

Hardship punctuates their long lives

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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This column finishes the story of David and Jane Gray Creighton. It is based on the diaries of David Creighton, transcribed by his great-granddaughter Josephine Farmer Albrecht. I'd like to thank her daughter, Kirsten Llamas of Florida, for permission to use diaries, letters and photographs for these columns.

David and Jane Creighton both lived long lives, filled with physically demanding work. Despite frequent malaria attacks, injured limbs and, in David's case, recurring attacks of dizziness in later years, they both seemed to stay relatively healthy into their late years.

Whenever Jane grew sick, David diligently took care of her, such as on Dec. 25, 1878, when he went to Elmira "for the Doctor for my Wife," bought flaxseed for a poultice and continued "Giving Medicine and taking care of my Wife" through early January of the following year.

A few years later, in 1885, Jane suffered from a more serious illness. On Sept. 14, she went to Sacramento for a "Water Cure"- the hot mineral treatments she had already used in earlier years. David joined her there on Dec. 26 for three days. Jane did not return to Vacaville until Oct. 10.

Mishaps in those years included a fire on Oct. 30, 1887. "Our house at Elmira burned down this morning about 3 o'clock." A contract to rebuild was negotiated with Mr. Arnold Trent for \$835. At age 73, David likely no longer felt able to work this project by himself. In addition, he recorded on November 1st: "Mortgaged my place today for \$1800 to the Vacaville Bank."

Another event found its way into his diary on April 19, 1892. "Had a hard Earthquake shock this morning five minutes before three o'clock. It knocked down the fronts and backs of all the brick stores on Main Street and damaged all the brick buildings in this vicinity. Several of them it ruined entirely. Shook the top off all our chimneys in both our houses. Done nothing today but ride around and view the ruins."

Daily aftershocks followed. On May 13, he wrote: "Mr. Butcher took me in his buggy to look at his house. It is a large brick house two stories high and is so badly broken up that he has to clear it away and will build a frame house in place of the brick." In all, the earthquake caused more than \$100,000 in damage in Vacaville. Despite the extensive

damage, nobody was killed.

Around the year 1896, 76-year-old Jane's health began to deteriorate seriously. On June 14, she suffered her first stroke. "Jane had a light atak [sic] of Neuralgia of the heart this Evening." David wrote. After the fourth attack, he sent for the doctor and for daughter Matty. On the 19th he telegraphed for the other children. They stayed several days, until Jane felt better.

A year later, she suffered another, more severe stroke. David wrote on Aug. 17, 1897: "This is the Aniversity [sic] of the arrival [sic] of my Family at the Allison place 34 Years ago," followed on the 18th by "Jane was taken mutch [sic] worse today. Her left side is Paralised [sic] and she is helpless in her lower limbs." Son Samuel arrived on the 21st and stayed.

Though Jane improved somewhat, she never again was able to move around independently. In October, David "Made a handcart to carry Jane in and put it on the water cart and Samuel hauled her around the house." The following year, he also made crutches for her.

With Jane unable to run the household, most of that work fell to David. Occasionally, he hired outside help, but much of the everyday chores were done by him. On April 23, 1898, he wrote: "Paid my Taxes and done the Cooking, for this is the gratist [sic] Chore I have to do since the 18th of August [1897] when my wife was struck with paralis [sic] the second time."

Fortunately, friends visited and helped entertain Jane, such as on May 9, 1898. "Mrs. Chandler took Jane out riding in her Cariage [sic]. It is the first time she has rode out since her second stroke."

Another time, "Mrs. Abbot brought her Sabbath School class to see my Wife and sang and prayed with her."

The family also often gathered around. "We sang old hymns in Mother's room. Her hearing is not so good as before her illness."

A special celebration for them on Dec. 28, 1898. "This is the sixtieth anniversary of our Wedding and We had an Informal Reception at which there was 43 Persons Present and we had a verry Plesent [sic] Day."

