

SIMON L. KNIGHTS, AN ODD FELLOW

By: John Edmonds

He was loved by just about everyone who knew him and by many who had only a passing acquaintance with him. He was a very generous man who took good care of his family and of those who he cared for and not too often for people he didn't know that came in contact with him. He was an honored member of the International Order of Odd Fellows. He was a businessman par excellence and invested wisely in quality materials in order to make people, riding with him, more comfortable.

Simon was the son of Abiel and Fidelia Knights who arrived at Searsville very early in 1850. They were farmers and found the soil rich and rewarding; they built their permanent dwelling on the upper side of Sausal Creek. On their arrival they had Simon, Francis accompanying them from the east. While at Searsville the couple had Marshall and Priscella. Priscella died on September 26, 1889 at 7 months of age.

The Knights' residence was on a hillside and it faced down toward Sausal Creek at Searsville, which had now been declared San Mateo County's first certified town following the platting map done by Horace Templeton, the Knights' neighbor. On November 1, 1880 following a very heavy few days of rain, the hillside gave way and mud slid over the house. Most of the family was able to escape but Marshall, age 7, tried to jump out a window and was buried in the mud. He died on that day and was taken to Union Cemetery and buried in the Odd Fellows plot.

The Odd Fellows lodge #109, called the Bay View Lodge, started in mid January, 1863 and was declared open following the dedication on January 31st, 1863. The San Mateo County Gazette wrote on January 24, 1863: "The new hall

of the lodge will be publicly dedicated at Redwood City on Saturday evening January 31st, 1963 under the direction of the Grand Master and officers of the Grand Lodge of the State of California.” The first members of the Board were Jerome W. Turner, S. H. Snyder, E. C. Southworth, William Holder, George W. Fox and the trustees were Andrew Teague J. L. Snow and Benjamin Fox.

The Odd Fellows held a special picnic every year and the San Mateo County Gazette reported on April 4th 1868: “The Odd Fellows of San Francisco have decided to have their anniversary picnic on the 27th of this month at the Finger Picnic Grounds and the field is to be fitted up with the People’s Park platforms and fixtures, together with improvements It is expected that the railroad company will lay a track directly to the picnic grounds.”

The Bay View Lodge of Odd Fellows was so well liked by its members that it doubled in size in just a few months and by May 4th 1878 the newspaper reported that members of the lodge had started lodges in Mayfield, Pescadero, Hayward and San Mateo. In 1882 the Bay View lodge started work on the present building on Main Street in Redwood City. The building was next to the Stafford and Dugan’s Stable and, according to the newspaper the building will be: “92 feet in length and 50 feet wide. The stairway is to be on the south side of the building. On the upper floor front there are to be three large offices. Back of these rooms are numerous ante-rooms. The main society hall will be 28X50 feet and on the side of the main room it is intended to have a supper room that can be used for any other purpose that may be advisable. This room will be 20X40 feet. This is the building as it will be when completed. The building will be two stories in height with an iron front below and a handsome ornamental pediment above the building.

The Odd Fellows original building was also on Main Street, not far from the location where Simon Knights kept his horses and other materials for his business. He had to walk right by the Odd Fellows building to get to his office in the American Hotel. It is no wonder that he found himself becoming a brother in the order of Odd Fellows. Simon Knights was certainly not odd nor were any of the

other members of this organization. They were all hard working men who cared for their families and enjoyed each other's company.

Simon Knights noticed that the stage coaches running in San Mateo County from San Francisco to San Jose stopped rather briefly in Redwood City, but none of them carried passengers and mail from Redwood City to Summit Springs, Searsville, La Honda and San Gregorio. He decided that he could do that, and invested in a stage coach, of sorts, and began a daily trip from Redwood City to Summit Springs. The Gazette announced on May 29, 1869: "S. L. Knights has put on a stage between Redwood City and the Summit House on the San Gregorio Turnpike. The stage leaves Redwood City every afternoon on the arrival of the first train from San Francisco, and returns from the Summit House in the morning, arriving in Redwood City in time for the 9 o'clock train to San Francisco. By this arrangement passengers can make the trip from the Summit House and Woodside to the city and back on the same day."



Simon Knights in the white duster.

Simon's father Fidelia passed away on March 31, 1880. He joined Marshall and Priscella in plot 166W in Union Cemetery. His Mother lived to be 87 years old and joined her husband on December 9th 1891. Francis Knights died at 54 years on October 22, 1889 and was buried in the same plot.

Lots 1, 2, &3 in block 66 of Redwood City became the home of the Knights' Ferry Company where he kept horses, feed, leather needs and other necessary materials. He also established an office in the American House on Main Street. The lots he used were bordered by Phelps (Middlefield Rd.), Cedar, Heller and Beech. The stages would be hooked up to the horses, 4 in the spring and summer, 6 in the wet seasons. The team would go out to the railroad station and pick up passengers.

By 1871 the Knights Ferry was traveling from Redwood City to Whiskey Hill, over to Searsville, up Old La Honda Road to the Glass Ranch where they would



Leonard Fisher and Samuel Murch built Simon Knights' two stage coaches in this shop.

pause for refreshment. They would then travel down to La Honda and the Sears, later Cavalli, store where they changed horses, had a meal and relaxed for a short period. They then headed out to San Gregorio and, as time went on, continued south on Stage Road to Pescadero where they spent the night. Eventually a second stage was built and one would be returning as the other was leaving Redwood City.

The stage coaches that Simon Knights used were manufactured to special specifications at the Fisher and Murch blacksmith and wheelwright shop on Main Street in Redwood City. The coaches were larger than the Concord Stages that most of the country used. They were specially built to seat people on top of the coach as well as inside. Fisher and Murch built such wonderful coaches that the newspaper reported on February 22, 1873: "L. Fisher of this place has commenced the construction of two coaches for Simon Knights. The coaches are to be placed on the road between this place and Pescadero, a daily line of stages to be started as soon as the season admits and the coaches are completed.



John Poole

Again on March 15, 1873: "The coaches being made at the shop of L. Fisher for Simon Knights are vehicles to see and feel. The workmanship is creditable to the mechanics of Redwood City. Each coach will weigh about 1600 pounds. A Concord coach weighs 2200 pounds. Simon is having his coaches erected especially for the Redwood City and Pescadero Road and can accommodate in each one 17 passengers without crowding, nine inside and eight out. When the travel or road is heavy six horses are to be used, otherwise four will do."

On March 29, 1873: "Simon Knights' stage now runs to Searsville and Woodside. John Poole, that king of the whip holds the ribbons." When the two coaches were available and had been properly tested, Simon hired John Poole, a very experienced horseman and coach driver. Poole probably knew better than anybody around, including Simon, how to make the horses listen, understand and respond the way they were instructed. Horses get to know their names and Poole knew horses responded better to a soft whip than a hard one and he knew how to hold the reins between his fingers so that he could instruct them separately. They responded to him very positively and people were impressed. People had a substantially smoother ride when Poole was driving.

Poole knew how to crack the whip over the horses without touching the horses and he knew they recognized his purpose as they responded with energy. But the greater purpose for doing this was to settle the passengers in the coach because they recognized instantly that the horses responded to John much better than other drivers. Simon Knights recognized John's expertise and they had a very good and long relationship.

When Simon died he was buried in the Odd Fellows plot in Union Cemetery alongside his wife Elizabeth who died in 1878 and son Marshall who died in 1880, Simon died in 1896.