

An Act of Survival

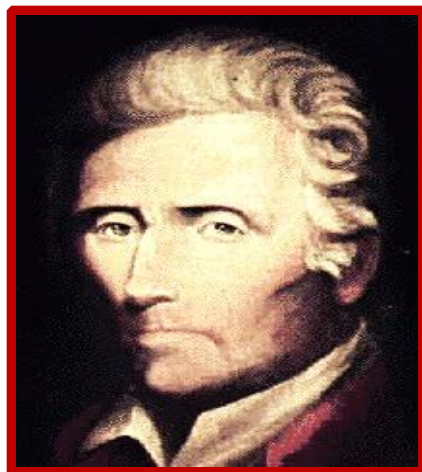
A Portrait of California Pioneer Andrew Kelsey - Et al.



Down through the ages, the unanticipated actions of ordinary folk inevitably influence key historic events in *unimagined* ways. During California's Gold Rush Era and beyond, Andrew Kelsey and his brothers were that sort of influence on events of the day. Their actions and consequence still reverberate throughout the State of California, one hundred and seventy years later.

Daniel Boone's Dream

In 1799, Kentucky's legendary frontiersman Colonel Daniel Boone and his extended family left their beloved Appalachia and emigrated to the Missouri Territory. Many followed his lead. Boone's eyes were on North America's far western wilderness, and he so wanted to go there. Alas, his legs were a generation too old to carry him yonder. The Missouri Territory attracted many frontiersmen, as it was the primary United States foothold on the continent, west of the Great Mississippi River. At the time, the Mississippi Basin was claimed by European hostiles: France, Britain, and Spain. Missouri was a safe haven, and the primary American corridor past the Mississippi to The Trails of the West.



Creative Commons



Daniel Boone

In 1830, the Kelsey Clan of Barren County, Kentucky, followed Boone's lead and emigrated to the Missouri Territory. Andrew Kelsey was one of five brothers and six sisters. Andrew's eldest brother David was a noted veteran of the War of 1812. Andrew's father Samuel Sr. hails back to the Revolutionary War with Great Grandpa Moses and his patriotic Virginian Scotch-Irish immigrant father John, bearing witness to the birth of America. Andrew Kelsey and several siblings came to Missouri on legs that were young, strong and enlightened by a family legacy steeped in patriotic fervor. However, Missouri was just a short stop along the way for the Kelsey's. A continent lay waiting. Daniel Boone's dream of exploring the west became a Kelsey Clan reality, for better or worse.

Kelsey Clan Mischief in Missouri

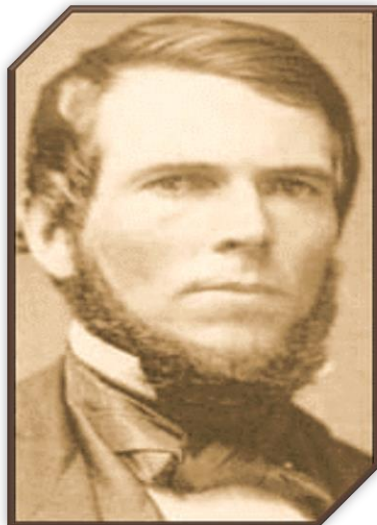
Land records indicate the first Missouri homestead of the Kelsey's was in St. Clair County. In 1838, the whole clan up and left St. Clair after a lawsuit against young Andrew Kelsey was prepared in Missouri's State Supreme Court regarding a pre-emption claim on land adjoining the Kelsey homestead. The family skedaddled to Roscoe, Missouri, likely to avoid the fallout from Andrew's claim jumping shenanigans. Subsequently, Andy's brother Samuel Kelsey Jr. was brought up on the charge of attempted murder. Sam bailed out, lawyered up, and the charges were later dropped by default. In just a few years, it appears at least two of the Kelsey brothers became rather notorious in Missouri.

The Iconic Bidwell/Bartleson Wagon Train

In May of 1841, Missourians breathed a collective sigh of relief when most of the Kelsey Clan left for California with the celebrated Bidwell/Bartleson Party. This group was the first to transcend the treacherous Sierra Mountains in order to go directly to Northern California. Twenty-year-old Missouri schoolteacher John Bidwell was the commercial inspiration of this landmark wagon train. Bidwell & Co. recruited nearly five hundred people to make the journey to California through subscription to *The Western Emigration Society*. Only about sixty-four brave souls actually made the trip. Bidwell's partner was a guide named Colonel John Bartleson. Bidwell & Bartleson became quite familiar with the Kelsey's during the grueling journey. Together, they crossed the plains, deserts, and mountains of the American West on their way to California. True grit and character are laid bare under such extreme circumstances.

Andrew Kelsey's brothers Isaac, Samuel & kin came along, but split from the main group at Soda Springs, Idaho with Tom "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick. He headed for Oregon. Half the pioneers from Bidwell's wagon train joined them. Fitzpatrick guided this group safely to Willamette Valley in the Oregon Territory by October of '41. The thirty-four California bound members of Bidwell's Party including Andrew, brother Ben & his wife Nancy Kelsey miraculously survived the trek too, despite thunderous threats of buffalo stampedes lurking in the dark of night on the plains. They "abandoned their precious wagons and dined on their starving oxen" while crossing the scorching deserts of Utah and Nevada. Then, they were accosted in the Sierra foothills at night by hostile Piute Indians who had a taste for horse meat. The Bidwell/Bartleson Party literally "walked out of their boots" hiking over the Sierras on foot through Ebbett's Pass. Fortunately, they spanned the Sierras before snowfall overtook them. On November 4th of 1841, a tattered and barefoot bunch of pioneers arrived at Dr. Marsh's Los Medanos Ranch in Alta California's San Joaquin Valley. The Bidwell/Bartleson Party was the first of nearly a half million wagon train pioneers who could proudly say:

It is No Matter, For I Have Seen the Elephant !



