

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Wild and Woolly Whiskey Hill

There is an interesting story connected with the Corralitos mill and water system. The flour mill there was run by water power, the water being brought down from a dam in Eureka Canyon, through a flume which was about two feet wide and three or four feet deep. The water ran very swiftly through this and poured into buckets on the immense wooden wheel at such speed that it kept it revolving at a lively rate.

When the mill was not operating the water was shut off at the gate, according to the report of Rebecca Deleissegues and her sister, Bennie Mylar, written in 1929. These two women were the daughters of Benjamin Hames, builder of the mill.

The question of a water supply for the town was quite a problem, as there were no iron or steel pipe available, but Ben Whipple found a way. He had a lot of Redwood saplings cut and hauled into town, then bored holes through them from end to end. He laid a line of these wooden pipes, joining them together in some way, and connected the line with the big flume, at a point much higher than the town so that the flow was speedy and the pressure ample.

It was a crude pipeline but the water system proved satisfactory and amply met the needs of the community. In those days (1860) no one thought of digging a well, as no well boring outfit or machinery had been devised and sinking a shaft by manual labor was a tedious and difficult job.

In those days bear were quite common and were often seen prowling about the outskirts of the town. Old man Lindsay, who lived across the street opposite the mill, according to Mrs. Deleissegues, frequently trapped them and took them to Whiskey Hill (now known as Freedom) where one of the favorite sports was a bull and bear fight.

Whiskey Hill at that time was perhaps one of the "wildest and wooliest" spots in the State, and its name was quite appropriate. The bear and bull fights and other similar attractions were very popular with a large percentage of the habitues and visitors, and often these entertainments were augmented with a few impromptu shooting and stabbing affairs.

Some years later a man by the name of Jerome B. Post lived in Lindsay's home across from the Mill and engaged in the manufacture of chairs at this site.

During the winter of 1861-62, there came a big flood which washed away houses and trees and hundreds of acres of land and the Post home was carried away, chairs and all. Post's little son, Jerome Jr., was caught in the angry waters and but for the presence of mind of his elder brother, George, who later lived in Hollister, who grabbed him by the hair and pulled him out of the swollen creek, he would have drowned.

The old flour mill was later made into a paper mill. This was in the year 1880, but Mrs. Deleissegues did not remember the name of the company which bought it and made the change. Afterward it burned to the ground and gone were the hopes, the aspirations and labors of many years.

Later there was found a news item clipped from a newspaper and dated Soquel, May 19th, "The Los Angeles Paper Box Company has purchased the Soquel Paper Mill, historic landmark of this vicinity, and is removing the machinery in preparation for shipment. The old building was used as a flour mill in 1846, and later served as a tannery, another time as a woolen mill. It has been used as a paper mill since 1879. The building is artistic and numerous paintings have been made of it showing the old mill wheel churning the waters of the Soquel Creek."

Near where this mill once stood there was a tall fir tree that had been planted by George Post when he was a boy marking where was once a beautiful spot when the flour mill was running, a comfortable home nearby, with a flower garden and an orchard where the children picked their favorite fruit.

Up in Brown's Canyon was a saw mill owned by Brown and Williamson. The tan yards up Eureka Canyon were owned by Jack and Henry Kern. A man named Roder also had a saw mill up Eureka Canyon.

(More Tomorrow)