

Tracing generations of owners

By Jerry Bowen

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In my last column, Albert and Prudence Lyon had sold their Pleasants Valley property to the Long family, also early pioneers in the area, and moved to Sonoma where he purchased a land Grant on April 11, 1849.

Meanwhile, life went on at the Pena and Vaca ranchos. Local Indians served as vaqueros, household servants and personal attendants. Hard work, rodeos, fiestas and fandangos were all a part of a way of life for the families.

Juan Felipe Pena's third son, Jesus, married Maria Anastasia Vaca around 1847 at the Mission in Sonoma.

People from all over the state came to the nuptials and among them were General and Mrs. Mariano Vallejo, the Picos' from San Diego and Albert and Prudence Lyon and their son, John Patton Lyon.

After the wedding, approximately one hundred guests made their way to the Vaca Rancho where they feasted and watched a bull and bear fight.

The party is said to have lasted several days. From the marriage, two children were born: Maria Dolores, and Jose Jesus.

When John Patton Lyon was old enough to attend school he was sent to the college at Vacaville.

In a past article I mentioned a house that was once in the downtown parking lot at the end of Dobbins Street that had been built by Manual Vaca in 1854. It was in this very house that Maria Delores Pena and John Patton Lyon met while both attended the college.

John and Maria fell in love and later were married in the Catholic Church in Suisun on June 2, 1868. They spent most of their lives in Vacaville.

At various times John ran a cigar shop, a saloon, and had a fruit farm. In fact John shipped a carload of fruit to the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. John was a member of Pythias, foresters of America, Ancient Order of United Workmen and as of 1912 was the oldest member of The Native Sons of California.

John died in 1926 and Maria Delores Pena Lyon died in 1948.

They had raised eight children in Vacaville who are buried in the Elmira Cemetery along with most of their children, and many of their grandchildren.

But the Lyon family and Vacaville story has other chapters besides that of John and Maria.

In the 1890's John's mother, Prudence, and several of his brothers and sisters were living in Vacaville. After Albert G Lyon died in Sonoma in 1879, Prudence bought a fruit farm in Vacaville, and lived on Callen Street until her death on Oct 21, 1897.

Prudence was known to have business deals with Jesus Tapia Rivera and Nestora Pena, the aunt of Maria Delores Lyon, and resident of the Pena Adobe around 1900.

Nestora Pena Rivera passed the Pena Adobe over to Maria Delores Lyon upon her death.

Louisa J. Lyon Hill, the 3-year-old girl who had traveled overland with her parents in 1846 moved to Vacaville in the late 1880's or early 1890's with her family.

Louisa was in Vacaville as late as 1900.

A daughter, Mary Prudence Hill, married Ray Bennett who ran a well-known Saloon on Main Street in Vacaville and built a house on Buck Ave, which burned down in the 1940s.

Another sister of John's, Lillian A. Lyon Singletary, lived with her mother Prudence in Vacaville most of the 1890's.

Her young daughter Florence Agnes Singletary burned to death in Vacaville one day before her sixth birthday on July 24, 1899. She had been playing with a friend behind Blum's store, near today's Heritage House Cafe, when her dress, that had become covered with sulphur dust, caught fire.

Another brother of John's, Albert J. Lyon, was doing business in Vacaville around 1890 and 91 in real estate with a G. N. Platt for the Pacific Commercial Advertiser until he died in 1906 in Hawaii.

Three of John and Maria's children lived in Vacaville as late as 1959 and are buried in the Elmira Cemetery.

A few years before her death, Anita sold the Pena Adobe that she had inherited from her mother, Maria, and thru a chain of custody the Pena Adobe ended in the care of the City of Vacaville. Now, almost 50 years later, the Grandnephew of Anita, Richard John Lyon, is working with the City of Vacaville and Pena Adobe Historical Society to restore and eventually reopen the Pena Adobe on a regular basis.

In fact, he hopes eventually to become an on-site docent in the future when he retires.

How's that for 150 years of history coming full circle?

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