Young John Bidwell – 1840's

Ca. State Archives



John Bidwell - 1861

Bidwell's Regret - The Testimony of an Honored Son of California

John Bidwell lived to regret bringing the Kelsey Clan to California. In his memoirs, Bidwell adds *horse thief* to the Kelsey's claim jumper reputation in Missouri. He tells us his valued pack animals picketed outside Sutter's Fort up and vanished in the spring of 1843. John had no clue who ran off with them until tracking the culprits for several days to the Oregon border. There, he came upon a large herd of cattle, horses, and mules tended by the Kelsey brothers and Charles Stone. The boys were running the herd to Oregon's Fort Vancouver. Bidwell, a well-armed and imposing figure of a man at a robust 6'2," told the drovers he wanted to check the herd for his animals. He states Andrew Kelsey and Big Charlie Stone denied him access to the herd, and "loudly howled" about the accusation of thievery. Ben Kelsey intervened and allowed his former wagon train comrade to survey the livestock. Bidwell did indeed discover and liberate his animals from the Kelsey herd. By rights, according to the unwritten *Code of the West*, he could have hung these dirty lowdown mule thieves on the spot! Why he did not, is anyone's guess. Perhaps Bidwell was outnumbered, or the Kelsey's had a plausible excuse. Besides, such punishment was surely against John's nature. In any case, Mr. Bidwell later became one of America's favorite sons. He was a popular politico known nationwide for his integrity. Congressman Bidwell was the champion of Suffragettes & Prohibitionists, along with his anti-monopoly platform. Therefore, its fairly certain his testimony in this instance is a sober and reliable account of the Kelsey Clan's malevolent nature. The historic record already provides indications the Kelsey boys were untrustworthy, but hold on, it gets worse...



The Kelsey's and the Sonoma Bear Flag Revolt

In 1844 -'45, most of the Kelsey's moved to Sonoma Valley from their square mile land grant at French Camp on the Stanislaus River. General Mariano Vallejo was established in Napa & Sonoma as Mexico's supreme authority in Northern California, and he was known to favor American settlers. Vallejo employed the Kelsey Brothers as cowpokes and sheep herders at his Rancho Petaluma. The following year, the Kelsey's participated in the Bear Flag Revolt and essentially sacked their Spanish Patron. General Vallejo, his brother Salvador and a few men were taken prisoner without incident by the American Sonoma Osos or *Bear Men*. Vallejo, his men and his property were treated respectfully. Ben Kelsey's account claims he played a vital role in this affair. Sam Kelsey Jr.'s signature bears witness to Vallejo's surrender at Sonoma. Afterwards, Vallejo and his men were imprisoned at Sutter's Fort, but allowed the freedom of the compound until U.S. Army Captain John Fremont arrived. He incarcerated the Vallejo's in a cramped calaboose. Confined as such, they caught malaria. The Vallejo's survived that wretched scourge and were later freed. General Mariano Vallejo was allowed to retain his property and return to his beloved Sonoma Presidio.

U.S. Army Captain John Fremont arrived at Sonoma Plaza ten days after the Bear Flag Revolt with a commuted sentence for dishonorable discharge under his belt, freshly signed by President Polk. He immediately declared California to be official U.S. territory and proclaimed himself "Acting Governor." Days later, Fremont ruthlessly exercised his authority. He ordered Ben Kelsey to kill General Vallejo's Alcalde of Sonoma, the affable Jose Berryessa and his companions the de Haro twins, just as they came ashore in a rowboat at San Rafael. Fremont's motto was: *leave no enemies behind*. To Ben's credit, he

refused this direct order under threat of insubordination. Later, Fremont made sure Ben Kelsey's application for military pay was denied over this incident. Kit Carson obeyed the order, murdering three unarmed and respected Californios. Years later, Mr. Carson admitted regret for his actions, but qualified it with: *just following orders*. Carson, Fremont & Bidwell all stated Ben Kelsey was a great scout under any circumstance. Otherwise, the Kelsey brother's ruthless reputation followed them around like a skunk.

The Bear Flag flew over Sonoma for less than a month before the Stars & Stripes were unfurled. Sam Kelsey and Jake York then transferred California's first state flag to Sutter's Fort. Along with this iconic banner went the dream of the Independent California Republic. The Bear Flag made its way into the hands of U.S. Naval Commander J.B. Montgomery and later the Society of Pioneers, but was lost in the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire. Ben Kelsey's wife Nancy claims to have contributed to making this famous flag in an interview published fifty years after the fact. Another fifty years later, the media revived & sensationalized this interview, dubbing Nancy: *the Betsy Ross of California*. Eyewitness accounts of the Bear Flag's creation state otherwise. Reputable firsthand informants never mention Nancy. The veracity of her testimony is also in question when she claims her husband organized the Bidwell-Bartelson Party. Its well-known John Bidwell was the primary agent of that historic wagon train. However, the Kelsey's were financial supporters and participants. Nancy's third attempt to rewrite history comes as she claims the peaceful Wiyot tribe of Humboldt attacked her, Ben and several heavily armed men on the way to Humboldt Bay in 1850. This bloody, incendiary incident will be addressed later on in this story.

As you will see, the historic records specify several Kelsey run-ins with County, State, and Federal officials, along with Indians & American settlers alike from the California Counties of Humboldt, Napa, Lake, Sonoma, Tulare and San Bernardino, not to mention their other escapades in Missouri, Oregon, Texas, Mexico, New Mexico and Arizona. The historic record is full of twisted statements by and concerning the Kelsey's, so beware the stench of bias. However, the legitimate documents show the Kelsey's were intimately involved in *the* key historic moment when America's Founding Fathers vision of a nation united from coast to coast essentially became reality. The Bear Flag Revolt was inspired by a few hundred loosely organized Americans who successfully deposed Mexican rule in California, and opened the door to U.S. statehood. The Kelsey brothers were certainly in the thick of it all.

