

PART III  
HISTORICAL SURVEY OF  
THE STAMPEDE AREA

The Sierra County Historical Society is pleased to present to our readers the third installment of the Historical Survey of the STAMPEDE RESERVOIR AREA IN THE LITTLE TRUCKEE RIVER DRAINAGE DISTRICT by Prof. W. Turrentine Jackson, Prof. of History at the University of Calif. at Davis. We are publishing this work through the permission of Prof. Jackson and the Department of the Interior. The first two parts of the survey, Immigrant Routes Traversing the Area and Roads for Wagons Freighters, and Stages, have appeared in previous volumes of the Historical Society Bulletin. The fourth and last section, Logging, and Timber Operations: Railroads, will appear in our next issue. Here is the third installment of this most interesting work:

Summer Dairy Ranches in Sardine, Stampede and Hoke Valleys

Earliest Known Ranching in the Area:

The earliest attempts to utilize the land north of Donner Lake and Truckee are revealed in the manuscript census dealing with agriculture in the 1879's. For example, Prosser and Son had 100 acres of improved land in the Meadow Lake Township of Nevada County, farming equipment and machinery evaluated at \$500, four horses and 36 cows appraised at \$7000. The statistics indicated that they were engaged in raising hay and dairying and were using hired help. In addition, Tinker and Fenton were listed as having 80 improved acres evaluated at \$1500, a horse and 32 cows worth \$2000. Tinker's name appears prominently in the list of stage stations along the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road and he apparently was operating a dairy ranch with a partner in conjunction with his wayside inn.<sup>1</sup>

The first man known to have engaged in summer dairy ranching in Stampede Valley was John Fleckenstein, who arrived sometime between 1865 and 1870. Prior to his coming to Stampede Valley, Jay Parsons, a lumberman, was the only resident of the area. As previously noted, Fleckenstein obtained residence for his family at Sardine House, built by Parsons, and may have started his career as an employee of Parsons, but later worked independently. Apparently his operations became sizeable through the years because he reported to the 1880 census-takers that he rented 300 acres of permanent meadow or pasture, 120 acres of unimproved woodland and forest, 220 acres of unimproved old fields, all for a fixed money rental. He reported that he had paid out \$1800 in wages, including board, in 1879. His livestock consisted of four horses and 86 cows that dropped 75 calves. Seventy of these he sold. In addition, he made 15,000 pounds of butter in 1879. The estimated value of the farm produce sold or consumed by his family was \$3759.<sup>2</sup> The Fleckenstein family returned to the Stampede-Sardine Valley area year after year in the summer months. Mrs. Alice Trentman, daughter of Fleckenstein, recalls how the family "put-down" the butter in 60 lb. kegs, or on occasions, in smaller kits. In those days there were no separators so the cream had to be taken off the top of the milk with a knife and ladle. Churning was by hand. The butter was all made in the summer, brine was poured over it to keep it fresh, and then the entire production was sold in the fall.

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In 1890, the family elected to stay at Sardine House throughout the winter. They had to lay in the food supply and cut wood for a family of eight including the six children. The family used tallow candles and kerosene lamps. That winter the snow was 16 feet on the level.<sup>3</sup> The Fleckenstein family home was in Folsom and they usually returned there for the winter months.

Another Folsom family identified with Stampede Valley is that of Joseph Woodward, who had come to California in 1849. He established a ranch three miles east of Folsom in 1852, homesteading 80 acres and purchasing the remaining acreage that he needed. With an associate, Lemuel Light, he ran cattle. Teamsters were continually passing his Folsom ranch on their way to Virginia City, and according to family tradition, they asked him why he remained in the Folsom area and let his cattle dry up when there were so many unoccupied green valleys up in the Sierra. They told him there was a man who owned a cheese factory in Sardine Valley who was very eager to have more dairy herds up there to furnish him with milk. On the basis of this intelligence, Woodward and Light in 1867 drove their cattle up to Sardine Valley. When they arrived, only Parsons and Fleckenstein were there.<sup>4</sup> The first Woodward Dairy was about two miles from Sardine House on the Sierraville Road.