In November 1899, David's diary contains the interesting information that he "ran the washing machine." The first electrical washing machines appeared around this time, which moved the tub around, though the clothes still had to be wrung with a

hand-cranked wringer. David had obviously bought one of these new contraptions to make his own life easier. Until then, his diary regularly recorded trips to the washhouse.

On January 2, 1900, Jane celebrated her 80th birthday with several of their children and a festive turkey dinner.

Two months later, on March 23, David wrote "Jane was taken sick last night and was worse this afternoon. I brought [daughter] Bell up." They also called the doctor, to no avail. On March 23, David noted "My dear Wife Jane Died this Morning." Jane was buried from the Presbyterian Church on March 28. "The Church was beautifully Dackorated [sic]."

Her funeral cost \$95 according to David's entry on Aril 6.

While David rarely mentioned his wife in earlier years, her name appeared more frequently later. Yet it remains difficult to form a clear picture of who she was from his diaries. Fortunately her obituary, an exceptionally informative and personal one, gives a vivid impression of her person.

On her early life, it read: "Jane Gray was born in Ohio near Cincinnati, January 2d, 1820. Her family were of seceder stock. When she was only six months old her mother was left a widow, without much means, in that rugged frontier country. Moving back to Pennsylvania the family settled near Pittsburgh. She [Jane] was the youngest of a family of four children, two boys and two girls. The mother died when the subject of this sketch was only twelve years old. Her brothers and sisters could aid her but little. Hard work, long hours and scanty pay deprived her of much education."

The obituary then summarizes her early years with David Creighton and her difficult journey across country to join him in Vacaville in 1863.

"They [Jane and her children] arrived near Vacaville in August and joined their father. In all those changes the mother was quiet, faithful and industrious. Her deep religious character predominated in all that she did. Her hope and trust in the answer to her prayers was phenomenal and was only bounded by her life ..."

The obituary continued with their life in Vacaville and her sufferings since her two strokes.

"Her married life extended over the long period of more than sixty-one years. She was always greatly interested in her home surroundings and enjoyed the sight of the changes that went on around her. Her suffering at times made her oblivious to all but

her intense pain. On the Thursday before she died she had been very restless but along in the middle of the night she ceased her moaning and sang one or two stanzas of her favorite hymn 'Jesus Lover Of My Soul.'

"O,' she said, 'I cannot sing any more; come dear Jesus and take me home.' She closed her eyes in the sleep of death peacefully and quietly, Tuesday morning, March 27th, 1900, at the age of 80 years, 2 months and 25 days."

She was survived by her husband David, her son Samuel, four daughters (the two youngest, Lucretzia and Mary, had died in earlier years), their spouses, twenty-nine grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren.

As he had been responsible for much of the housework during the last years, David did not have much trouble taking care of himself. He even seemed to be proud of his ability to do so, as a few entries in December may indicate. On Dec. 23, he wrote "Samuel went to S.F. this Morning. I am alone," followed on Dec. 25 by "Getting along verry [sic] well," and finally "Done the housework all the time since Samuel left."

He continued to live mostly alone until the following autumn. On Sept. 7, 1901, a strange handwriting recorded: "Took buggy to be repaired. Fell in front of Pioneer Stables and hurt right leg. Brought home by Frank Eversole in buggy from livery stable. Bert went for my buggy. Called in Dr. Carpenter. Bert went for Samuel."

The doctor arrived on the 8th and again on the 10th. David's fall seems to have been a stroke. Daughter Bell arrived, as well as several friends. David died at 6:35 p.m. on September 15, 1901.

Regrettably, David Creighton's death was overshadowed by the assassination and funeral ceremonies of President William McKinley, which covered most pages of the Vacaville Reporter in the following week. A short death notice "In Vacaville, Cal., September 15th, 1901, David Creighton, aged eighty seven years," is all the announcement for this strong, devout, hardworking pioneer.

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