Lesser-Known Mischief

One lesser-known Kelsey indiscretion begins in the winter of 1846-'47. Kelsey family descendant Ken Maines states Andrew Kelsey and Charles Stone headed for the Sierras from Sutter's Fort with James Reed and Company to aid the ill-fated Donner Party of Illinois. This unfortunate wagon train got caught in a Sierra snowstorm during an ill-advised late fall crossing. Their wagons were buried in deep snow near Truckee, and they could not go on. Andrew Kelsey set up camp in the foothills below Donner Pass while Charlie Stone and a Mr. Charles Cady traveled with the Reed Rescue Party. The duo lingered behind after Reed & Co. left with a handful of grateful Donner Party survivors. Stone and Cady nosed about and came upon Mrs. Tamsen Donner. She refused to leave her ailing husband George, but begged the men to take her three daughters with them. They claimed Tamsen gave them \$500 in gold to carry the girls down to Sutter's Fort. Stone, Cady & Kelsey carried the Donner children six miles downhill and "dumped them off" at a cabin occupied by an insane woman who was hallucinating and near death. Instead of fulfilling their obligation, they packed out a valuable load of goods absconded from the Donner wagon train. Despite this betrayal, the girls survived. Their parents were not so lucky. Tamsen Donner froze to death under suspicious circumstances. The next rescue party to reach the snowed in wagons found poor Tamsen delirious and near death, her clothing covered with ice and stuck to her skin, as if she had fallen into a nearby lake. George Donner also froze to death. Later, he and his wife were partially eaten by their starving friends.

In another escapade circa 1847- '48, Sam Kelsey Jr. was abducted by the Californios, in all likelihood, in retaliation for his role in the capture and incarceration of their beloved Don Vallejo during the Bear Flag affair. Sam was put in irons and stowed away in the belly of a schooner docked at San Francisco, soon to depart for the Orient. Sam was Shanghaied! The Californios sent a message to brother Ben Kelsey demanding ransom. It would take \$75,000 in gold to free his brother... and pronto! Ben somehow came up with the gold in short order, liberating his brother Sam from the fate of a slave.

The Beginning of the End

The most fateful and well-known historic event involving the Kelsey brothers cost Andrew Kelsey his life and by proxy, tens of thousands of Indian lives. The beginning of the end commenced in 1847 when the Kelsey's made a deal with Capitan Salvador Vallejo, the brother of General Mariano Vallejo. Salvador Vallejo granted the Kelsey's grazing rights to his Rancho Lupyomi Grant on the western shore of Clear Lake in Big Valley. Capitan Vallejo had abandoned Rancho Lupyomi during the early 1840's after attempting to keep Clear Lake tribes working for him. The local clans were not interested in laboring for the Spaniards. This insulted the Vallejo's. A vengeful slaughter resulted on Clear Lake's Kamdot Isle. Capitan Salvador Vallejo bushwhacked the last of several tribal leaders as they entered a council lodge parley. Vallejo's men then barricaded the lodge door and burned the rest of the tribal council alive. The Californios taunted the men to come out so they could shoot them. Instead, these braves chose to perish together. Captain Vallejo left Rancho Lupyomi headed for San Jose on a series of murderous missions for his brother. A thousand head of cantankerous Mexican longhorn cattle and an equal number of horses were left roaming about Rancho Lupyomi, wild and free. The Kelsey's and Charles Stone purchased Vallejo's wayward stock, set up camp, fenced in pastureland by Kelsey Crick and began a round-up for a cattle drive to market. The Xalanapo villagers of Big Valley protested, claiming Vallejo's livestock was left to compensate them for land use and labor.



California State Archives



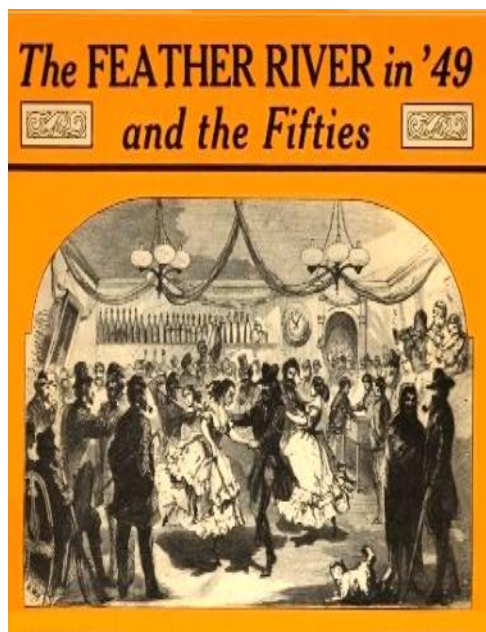
Captain
Salvador
Vallejo

Author's Note: For years, Vallejo's uncaptured longhorns roamed about the ancient oak & pine forests of Lake County, terrifying settlers, Indians, mountain lions, and bears alike. The last feral longhorns in the area weren't rounded up until four decades later on Cow Mountain, thus erasing the last trace of Capitan Salvador Vallejo and his Californios from Big Valley. However, the murderous Kelsey Era still casts a long shadow.

Dark Days for the Xalanapo & A Fateful Expedition to the Gold Country

Andrew Kelsey and Charles Stone needed laborers to help round up, fence off and feed their livestock. They quickly terrorized and enslaved the Xalanapo Clan to do so. Augustine, one of the leaders of this unfortunate band of the Pomo Nation, spoke of the cruel treatment Stone & Kelsey doled out. The tribe was incarcerated when not working for the Kelsey's. They were barely fed and not allowed to have weapons to hunt for themselves, nor gather their traditional foods. Some were whipped so severely they died. A lad was shot dead to set an example. An eyewitness account speaks of Stone and Kelsey shooting at villagers for fun... just to see them jump. Children were sold to slave traders in Napa. Young girls were raped. Augustine's wife Ki-reech was forced to be Andrew Kelsey's live-in domestic. Twenty elders died of starvation during the winter of 1848. These were dark days for the Xalanapo people, but hold on... it gets worse.

