

Pioneer Swift persevered despite the odds

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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Early pioneers often were adventure-seeking men with the ability to adapt to changing situations and seize any opportunity that offered itself. One day rich, the next day poor again - nothing seems to have stopped their intrepid spirits.

One such man was Granville Perry Swift. His great-uncle was Daniel Boone (1734-1820), the first pathfinder of American frontier history. Granville Swift was born in Lexington, Ky., on May 1, 1821, but the family left for the new state of Missouri when he was 3 or 4 years old.

Around 1840, at age 19, he set out with a group of trappers headed for California. During the years of 1844-46 he hunted and trapped in the Sacramento Valley and along the Cache Creek, selling meat, hides and possibly furs at Sutter's Fort. His close companions were his cousin Franklin Sears and Henry L. Ford, whose diary is a main source for this time period.

During the Rebellion of the Californios against the Mexican governor in California in 1844-45, Gov. Micheltorena asked Sutter to form a troop of foreign mounted riflemen, one of which was Granville Swift. Over time, though, Swift became part of the growing number of Americans who openly defied Mexican authority.

This defiance led to the famous Bear Flag Revolt of 1846, where 33 American settlers, among them Swift and Ford, responded to the rumors that the Mexican military commandant planned to expel all foreigners.

Swift played an active role in the military organization of the Bear Flag Republic. Together with William Todd, Ford and Peter Storm, he designed and made the Bear Flag. He also was elected to be the first sergeant of the party. William Baldrige, who served under Swift, remembered "... we all had great confidence in Swift, and thought him worth a dozen common men in fight, and consequently a good judge of fighting men and as all concerned were desirous that, if a fight should take place the work should be done in the most efficacious manner, so those requested withdrew and Swift filled their places with men of his own choosing."

On July 5, 1846, the "California Battalion of Volunteers" was organized, and Swift commanded one of the four companies. A few weeks later, the battalion was incorporated in the United States forces, with Swift leading Company C with the rank of

captain.

He served until the spring of 1847, after which time he settled in the Colusa area, where he ran an extensive cattle operation. In the meantime, gold had been found at Sutter's sawmill, and in the spring of 1848, Swift took part in a gold hunting party to the Feather River. The party was quite successful, mining about \$10,000 for each member in six weeks. Swift continued to dig through fall and winter with two companions and an impressed group of Indian laborers. A fellow miner remembers: "Swift was one of the best miners I ever knew. It seems as if he could almost smell the gold. He made an immense amount of gold. When these three men had worked all winter and fall, I believe they must have made \$100,000 apiece and maybe more." Swift coined his money into octagonal slugs of \$50, each bearing his private mark.

In the spring of 1849, Swift brought his whole family back from Missouri, and they all worked in the gold fields. His sister Mary "Polly" Swift, who later married Frederick S. Jones, acted as a cook for the crew. Her great-grandson, Fred Jones, who still farms in Suisun Valley, remembers, "In the afternoon when she wasn't doing anything, she went and picked nuggets on her own. She said she picked up over \$80,000 worth of nuggets. ... She entrusted her brother, Granville, to hang on to it for her. Granville buried it up there alongside Hambreck Creek, and they had a flood that winter, and it all washed away."

With his gain from the gold fields, Swift, his brother William and his cousin Frank Sears purchased 15,000 acres of Gen. Vallejo's Petaluma Rancho, located near Sears Point. In 1858, he built one of the finest mansions in the Sonoma area on an additional parcel of 1,000 acres, called Telemec.

Three stories high, it was designed in the southern antebellum style with an encircling balcony supported by great stone columns. The first two floors had 14 rooms, while the dining room could seat as many as 50 guests and featured a fireplace of imported Italian marble. Swift also reburied his gold hoard, an estimated \$100,000, in seven bottles, two "Stoan Jugs in one other hoal" and "1 tin box & 1 Little Bottle Boath in the saim hoal." The list in his handwriting miraculously survived.

Now in his early 30s, he was both famous as well as wealthy. He married 16-year-old Eliza Jane Tate of Sonoma. Together they had three sons.

But only a few years later, their life would change drastically. Serious financial losses in the so-called Comstock Swindle forced Swift to sell most of his ranch as well as the Telemec ranch to pay his debts. The family left Sonoma County to start a new life in Solano County, settling in Green Valley in 1864. He acquired the 130-acre ranch of James Harbin, complete with the stone mansion that today houses the Green Valley

Country Club.

His sister Mary and her family moved with the Swifts to Green Valley. In 1869, Eliza Tate Swift filed for a divorce. During that same year, Swift deeded the Green Valley property to his sister. It remains unclear whether this was as a repayment for her lost \$80,000 or because he foresaw the marital breakup. The property has stayed in the Jones family since then.

Swift returned to prospecting, this time for quicksilver in the mountains between Berryessa Valley and Knoxville. Once again he seemed on the verge of success, when, on April 21, 1875, he was riding on a mule and suffered a fatal fall from a steep mountain path. He is buried at Rockville Cemetery.

A Sonoma newspaper wrote about him: "He was a loveable fellow. I knew him well during prosperity and adversity and all his life he was never known to turn his back on his old friends who were poor. He had, however, too large a heart to retain his own vast wealth, and through much generosity and misplaced confidence, much of his possessions were taken from him. It is a pity that the biography of such a man as Swift was not written during his life, so that the public might know to whom they were indebted for a series of untold value."

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