

## Aging structures in county spotlight

By Jerry Bowen

Sunday, September 02, 2007

Before I launch into this column I need to let several people who e-mailed me with questions know that my trusty old portable computer went up in smoke, and I lost all the questions. So, if I haven't answered you in the last month or so, try again.

This has been an interesting month in relation to old homes in Solano County. The video crew (Town Cryer Pro Video) and I were lucky enough to have the chance to do a video interview with Joan Perry Ryan and Clyde Perry in the old historic Perry Ranch home that was built in the late 1850s or early 1860s on Cordelia Road. It was the carpentry skills of Clyde and his brother Bruce that kept the house livable the last few years. It was especially great in that she dressed in period costume as she gave us a tour of this old home.

As we entered the house by way of a beautiful staircase and banister, we could see large photographs of the original Perrys, Andrew Jackson Perry and his wife Elizabeth Cecilia Davisson Perry who built this house. But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Andrew Jackson Perry, who was the youngest of the four, was born in Rochester, New York, on March 22, 1831. His father died, leaving a family of four boys destitute and without a favorable foreseeable future. As a young boy, Andrew chose to be a sailor, beginning his seafaring life on the Great Lakes and later on deep-water vessels. Following that he joined the United States Navy, serving for three years. After being discharged from the Navy, he returned to his home in New York. It wasn't long before he answered the lure of the possibility of riches from gold being found in California.

Andrew and his brothers, Silas and Joseph, set sail for California in 1853. It is interesting to note here that they started the trip on board their cousin's ship. He was none other than Matthew Calbraith Perry, who was making his first trip to Japan to open up a trade route with the Japanese. Another brother, John, had arrived earlier, about 1853, and established the blacksmith shop in the then new town of Rockville.

Silas left the ship on the Pacific side of the Isthmus of Panama and chose to cross over to the Pacific side by the land route because he didn't care to go around the infamous Cape Horn route. I can't help but wonder which was worse, facing hunger, insects, fever and a humid jungle over the possibility of drowning in one of the fearsome storms for which the Horn was so notorious.

Andrew continued with the ship and the brothers reunited on the Pacific side of the Isthmus. From there they continued on to San Francisco and then to the gold mines in Hangtown, now better known as Placerville fields, where they hoped to make their fortunes. Andrew and Elizabeth Cecilia Davisson soon married.

She had also journeyed far to California, traveling by covered wagon across the prairies in 1853 with her parents Obadiah and Huldah Davisson settled on a ranch on Abernathy Lane.

In 1863, Andrew and Elizabeth selected the fertile Suisun Valley to build their home and establish their roots on this original homestead of some 170 acres.

They reared seven children: Rosella, Dora, Horace, William, Charles, Joseph, and Paul. Being a shrewd farmer and businessman, Andrew acquired other ranches in Vacaville, Lake County, Tolenas and Fairfield.

Through the years, some of the seven children migrated to the other ranches to farm and raise their own families. But to this day, the original acreage has remained the special "Perry home" to five generations.

The house is unique in many ways including a "secret" stairway accessible from the living room to another part of the house that was added later. That room can also be entered at the top of the fine old spiral staircase that begins at the front door. At the top of the stairs is a door about only five feet tall forcing most of us to duck down to go through.

On May 17, 1911, Andrew Jackson Perry died in his home that still stands where it has been for more than 130 years.

The Perry family sold the old home ranch to Anheuser Busch in the 1970s, and the property has recently been resold to a developer. Members of the Perry family were allowed to remain in the old family home until the property was to be developed.

In addition, another 1,000 square-foot home had been built nearby in either the 1910s or 1920s and other family members lived there until about thirty-eight years ago. That home was built by a true craftsman and included a built-in credenza in the living room. The fireplace is crafted from reject bricks from the old Benicia Brick Works. A nice covered porch greets you at the front door. It has been rented since then but it appears it will suffer the same fate as the historic Perry house-DEMOLISHED!

One can only hope the historic early pioneer home would have a happier ending to the story.

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