The Kelsey's took a group of brother Andrews' Big Valley tribal slaves to work the rich gold deposits on the banks of the Feather River. It became a fateful journey, with dire consequences for all tribal people of California. Some historians have offered a version of this trip, perhaps confusing it with another excursion in 1848 and/or inaccurate statements made by an elderly Nancy Kelsey. An accurate but little-known version originates from an account by Granville Perry Swift's ranch foreman. Swift was one of California's most admired pioneers, with a big-hearted reputation. He was one of the last fur trapping *Rendezvous Era* frontiersmen. A different breed than his pioneer peers. He was a friend of the Wailaki (Rocky Creek) clan of the Wintu/Patwin tribe. Granville Swift was a Captain in the Bear Flag Revolt and Daniel Boone's grandnephew. He proudly carried his Kentucky Long Rifle with him most everywhere. As it turned out, Granville Commodore Perry Swift was one of the most fortunate prospectors of California's Gold Rush.



Ca. State Archives

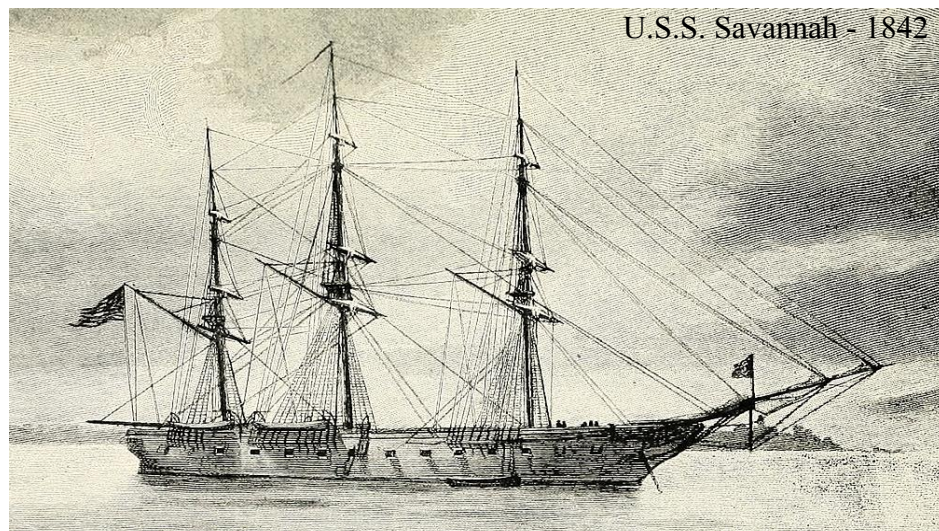


During 1849, Captain Swift and his Wintu Indian crew intensely worked a gold claim at the nugget rich Bidwell Bar on the Feather River. The Kelsey's arrived onsite with their Big Valley Pomo crew in late fall of '49 and started to set up their mining operation near Swift's claim. All hell broke loose. Swift's fifty-man mining crew were of the Rocky Creek Clan and had an age-old territorial dispute with Kelsey's Lake Pomos. There was bad blood between them. All mining stopped as the two tribes confronted each other. Skirmishes went on for three days until: "nearly all the Lake County Indians perished." The Wintu braves in Swift's employ normally worked for him as paid cowpokes at his Colusa cattle ranch on Rocky Creek. Therefore, the Wintu were mounted and well-armed. Kelsey's enslaved Pomos were forced to walk everywhere, worked under threat of death, and never allowed to carry weapons. This tribal grudge match most certainly was not a fair fight and slaughter ensued. As it turned out, this *unimaginable* event sealed the fate of Andrew Kelsey, Charles Stone and tens of thousands of California's tribal people.

In December of '49, only two or three of an estimated sixty Big Valley braves made it back to the fringe of Pomo territory from the Kelsey's Feather River gold mining fiasco, and they were barely alive. When these poor fellows told their story, a runner was sent to Big Valley with the terrible news. The enraged Xalanapo executed Charles Stone and Andrew Kelsey not long afterwards. It was: *An Act of Survival*. Besides the fact that the remainder of the clan was starving to death, now most of their menfolk were gone forever. Stone and Kelsey obviously deserved their fate at the hands of the Xalanapo people due to numerous atrocities, culminating in the Feather River Massacre incident. Tragically, the execution of these two cruel rogues inadvertently ushered in the attempted annihilation of *all* California tribes.

A Savage Act of Vengeance

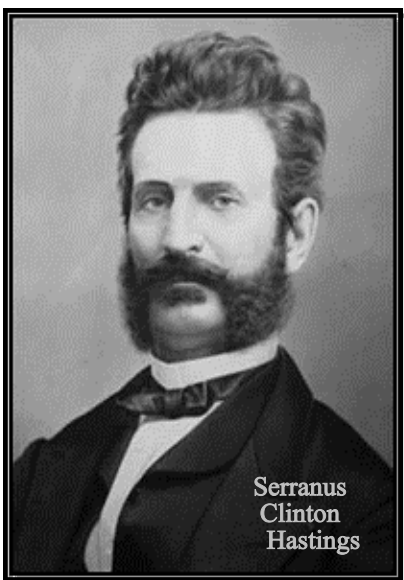
The Kelsey Boys were informed of brother Andrew's death soon after the fact. Sam & Ben, accompanied by several volunteers and a detachment of the 1st Army Dragoons, rode up to Clear Lake and buried their brother and his partner Charles Stone. They searched for their brother's killers but returned to Napa without locating the assassins. In a fit of rage, Sam & Ben Kelsey went on a bloody rampage in Napa Valley along with a gang of over thirty men. They split into two groups. One indiscriminately slaughtered virtually all of Napa County's Suisun Clan in a covert village raid after dark. The Suisun Indians were not involved in executing Andrew Kelsey and Charles Stone. In fact, they weren't even from Napa but migrated there after being pushed out of their own lands by incoming ranchers. Napa settlers were alerted by distant gunfire and the glow of the burning Suisun village across the valley. The pioneers banded together, armed themselves and turned the Kelsey gang back in outrage. The other half of Kelsey's Raiders continued the carnage at Yount's Rancho, killing many and torching a village of four hundred Caymus Clan Indians. The marauders moved on to Calistoga, burning villages and killing many members of the Ulucas Clan and other tribes. It was a savage act of vengeance upon innocents under cover of darkness. The carnage continued for days, going as far south as Santa Rosa. This cruel insanity created a deep rift between Kelsey's Raiders and their neighbors in Napa and Sonoma. Indian labor was vital to harvest crops and tend to livestock. You see, although California joined the Union under the pretense of being a non-slavery state, this federal mandate was virtually ignored. By 1850, State Law allowed pioneers to enslave the tribes. Indians were considered *indigent* and became mere property, sold to the highest bidder at an auction, or a private sale between settlers. *Property...* just as African slaves were in Old Dixie. So, when charges were filed by Napa authorities against the Kelsey's for destroying "Indian Property," it was no surprise. The surprise was Kelsey's Sonoma Raiders were indicted by the State on murder charges. Dubbed the *Sonoma Seven* in the newspapers, Sam Kelsey Jr. & Co. were arrested and held for trial without bail in the brig of the U.S.S. Savannah docked at the port of Benicia in San Francisco's cold and foggy bay. Ben Kelsey and a half dozen others were indicted on "incendiary charges." These alleged arsonists were admitted to bail instead of jail. The Sonoma Seven were incarcerated aboard the Savannah for nearly seven months while California transitioned to statehood and formed a viable court system.



