

The Story of Sarah Elizabeth (Sweetman) Cuddeback As Told by Her Daughter, Grace Bernice (Cuddeback) Cheney

The year of 1856 found the Modoc Indians of Oregon making war on the white settlers of Oregon and Northern California, and many of the families of Siskiyou County were in Fort Jones for their protection. The Indians were very vengeful with the women and children, believing by exterminating them they could keep the white population from growing.

It was in this Fort on November 11, 1856, the first child of a young pioneer couple by the name of Charles and Elizabeth Jane Sweetman was born – a baby daughter they named Sarah Elizabeth. Fourteen months later her only son was born in the Fort also. By then the Indians were returning to peaceful living and the Fort was abandoned. Only an historical marker remains now to show where Fort Jones stood.

Little Sarah Elizabeth had the distinction of being the first white child born in Siskiyou County. Her parents, the Sweetmans, were of Southern ancestry. Her mother's family from Kentucky and her father's family from Georgia.

Her maternal grandparents, the Ellison Truebloods, had left Kentucky before the Civil War and had emigrated to California. Ellison Trueblood had been a plantation owner and had sold his estate and freed his slaves some years before the Civil War. He had seen the Civil War approaching and although his sympathy was with the South he felt that he was too old to take an active part in the war. At the time of Sarah Elizabeth's birth they were living on their homestead a few miles south on what was then called the South Fork on the Cottonwood. These two ranches were stocked with the finest breed of cattle and horses, and the finest poultry stock Grandfather Trueblood could find.

It was on these two homesteads that Sarah Elizabeth spent many of her early years. Her grandparents were very fond of her, and they were deeply hurt when her parents decided it was time for her to begin her education, and took her home to Petaluma, where they were living with her brother and three younger sisters. She was then about nine years old and had very little formal schooling. She had been allowed to run wild and carefree as a little Indian. However, she proved to be an intelligent child and learning came easy to her.

When Sarah Elizabeth was sixteen years of age, her family moved south to Los Angeles on their way to Arizona. In Los Angeles she entered the convent to finish her education while her parents were on a two year exploring trip in Arizona. Her father had been employed for many years by the jewelry firm of Tiffany of New York, and he was sent many places in search of rare metal and gems. He was known as a mining expert – today he would be called a mining engineer.

The Catholic convent in charge of the Sisters of St. Vincent De Paul was the only boarding school in Los Angeles at the time. Besides receiving a fine education for her day, she was taught many kinds of hand work, - embroidery, tatting, knitting, sewing, and crochet, flower

making and how to play the piano.

At the age of eighteen her school days over, she returned to Red Bluff, the home of her grandparents, and to employment on a newspaper as a proof reader. (I never knew her to misspell a word). It was there she met her future husband, John W. Cuddeback, who as a small boy had come to California over the Oregon Trail from Springfield, Illinois, the same year she had been born in Fort Jones. In Red Bluff, the winter of 1875 at the age of nineteen, she was married.

Here they were to spend the early years of their married life; here too, was born to them five daughters and two sons. There were later four more children born in the southern part of the state.

John Cuddeback, like most pioneer men, was handy at many kinds of work – as he often said, “Jack of all trades, master of none.” He was a very good carpenter and could construct a building using lumber, stone, brick or adobe. He was also a fine bridge builder. He had some part in many of the early bridges that were built.

In the late ‘80s, with Sarah Elizabeth in poor health, John Cuddeback move the family to Southern California in hopes that the change would restore her health.

There in the town of Redlands, San Bernardino County, December 19, 1890, the eighth child, a daughter, was born. In the next ten years two more daughters and a son were born. The baby boy died in infancy. The rest of her family was raised to adulthood.

By then it was the turn of the century, and mining towns were seeing much prosperity. She, her husband, and her large family were to see life in many of these exiting towns. It came natural to her to be interested in mining having been born in the Gold Rush years, and also the daughter of a mining engineer.

In may of these towns she had some small business – some made money for her, others only experience. Her husband also led a busy life either in building or in transportation. In all of these busy years she kept a watchful eye on her large family. They were all fed, clothed, and educated as well as place and circumstances would permit.

As she reached her middle years and most of her family was grown, she returned to Los Angeles, there to spend many years as a practical nurse, and a very good one as many of her patients could tell.

The sunset years of her life were to be saddened by World War II. She had lived through three wars, and her family hoped she would live to see America victorious again. It was not to be. After a short illness in the winter of 1943, on December 17th, she passed away—a little over a month past her 87th birthday. At this time she was living in her little home in Los Angeles, near the home of two of her daughters.

She lies at rest between the graves of her two sons, and the nearby grave of a well loved daughter, who preceded her in death by many years. The memory of her courageous spirit lives on in the years of her surviving children, who never found her too tired or busy to answer their questions – she always had the answer.

Siskiyou County didn't forget – on her death the newspaper published: Siskiyou's first native daughter passes away in Los Angeles. Sarah Elizabeth's eighth child became the mother of Laurel, Robert, Adrian, Hope, Milton, Gayle, Lois, and Shirley Ann – She is Grace Bernice (Cuddeback) Cheney, the widow of Richard Melvin Cheney.

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