

Chapter XIV

Gold Mining in Murphys (August, 1852 to September 1853)

In one of the journals from the book, *They Saw The Elephant*, one woman described her experience at a mining camp in Murphys. Some of **Sarah's** experience could have been like this woman's:

"The homes in the mining camps were mostly tents alongside their wagons or shacks built in one or two days. The rain came in early November and continued with little interruption until the latter part of March. The poor souls living almost outside, would sometimes come out of their wagon and find the tent blown down and the shed under which they cooked blown over and their utensils lying in all directions, the fire out and it pouring down as though the clouds had burst. Sometimes they would scold and fret, other times endure it in mute agony again and again, taking consolation in the fact their family was around, it was better than waiting alone with their family back in San Francisco, not knowing what was happening.

When they did find a cabin it didn't have a window with glass, or maybe someone had put up glass jars with mud in between. Furniture was trunks with a cloth over it or boxes with a board across the top. chairs were whatever could be found or made. Three legged stools were better because the floor [if there was one] was not level, which made four legs a rocking chair. Local furniture was made from the pine trees all around. Sometime barrels covered with coyote skins made large comfortable lounging chairs. Other items could be purchased in San Francisco and shipped by steamer to some places."

Many wives laundered miner's shirts for a dollar apiece and made more money than their husbands did mining. For a while **Sarah** may have taken in laundry and made more than William. Some women worked alongside their men in the mining camps. Some men were so desperate for home, when they saw a woman cooking, they would offer \$5.00 for one biscuit, then double the offer. This enticed women to cook, sew, clean, wash and iron for the miners.... Even dance and pour drinks, whatever was required.

Sarah might have decided to try cooking for a while, however the cost of groceries was exorbitant. The price of a breakfast of two onions, two eggs, a steak and coffee was not much less than \$5.00. Once she was offered \$100.00 a month to cook three meals a day for a hotel man's boarders. She would even have an assistant, and would not have had to do the dish washing. She considered the offer, but had all she could do taking care of her own family.

Other stories from *They Saw The Elephant*:

"At one mining camp a man told about dry digging forty-six days and bringing in \$2,125. After hearing that, the gold fever raged so high, one woman said she went to dig the gold with her husband, but didn't get much gold and came home tired, but in good spirits. Next morning she went again to find that bewitching ore. We had better luck, we made 16 dollars in dust. Next morning again, this time we made ten dollars, next day eight dollars. She had become a miner. The work entitled her to the name Mineress.

Sometimes the miners salted the earth before the women came so the dear creatures could go home with treasures, believing mining was the prettiest pastime in the world. Most mining meant washing dirt. It was hard work, demanding muscle and stamina, but women and some children were strong enough to use a pan or simple contraption that looked like the rocker.

Drunken men that murdered their wives were often lynched. They said justice must be done. No man could kill a woman and live in California. Women were also at risk from sexual violence, although chroniclers generally masked rape with euphemism or vague or veiled references in Victorian but nonetheless unmistakable language. Example a man was caught in the commission of an act too infamous for words. He was taken to the levee, tried and convicted. The only question that arose was what the punishment should be. The question was put to vote, some were for hanging, others for mutilation. At last whipping was decided, one hundred lashes to be inflicted by six respectable citizens.

Death was so common that it was rarely reported in the papers. Death was common, not only from fights, but from disease many from fever, scurvy or cholera. Death Respected no one age gender or station.

California was so overrun with the lawless element, that the formation of vigilance committees was inevitable. But not everyone suffered encounters with the lawless element. If the camp was crime free and rich with good fellowship, California was utopian”.

Murphy’s had more than just gold. It had many interesting and beautiful places around it. Not the least of them were the “Big Trees”, discovered shortly before the time William arrived in the spring of 1852, A.T. Dowd, a hunter for the Union Water Company came upon one of the Big Trees while following the trail of a grizzly bear. He was so awed by the size of the tree, all thoughts of the bear were forgotten. He rushed back to camp and no one would believe him as hoaxing was a great sport in those early days.

However it was not long before the world learned of these trees. Murphys was the starting point to the grove. When botanists learned of the discovery and examined the cones and foliage, they believed a new genus had been found and named it “*Wellington Gigantia*.” Later it was determined to be the old genus *Sequoia Sempervirens*. Consequently it eventually was called, “*Sequoia gigantia*”.

Speculation began as to the age of the trees. It was agreed each concentric circle represented a year’s growth. In 1853, five men from Murphys decided to cut one of the larger trees and determine its age.

The task took 22 days, accomplished by boring through the trunk with pump augers to which additional metal had been welded. After the trunk had been severed, the uprightness of the tree and the breadth of its base sustained its position on its stump. Two and one half more days were required to tip the tree over by inserting wedges in the auger holes and driving in with butts of trees. Finally, after having braved fires, winds, and storms for nearly three thousand years, the tree trembled and fell.