Library of Congress

A Trial Set Aside, Bounty & An Island Left Bloody

State Archives



Serranus
Clinton
Hastings

The Sonoma Seven trial was one of the first cases arraigned in the newly established California Territorial Court. The Chief Justice of this interim court was Serranus Clinton Hastings. He released the Sonoma Seven on a \$10,000 bail bond citing lack of precedent and questions over jurisdiction. Only two members of the Kelsey gang showed up at the next hearing. The rest jumped bail and hightailed it north. The Hastings decision, or lack thereof, encouraged gold hungry miners, ranchers and land speculators to continue the carnage. Judge Hastings was a powerful advocate of Anti-Indian sentiments. He heartily supported California Governor Peter Burnett's enactment of generous bounties on Indian people... dead or alive.

With few exceptions, the public agreed with Hastings & Burnett. Citizens who opposed such tactics were chastised and powerless to stop the senseless slaughter anyhow. The Jacksonian policies of dispossession, removal and genocide had permeated into the very psyche of the American majority.

In fact, Justice Hastings personally funded the infamous *Jarobe's Eel River Raiders*. This death squad shot, killed, decapitated, and scalped slews of Indians who had obvious rights to Hastings self-proclaimed real estate empire in the counties of Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma, and Napa. As a result of his ruthless real estate ventures, Justice Hastings eventually became one of California's wealthiest land barons and a popular philanthropist among the newly created aristocracy of gold, living in the gilded Victorian mansions perched atop San Francisco's sandy Seven Hills.

In May of 1850, five months after the Xalanapo executed Charles Stone and Andrew Kelsey, the U.S. Cavalry rode up to Clear Lake seeking revenge. By tribal accounts, they massacred 50 to 60 Danoxa (Upper Lake Pomo) in retribution for the deaths of Stone & Kelsey. The bloated U.S. Cavalry claimed 250 dead. The Danoxa women, children, and elders were visiting Bonopoti (Old Island) to harvest and dry fish. It was an old tradition to harvest fish there seasonally, while the clan's able-bodied men hunted elk and dried jerky at nearby Lake Pillsbury. The Danoxa had no hand in slaying Stone and Kelsey, but suffered a brutal assault by the 1st Dragoons of the U.S. Army Cavalry. The Dragoons erroneously claimed Indians who killed Stone & Kelsey were hiding on the island. In fact, the tribe in question was at the other end of the lake, several miles away. Consequently, innocents were murdered. Some were shot or bludgeoned with rifle butts on orders to save ammunition for other incursions. The eyewitness account of Nika (Lucy Moore) states infants were mercilessly slung into the lake off the point of a bayonet. Poor old souls hiding in the tule rushes were stabbed and slashed with sabers. The lake ran red. Since then, Bonopoti has been called: *Bloody Island*.



Eliza Coon -Yokayo Weaver



Xabenapo Mother and Child

LCHS Collection

Captain Nathaniel Lyon of the U.S. Army Dragoons intended to send a clear message to the tribes of Northern California in response to Stone and Kelsey's executions, and it did not end there. The Dragoons pressed on to Yokaya (Ukiah) in Mendocino County and beyond, leaving trails of tribal blood as they went. And it gets worse...

SUCCESS OR FAILURE DEPENDS ON INDIANS

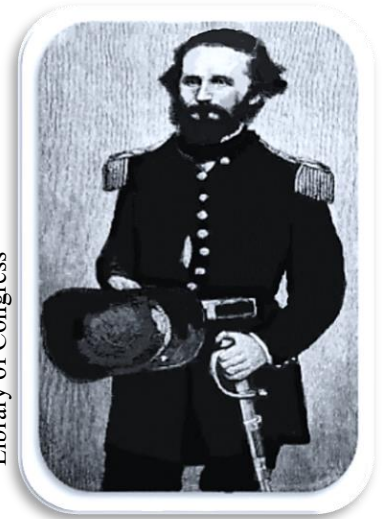


Library of Congress

The Ghost

Between 1850 and 1861, the State of California paid out 1.5 million dollars in militia expenses and bounty for severed Indian heads, hands, scalps and vials of blood. Take into consideration that 1.5 million dollars in 1850 U.S. gold coin converts to over 45 million in today's paper currency. Scalps were worth a dollar and vials of blood 25 cents, while a hand or head might bring 5 to 10 dollars. United States President Willard Fillmore's Administration helped to defray militia costs to rout out California's tribes with the Federal Land Bounty Program. State Militia conscription was worth forty acres of land for as little as forty days service. Desperados who had no success at gold mining, or lost it all drinking, whoring, and gambling, made an easy living as bounty hunters and slave traders. Bounty and blood flowed until approximately 3% to 5% of Northern California's tribal population remained. Such murderous events seem surreal today, but the cold hard facts retell a nauseating chapter of genocide in the darkest volume of United States History.

