

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SOCIETY NEWS

The June 27 meeting at Micke Memorial Building, 8 p.m., will be our annual pot luck dinner event. The speaker for the evening will be Dr. Howard T. Letcher, who plans to tell us about Early Railroads in San Joaquin County.

HISTORIC FACTS

Material for our story of early day Lockeford has been gathered by Quin Bonebrake from the following sources: Unpublished Masters Thesis Presented to Faculty of Dept. of History, University of the Pacific, 1953, by Robert H. Bahnsen, on file at the Stockton Public Library; and a History of San Joaquin County by George H. Tinkham, 1923. Members of the Locke Family were consulted for verification.

EARLY DAYS IN LOCKEFORD

Before the first settlers arrived the Indians from the interior Miwok Tribe lived near the town of Lockeford, then known as the village of Mokel. The tribe gathered their food from the rich natural resources. They fished along the Mokelumne River, gathered acorns and wild berries, hunted small game, the squirrel, rabbit and even deer. Although grizzlies were plentiful, the natives refused to eat their meat. The muskrat and beaver of this section made the Lockeford area popular with the early trappers, but by the year 1849 both Indian and trapper were moving on, leaving the field to the incoming settlers.

As early as 1846 Thomas Pyle purchased farm land in this region, but not until the gold rush had somewhat subsided did the pioneers turn to the valley. It was in the year 1850 that Dr. Dean Jewett Locke, founder of Lockeford purchased land from David Staples, who had secured a thousand acre tract from the government of Mexico. Dr. Locke's brother Elmer was with him at the time he bought three hundred sixty acres and other acreage.

The Locke brothers built the first cabin on Pioneer Hill, a quarter of a mile north of Lockeford.

It might be interesting to insert here a few high spots in the personal story of Lockeford's founder. Dr. Locke left Boston, Mass., April 16, 1849 and joined an emigrant party at Independence, Missouri, May 16 of that year to travel as their physician. He remained in Sacramento practicing his profession until word came from Mokelumne Hill that his brother Elmer was there, seriously ill from an accidental gunshot wound and was in need of medical attention. He set out for Mokelumne Hill and once there he decided to remain and try his luck at mining. Meantime Elmer, on recovery, left the mountains for the valley and it wasn't long before the doctor joined him.

By 1854 the physician was so impressed with the Lockeford area he made a trip east to get more medical supplies. While there he married Delia Marcella Hammond. The couple returned to California the following year. Luther Locke, father of Dean Jewett and Elmer, accompanied them. A third brother, George, also became a member of the family group in Lockeford.

Among the pioneer ventures important to the town in early day history was the location of a ferry across the Mokelumne just west of town. The ferry, owned by John W. Laird, was in operation in the year 1849. Laird sold his interest in 1850 to Staples, Nichols and Company, who in the same year put up a covered toll bridge, which was washed out the following year. Dr. Locke maintained a ford across the river, closer to Lockeford, thus giving the name of Lockeford to the community.

The original post office was located in the private home of Luther Locke, who became the first postmaster in 1856. His home, the "White House", had the post office upstairs and a general merchandise store downstairs. The original building is in Lockeford near the corner of Main Street and Elliot Road.

Christian Magerle ran a hotel to serve Clements and Lockeford in 1857. Two years later a Mr. Pelton opened a blacksmith shop. Thereafter the town became something of a manufacturing center as W. O. Read operated a wagon shop, Benjamin Steacy opened a carriage factory, and U. P. Grant started up a second wagon building business. There were several harness outlets, a butcher shop, and a drug store. Streets were marked by official survey in 1862. In those days a California town without a saloon was unheard of. Lockeford was no exception even though a large faction opposed it bitterly.

Two years before the town was officially plotted its founder, Dr. Locke, cast an eye toward the Mokelumne as a possible source of transportation. In 1862 he watched his dream become reality when Captain Allen brought the steamer Pert into port. Three days later the Mokelumne River Navigation Company was formed. They did business for fifteen years. By this time the river had become so clogged by silt and debris from the mining operations above, it really wasn't navigable.

By 1885 a branch railroad had been constructed from Lodi to Valley Springs bringing freight and passenger service to Lockeford. For many years the line ran special excursion trains to bring people to the Annual Lockeford Picnic held in a grove of oaks near the town.

While business, navigation, farming and industry engaged the attention of those early pioneers cultural life was not neglected. Elkhorn school district was, by 1852 and 1853 serving a wide area, going as far west as Woodbridge. By 1854 enough families had settled around Staples Ferry to form a district of their own. School was first held in a canvas covered affair dubbed by the pioneers "The Rag School House". Delia Locke, in her famous diary, commented in 1856 about the dirt floor and flimsy structure. In 1857 the "Octagon School" replaced the temporary structure and Susan Hammond, sister of Mrs. Locke, began her teaching career with 14 pupils. Dr. Locke, D. O. Staples and Mr. Foster were on the board of trustees.

In 1855 Dr. Locke built a home at the site of the present twenty-two room brick house erected in 1864. The original building was moved south of this location and is now occupied by Dr. Locke's granddaughter. Back of the old home an adobe and brick granary was built. The second floor of the granary, which is still standing, became the scene of many civic gatherings. In 1858 as many as 150 citizens attended a temperance lecture. An organization known as the Sons of Temperance was formed in 1860. Fraternal groups and a local unit of the Grange became part of early day civic and social life carried on in the building. During the Civil War, 1861-1864, the Mokelumne Light Brigade used the building as a training barracks.

Supplementing religious activity in private homes, the old Harmony Grove brick church was erected as a community project in 1858. Another community project was the Grace Church in Lockeford which was built in 1862. This church has been in continuous use ever since. The small white church seen as one enters Lockeford is St. Joaquin Church. It was built in 1876.

The bricks for Dr. Locke's warehouse in downtown Lockeford, as well as other early buildings in the town, were made in Lockeford by Chinese labor. The warehouse was built in 1883 and is still in use.

Six generations of the Locke family have lived in this peaceful little town.