

# Historic adobe slowly deteriorates

By Jerry Bowen

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Surrounded by a protective wooden shell with a leaky roof, Solano County's second oldest adobe building, located about a mile and a quarter east of Collinsville, is slowly crumbling back into its original elements.

No longer maintained or, for the most part, remembered, it will someday be lost forever.

Perhaps some folks will feel its demise will be a just and suitable testament to the man who built it. For others, it will be one more tragic loss of tangible history.

In 1842, Lansford W. Hastings, a lawyer at age 23, journeyed to the Oregon Territory as part of the Elijah White Party. He returned east two years later and in 1845 published the controversial Emigrant's Guide To Oregon and California.

In that same year, he returned to California and laid out the town of Sutterville (Sacramento) for Captain Sutter. Traveling east once again in 1846, he laid out the route to California: the very same "shortcut" the leaders of the ill-fated Donner Wagon Train chose to travel.

Hastings returned with the Harlan-Young wagon train in late 1846. Later that year, acting as an agent for the Mormons, he searched for a site to establish a colony and built an adobe home on a knoll overlooking the junction of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers.

In anticipation of a Mexican land grant, he laid out a plan for the Mormon community and named it Montezuma City. The name was chosen in hopes it would influence the Mexican authorities favorably toward granting him the land.

But the best laid plans of men have a habit of going astray. The Bear Flag Revolt, and the ensuing movement for statehood put an end to any further development of the town.

Hastings continued to live in the adobe for another three years after the Mormons had lost interest in the colony. He finally abandoned the site in 1849 and moved to Monterey to participate in the convention to draft a constitution for the new state of California.

During the next four years, the abandoned adobe suffered considerable damage from vandals and travelers seeking temporary shelter. The structure was in deplorable condition when, in 1853, Lindsay Powell Marshall, a cattle rancher and land speculator, arrived with his two of his sons and a band of cattle.

They repaired the dilapidated haven and eventually acquired Hastings' squatter's claim to the premises.

It is interesting to note that at some point after the home had been abandoned, counterfeiters had apparently occupied the structure. Marshall found coin-making tools such as crucibles, dyes, and copper in the house, tools commonly used by the criminals.

In 1854, Hastings returned to the adobe and attempted to reclaim the property, even though he had no legal right to it. The Marshalls, not wanting any trouble, gave him some of their livestock as compensation even though he had no legal claim to the land.

Sometime before 1857, Marshall brought his wife and six children from Missouri to the then much-improved ranch. They raised stock and gradually expanded their operations by systematically acquiring additional acreage. Between 1866 and 1873, Marshall and his sons added more than 1,000 acres to their original holdings through a combination of cash entry patents, patents of swamp and overflow lands, and a homestead claim.

In the ensuing years, Lindsay Marshall divested himself of all but 400 acres. After his death, the property passed to his wife and in 1897, to his eldest son, Lindsay P. Marshall Jr.

Around the turn of the century, the old adobe passed into the hands of the Stratton family. The Strattons constructed a wooden shell over the original structure, added a living room, and continued to use the adobe for sleeping rooms and a kitchen. No effort was made to modernize the original historic old rooms with their rough, heavy timbers, thick wooden doors and hand-hewn woodwork. Even though other additions and modifications were made over the years, the Strattons always maintained the majority of the original adobe in its original configuration.

The Strattons sold the property in 1964 to PG&E, which had planned to construct a nuclear energy plant on the site. After the family moved from the ranch, bottle and artifact hunters caused considerable damage to the site and buildings.

In 1972, the adobe was placed on the National Register of Historic Places through the efforts of local historian, Wood Young and the Solano County Historic Society. Repairs were made and the roof of the wooden enclosure surrounding the adobe was renewed.

Unfortunately, the structure has since fallen into disrepair.

Due to its remote location, lack of funds, and community disinterest, major roof leaks are increasingly destroying the original adobe within its once protective shell.

So, what happened to Lansford Hastings, the man who started it all? Well, during the next several years after leaving Solano County, he practiced law, was a judge for a brief period of time and a delegate to the statehood convention. He speculated in real estate and fleeced the gold rush with various dubious schemes.

Hastings married in 1848, lived in Yuma, Ariz., from 1850 to 1862, and returned to California when his wife died.

During the Civil War he unsuccessfully tried to sell the Confederacy on a plan to seize and annex Arizona. From 1867-70 he promoted and led a movement to settle uprooted Confederates in Brazil. On his second voyage to Brazil, in 1870, he died.

During his quest for riches and notoriety, Hastings was evidently unable to concentrate on any one endeavor long enough to make him the powerful celebrity he wanted to be. It can be said though, he was an important, even pivotal figure in the settlement of central California in spite of his failings.

Even as I write this story, Hasting's tangible contribution to Solano County's history continues on a path of deterioration. It may soon be lost completely as the ravages of time and neglect persist unabated.

As I hinted in the beginning of this piece, some will care, but most will not and another irreplaceable segment of history will join the graveyard of the past.

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