Library of Congress



Captain Nathaniel Lyons

In the meantime, as *persona non-grata* in Napa Valley, the Sonoma Seven and the rest of the Kelsey gang jumped bail in August of 1850 and high-tailed it north to a small seaside settlement perched alongside California's Humboldt Bay. Along the way, Ben Kelsey and his gang shot a hospitable Wiyot tribal leader and a few villagers. When the rest of the Wiyot's scattered in the woods, their village was burned. Pioneers of Humboldt Bay were immediately disgusted with Kelsey's gang. The Wiyot were a friendly tribe and had helped the incoming settlers survive and thrive in their unfamiliar environment. Here is another episode of incendiary incidents, murder and mayhem by the Kelsey Clan never to see the serene face of Blind Justice.



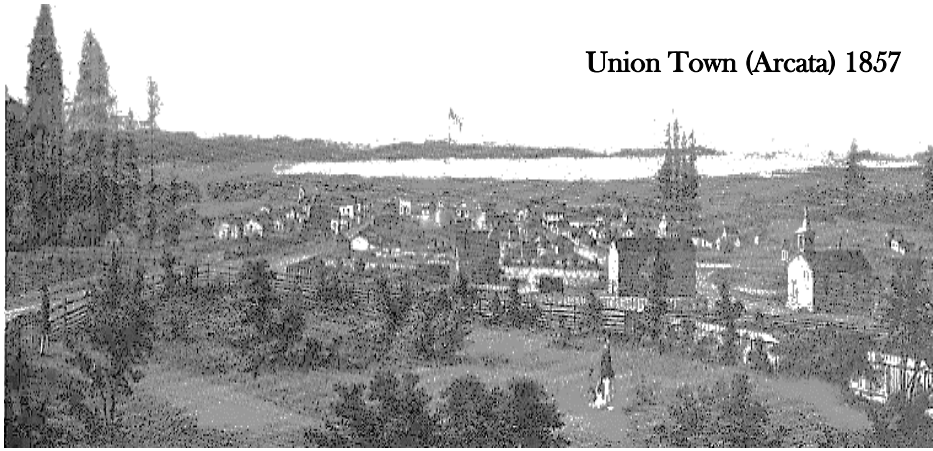
Wiyot Shell Dress

Wiyots of Humboldt

Humboldt State Collection



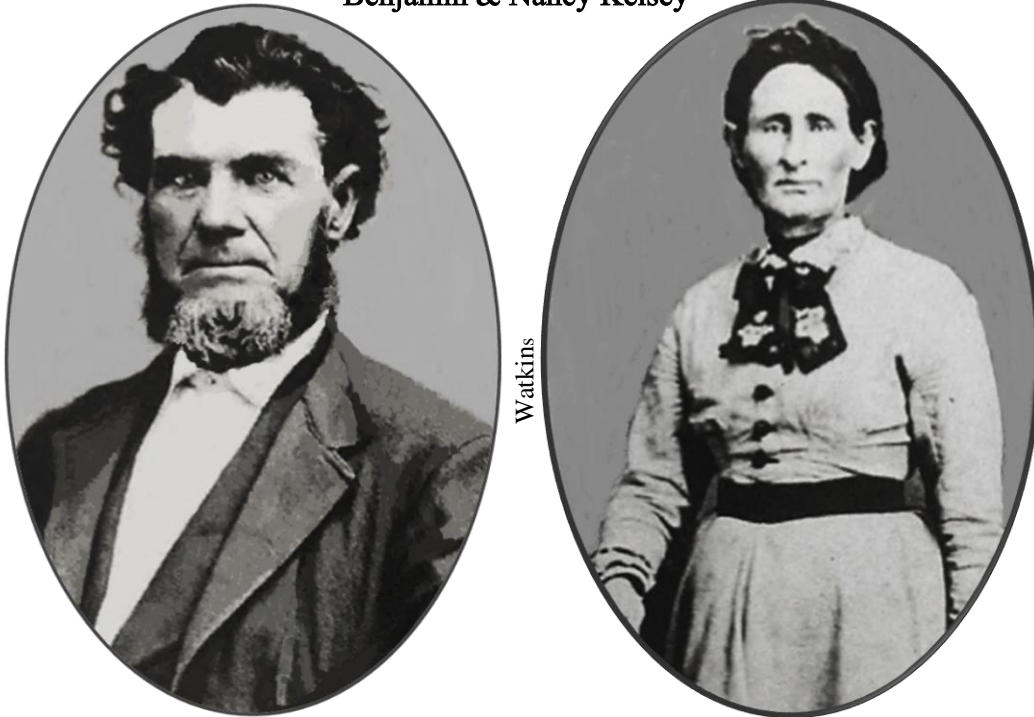
Union Town (Arcata) 1857



Kelsey Crimes Continue at Union Town and Beyond

The 33 members of Kelsey’s “Union Company” surveyed and claimed large portions of Humboldt Bay, much to the dismay of established settlers. The gang apparently had plans to make this secluded bay a major port city in Northern California. They called it Union Town. Today (2021) it’s known as Arcata. Kelsey’s gang continued to slaughter the Indians of the area, agitating other Northern California tribes to rise up, resulting in increased violence against pioneers. The settlers of Humboldt Bay wanted to lynch certain members of the Union Company for the continual criminal acts committed against them and the tribes. Apparently, locals were fearful and/or powerless to stop them.

Benjamin & Nancy Kelsey



While living in Union during the early 1850’s, Ben & Sam Kelsey Jr. signed a contract to cut a trail from oceanside Crescent City to the east, over the Marble Mountains to Fort Jones. Coastal merchants were eager to cart precious supplies inland to the U.S. Army and Trinity River gold miners. Utilizing Chinese labor, the Kelsey boys blazed a wagon trail to Fort Jones and profited handsomely. Ben Kelsey built a fine home for his family at Union with the proceeds. Brother Sam bought valued land there too. By this time, Humboldt Bay’s growth had exploded. Over one hundred-fifty ships were counted in the bay at one time in 1854. However, the Kelsey brothers lost their property to the bank. As *persona non-grata* once again, Ben Kelsey and kin moved to Oregon, where brother Isaac (Zed) Kelsey had settled. The remained there for about five years.