The Titchenal Saga The Gold Under The Sycamore Tree

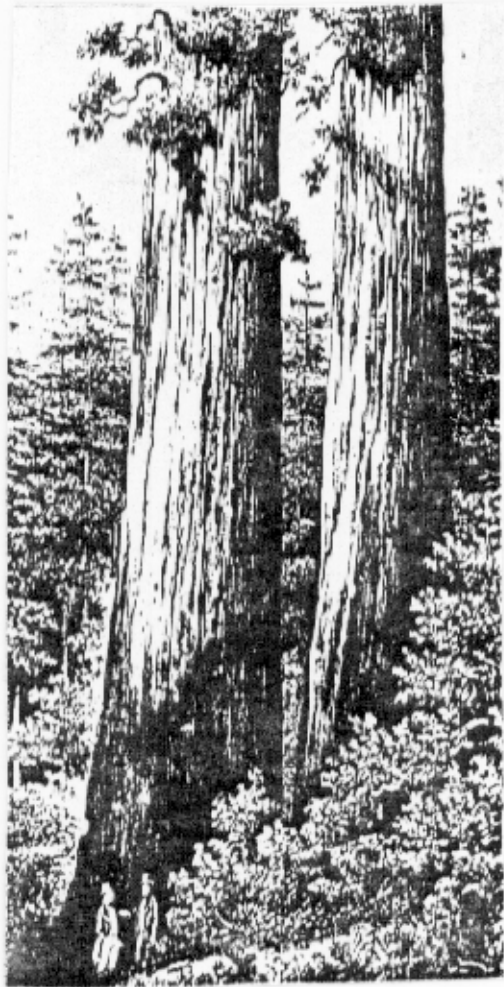
Pioneers Cabin

The Pioneer's Cabin is tunneled in a living tree standing in perfect preservation and vigor, even though before men cut through it's heart fire had burned a great cavern in it's enormous trunk.

The picture was taken in the 1870s

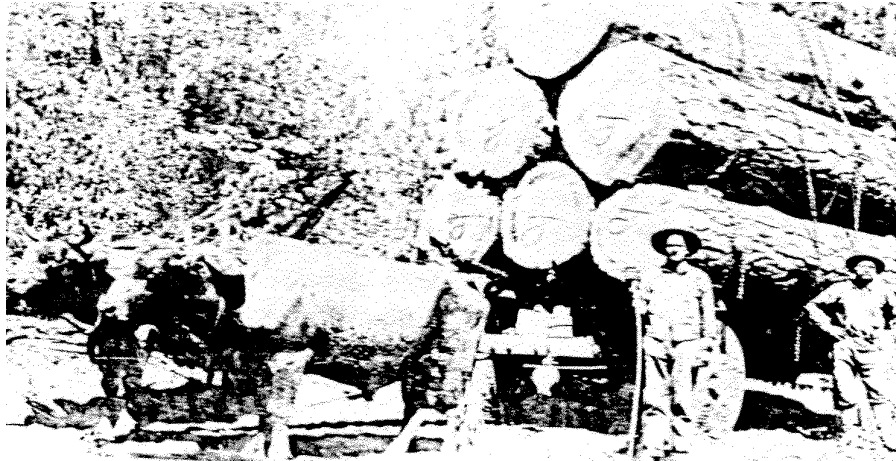


This giant was three hundred and two feet high with a circumference of ninety-six feet at the ground and twenty-eight feet in diameter. The stump was smoothed off and the rings counted and it was decided the tree had been one thousand years old at the birth of Christ. The tree trunk scaled to 165,000 board feet of limber or enough to build sixteen five room houses.



Later, a house was built on the trunk and served the varied purposes of a restaurant, a print shop, a church, and a theater. Many famous people visited the trees from all over the world. The father of the forest was the largest. It had been down for many years but when standing it must have been over 400 feet tall. I am sure **William** and his family would have gone out to see the trees.

Because of the big trees, lumber became a thriving business. On November 13, 1852, a writer in the *San Joaquin Republican*, stated that the amount of pine forest in the vicinity of Murphys was inexhaustible. There is no record of who brought in the first sawmill, but there must have been one by 1850 because of all of the wooden houses built there. There were two sawmills in Murphys in 1852 while William and his family were there.



Oxen used in logging operations near Murphys

Tragedy strikes in Murphys, California

I don't really know how well **William** fared in Murphys, but it is quite possible he found enough gold to make a good living and save some money. However, even if **William** did find gold, Murphys was not lucky for the family.

Women had the added danger of childbirth. **Sarah Ann** certainly faced this challenge in Murphy mining camps. She had become pregnant in San Francisco and a child was due in July 1853. July 23rd **Sarah** had her seventh child, a girl. Her child's life was doubtful from the beginning. There was no pulsation except in the umbilical cord. The doctor instead of severing the cord immediately as is customary, allowed her to remain in connection with **Sarah** in hopes that the circulation would be renewed. He couldn't revive the pulse and the infant daughter died.

Their daughter, Sarah Lovina had died on August 15, 1852, almost one year ago. **Sarah** was devastated, she had counted upon her new child helping her get over the deaths of her other two daughters. now she was even more troubled. Murphys was a beautiful place, with majestic mountains and big trees. **William** had found gold in the mines, but with drunken miners, gambling, few doctors, poor housing, the cold winds and snow, it was not yet completely safe for young families, mothers and babies.