The Dry Valley Ranch:

Sometime later the family moved over the divide from Sardine to Stampede Valley to what was known locally as Dry Valley. This Dry Valley Ranch was operated not only by the Woodwards but by their daughter and son-in-law, Ed and Jessie Payen.<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that another family by the name of Geysler moved into Dry Valley for a year or two, but they were not regular summer residents.<sup>6</sup> Apparently the partnership between Woodward and Light was dissolved shortly after they came into Stampede Valley. The 1880 agricultural census for Sierra Valley Township in Sierra County noted that Lemuel Light possessed 320 acres of permanent meadow pasturage, valued at \$1000. Like the rest, his livestock consisted of 80 to a 100 cows and four horses to tend the herds. He had sold 60 calves out of a crop of 82. He also was paying wages to hired help and produced 12,000 pounds of butter in the summer season of 1879.<sup>7</sup>

The Bill Williams Ranch:

About a mile from Sardine House was a dairy ranch owned by Bill Williams. Apparently he had been in the area for some time; Jessie Payen recalls visiting the ranch as a small girl in 1887. Williams sold this land to Carrie Unsworth, who in turn sold it to Edmund Payen. Williams had no children and apparently lived to be 80 years of age. This property, belonging to the Payen family, is 320 acres of the east half of section 18, range 17, Township 19.<sup>8</sup>

The Perazzo Dairy:

This was a dairy ranch in operation started by another family from Folsom. There were two brothers by the name of Joe and Pete. At least one of these stockmen was married, for there were twin girls and a young boy about the place. Their headquarters were in the southern part of Stampede Valley, just across the Little Truckee on Sagehen Creek. The ranch house was located about a mile below the ruins of

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"The Mansion" on the right hand side of the road leading from Sardine House to Truckee.<sup>9</sup>

The Hoke Dairy:

The Hoke Dairy belonged to Louis and Mamie Hoke. This dairy was about two miles from the site of Bill Williams' dairy purchased by the Payens. Louis Hoke was the stepson of Bill Williams and this fact explains the proximity of the locations. Hoke was known locally as "Lou"; he played the violin for all of the dances in the area. After his death, his wife continued to run the dairy for several years. The Hoke Dairy was at its height of operation about ten years later than those previously mentioned, probably in the 1890's.<sup>10</sup>

Ranching and Dairy Operations in the Region Adjoining the Stampede Valley Area:

Throughout the period, 1879-1900, there were many ranches which had both cattle and sheep in the vicinity of Stampede Valley but their headquarters were outside of the area to be flooded. For example, the Sales Dairy was located in the north end of Sardine Valley. This property was owned by William and Elvira Sales, the maternal grandparents of Mrs. Alice Trentman. This couple had come across the Plains in the 1850's. They had 10 children. William's brother, Abb Sales, worked for Ed and Jessie Payen on the Dry Valley Ranch.

William H. Johnson was a well-known sheep man who ran his flocks in the north end of Sardine Valley in an area described "on the way to Tucker Valley." He had originally been a cattleman, like the rest, and his shift to sheep made him something of an "outsider" in the community. The Sheaf Family was remembered for the operation of a wayside inn on the way to Sierraville. Their home was a social center where many of the families gathered periodically for dances. The Bickford Family also operated a cattle ranch on Sagehen Creek, at the site they called Sagehen Place. This family had headquarters in Penryn where they raised fruit. Grace Nye lived on Prosser Creek in a two-story building nearby the bridge where the road to Ruckee crossed the creek, and she served travellers who passed by. There is some indication that she had purchased the property that had once been known as the Prosser Creek Station on the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is seen that throughout the entire period after 1879 there were not a dozen families known to have resided in Stampede Valley and the surrounding area. This small group was there only in the summer months when dairy ranching was possible. Of these, only four families operated on sites specifically in Stampede Valley and its offshoot, some times designated locally as Hoke Valley.

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1. Ninth Census of Calif.:Nevada Co., Agriculture, 1870
2. Tenth Census of Calif.: Oneida Township, Sierra Co., Agriculture-1880
3. Information provided by Mrs. Alice Trentman.
4. Information provided by Mrs. Jessie Payen, daughter of J. Woodward.
5. Dry Valley Ranch indicated as Site No. 4 in the Inventory.
6. Information by Mrs. Alice Trentman. 7. Tenth Census of Calif.: Sierra Valley Township, Sierra Co., Agriculture, 1880. 8. Information from Mrs. Payen. 9. Information from Mrs. Payen and Trentman. 10. Ibid.
11. Information from Mrs. Trentman.

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