In 1859, Ben and wife Nancy Kelsey left Oregon with four children in tow, headed for Mexico. Then, in 1861, on to the Confederate bastion of the Republic of Texas. Along the way, they were attacked by Comanches. Ben's daughter Mary Ellen was scalped while Ben was out hunting. The family survived the attack, but poor Mary died deranged six years later. They later traveled to New Mexico, then on to California's Central Valley, then settled at Fresno in 1864. It's rumored Ben and his sons were associated with the Confederate Mason/Hill Gang in Fresno. Nancy & Ben spent their final years in the Los Angeles area. Ben Kelsey roved the streets of L.A. preaching the Gospels and saving souls. He died of natural causes in 1888.

Slippery Sam

In 1853, brother Sam Kelsey Jr. somehow ended up back in Petaluma after losing his property at Humboldt Bay and his brother Ben left for Oregon. He recruited men at Petaluma to explore the Russian River, telling them he "found color" and gold was there for the taking. Problem was, the Wappo & Kashaya Indians claimed this land and were hostile to pioneer intrusions. Twenty-five heavily armed men took the bait despite the danger, but they became downright ornery after several days of fruitless gold panning. Sam's life was threatened, but nothing came of it all. Was this excursion simply a wild goose chase, or perhaps part of a sly ruse to explore the territory under the protection of two dozen well-armed miners? Unknown to the miners, Sam was actually scouting around for a route to build another road to the coast.

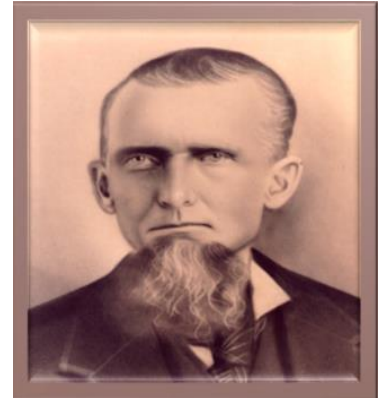
Little is known of Sam Kelsey's whereabouts for several years until he resurfaced when arrested for attempted murder again near Visalia, California in December of 1860. He somehow escaped custody just as a constable was transporting him to jail! Sam slipped off to the south. He became well-known to Major Carlton of the Union Army as a Confederate Army organizer & recruiter in Holcomb Valley near San Bernardino. Holcomb Valley was home to Sam Kelsey's store and the *Knights of the Golden Door*. This covert organization sought to annex Texas and the entire South\Western Territory for the Confederacy. Rebels known as the *Montes* were also familiar guests at Kelsey's Holcomb Valley establishment. Rest assured... all these boys were up to no good. Major Carlton and Captain Davidson's First Dragoons kept a watchful eye on them.

Sam Kelsey's rebel rogues gathered the ire of San Bernardino citizens at a saloon after a local election circa 1862. Secessionists held animosity towards the sheriff elect, desiring an officer more sympathetic to their Confederate cause. Sam's gang even tried rigging the election with tampered ballots. When all else failed, Secessionist "Hell Roaring" Johnson decided to settle the matter by simply killing Sheriff St. John. Mr. Johnson rushed at the sheriff with a knife, but was repelled and mortally wounded. As Johnson lay dying, Sam Kelsey Jr. riled up the gathered crowd with a call to hang the sheriff then and there. The town's citizens took up arms in defense of St. John and cordially invited Kelsey and his Confederate compadres to leave town. The Secessionists welcome in San Bernardino was plum wore out.

In 1863, Sam Kelsey Jr. was arrested and jailed along with one-hundred fellow Confederates by the U.S. Army. He somehow escaped custody again. Sam slipped off to the Arizona Territory. He met up with his three sons in Prescott. Sam and his boys became professional gamblers and cattlemen in Tucson for a time. His sons William and Ben were popular members of the Tucson community, but died young of odd physical ailments in the early 1870's. His third son Joseph was a miner by trade, but ended up bartending in Tombstone during the 1880's. Surely, Joe Kelsey witnessed everything the wild west had to offer in Tombstone. He was living there when the iconic O.K. Corral shoot-out took place in 1881. The Kelsey's were related by marriage to Ike & Billy Clanton, both were participants in that epic gunfight... Just a coincidence? Surely, Joe Kelsey served a beer or two to Doc Holiday and the Earp Brothers whether he wanted to or not.

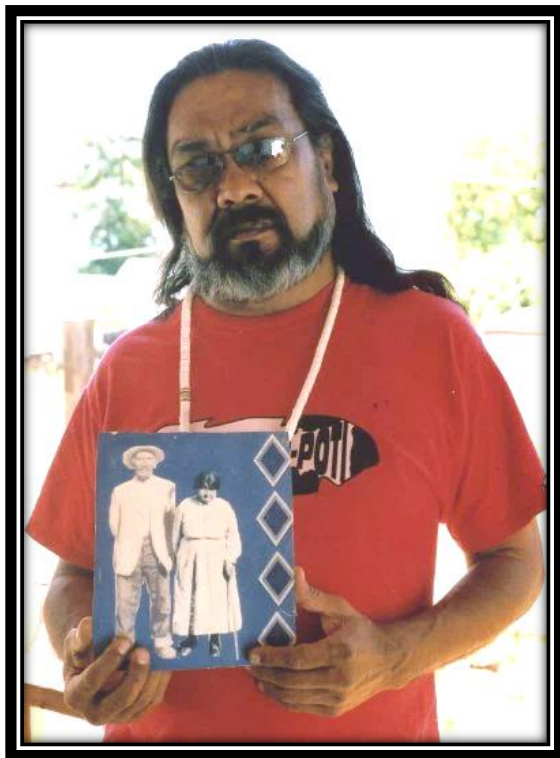
Slippery Sam's final fate and the exact date of his demise is yet unknown, nor has a gravesite been discovered by this author. Sam Kelsey Jr. eludes us yet, even in death. Some say he was wanted for treason. Family tradition tells us while laying low in the Arizona back country, the fearless Apaches found him. His luck finally ran out. There was no escape this time. It is said the Apache dispatched Sam to a reckoning with his Creator prior to 1870, just as the Xalanapo tribe dispatched his baby brother Andrew two decades earlier. And to think, as a young man Sam Kelsey Jr made a respectable living as a schoolteacher.

It seems Kelsey Clan crimes against the State, American settlers, the Californios and various Indian tribes were part of an endless cycle. The irony is, Lake County, California's town of Kelseyville has honored Andrew Kelsey as the first Anglo settler of Big Valley for the last 170 years, although qualifying as a *bonified settler* usually involves a land claim and family. Neither Stone or Kelsey ever brought a wife or children to Lake County, nor perfected a land title. Big Valley was merely their cattle depot. Kelseyville was previously called Kelsey Creek and/or Uncle Sam until cousins of the Kelsey's moved into town in the early 1870's. They began a campaign to honor their martyred kin. Cousin Alexander Kelsay's crusade to change the town name to Kelseyville was enacted in 1882. And the rest is history.



Alexander Kelsay

After review, this author cannot casually explain away the Kelsey Brother's actions. Even those who characterize such men as: *A Product of Their Times* have a hard time making a valid argument in their defense. This long-standing narrative of political & cultural influence excuses acts of dispossession and ignores outright atrocity under the glorified guise of Manifest Destiny. Surely, such rhetoric denigrates the very concept of an honorable and fateful Christian purpose. In reality, the Kelsey's well documented record of ruthlessness speaks for itself. It is a bloody, savage and vengeful legacy, undeserving of commemoration.



Courtesy of Raphael Montoliu

Clayton Duncan holding a photo of Grandparents Solomon & Lucy Moore.

History in the Making

In 2008, a descendant of a survivor of the Bloody Island Massacre proposed renaming the town of Kelseyville due to the Kelsey brother's horrible legacy. Mr. Clayton Duncan, the Grandson of Bloody Island survivor Nika (Lucy Moore) pointed out to county officials that it was highly inappropriate to have a town named after pioneers who were responsible for the cold-blooded murder of so many innocent people. Mr. Duncan and others also called for the elimination of the Kelseyville High School Indian Mascot. This stereotypically inaccurate tribal caricature was combined with unabashed cultural appropriation. By order of Kelseyville's School Board and a mandate by the State of California, the mascot was banished after much debate and vocal local protests. Clayton Duncan's appeal to change the town's name sparked a proposal for a countywide ballot measure. On his own, Mr. Duncan attempted to garner the needed signatures, but his one-man army was unable to gather enough registered voter's signatures in time to qualify for the county ballot. And so, this story may yet be: *History in the Making*.

This article is dedicated to the loving memory of Ni'ka (Lucy Moore) who was one of the few survivors of the Bloody Island Massacre. This article's inspiration provided by Kimey Jones (Sent from The Heavens) & Clayton Duncan (Klemhyu). Aho!

Kudos to Creative Commons for the Boone images & Raphael Montoliu for the fabulous image of Clayton Duncan and his Ancestors. All other images contained herein are vested in the Public Domain of the United States of America and/or part of the combined digitized collections of Lake County's Museums, the Lake County Historical Society & the Lake County Genealogical Society.

References

- Bancroft, Hubert. *Bancroft's History of California*. Volumes: VI, XXII, XXIII. The History Company, 1886-88.
- Benson, William, *The Way We Lived: California Indian Reminiscences, Stories, and Songs*, Malcolm Margolin Ed. Berkeley, 1981.
- Bidwell, John. *Life in California Before the Gold Discovery*. Lewis Osborne, 1966.
- Bidwell, John. *Echoes of the Past About California*. R.R. Donnelley & Sons, 1928.
- Carpenter, Aurelius O. & Millberry, Percy H. *History of Lake & Mendocino Co.*, Historic Record Co., 1914.
- Carranco, Lynwood & Estle Beard. *Genocide and Vendetta*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1981.
- Flora, Stephenie. *Emigrants to Oregon 1841*. <http://www.oregonpioneers.com/1841.htm>. Accessed July 2020.
- Fountain, Mrs. Eugene F. *The Four Kelsey Bros. Part I*. Blue Lake Advocate, 13 June 1957.
- Foy, Mary. *The Bear Flag Revolution*. The Quarterly - Historical Society of Southern California, June 1946.
- Gilbert, Frank. *History of San Joaquin County*. Thompson & West, 1879
- Gregson Memoirs*. California Historical Society Quarterly. Volume XIX No.2, June 1940.
- Hobart, Billie. *Capitan Granville Perry Swift: California Pioneer and Sonoma Bear*. Author House, 2001.
- Horrible Slaughter of Indians*. Alta California. 28 May 1850. California Digital Newspaper Collection. Accessed Dec. 2016.
- Irvine, Leigh. *History of Humboldt County*. Historic Records Company, 1915.
- Kohnen, Patricia. *Oregon Trail Timeline 1841-1843*. Unpublished. ND
- Library of Congress. *Postal Records of Lake County, Ca*. <https://www.archives.gov/research/post-offices>. Accessed Oct. 2020.
- Madley, Benjamin. *An American Genocide: The U. S. and the California Indian 1846-1873*. Yale U. Press, 2009.
- Maines, Ken. *Andrew Kelsey (Lecture)*. Oroville Mercury Register. Print. 11 July 2011.
- Mauldin, Henry. *Mauldin's Notes*. County of Lake (CA) Museums Digitized Collections. Unpublished. 1972
- Palmer, Lyman. *History of Napa and Lake Counties, California*. Slocum, Bowen and Company, 1881.
- Palmer, Lyman. *History of Mendocino, California*. Alley, Bowen & Co., 1880.
- Parker, John. *The Kelsey Brothers: A California Disaster*. www.wolfcreekarchaeology.com. Accessed Dec. 2016
- Rootsweb. <http://boards.rootsweb.com/localities.northam.usa.states.kentucky.counties.barren>. Accessed Feb. 2017.
- Scott, Robert. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Government Printing Office, 1897.
- Secret, William. *When the Great Spirit Died: The Destruction of the California Indians 1850-1860*. Linden, 2002.
- Warner, Barbara. *The Men of the California Bear Flag Revolt and Their Heritage*. Arthur H. Clark Publishing Company, 1996.

Kevin Engle/2021