

Frederick Cox & Crawford Clarke

Crawford Washington Clarke

If you live in Fair Oaks, Frederick Cox and Crawford W. Clarke once owned your land and land for miles around it. In 1895 the two men agreed to allow the Howard & Wilson Publishing Company of Chicago to subdivide, market and develop some of their land holdings as the Sunset Colony of Fair Oaks. The rest is Fair Oaks history that you can learn about on our website: [www.fairoakshistory.org](http://www.fairoakshistory.org)

Abstract by Chris Highsmith

The following is taken from the article "Stirring Events in the Life of the Late Senator Frederick Cox" in the Sacramento Daily Union, March 27, 1906. In honoring his partner Crawford Washington Clarke shared about his life and partnership with Frederick Cox.

Sacramento Daily Union Introduction

Among those who sorrow for the death of the late Senator Frederick Cox no one outside his immediate family circle grieves more deeply than his old partner, Crawford W. Clarke. Fifty-four years ago this spring Mr. Clarke and Senator Cox entered into the partnership that was dissolved last Sunday evening by the death of Senator Cox. Twenty years ago the two pioneers, the measure of a prosperity greater than comes to most men, began a settlement of their affairs, deeding to one another tracts of land located in every part of the State and trading bands of cattle worth thousands. Even with the aid of their attorneys the line between their possessions has not yet been drawn, and they own in common many acres that will someday make homes for a people who may never hear of their achievements.

Last evening, in the home of his daughter, Mrs. A. N. Buchanan, Mr. Crawford W. Clarke sketched a few passages from the busy career the twain has led since they first met. Telling of things that few Californians have seen, picturing conditions that will never arise, dreaming of days that were well worth the knowing, the sturdy old pioneer, now nearing his 78th year, disclosed glimpses of a country that Bret Harte and Mark Twain, and none since, have painted for posterity.

The account of his coming to California was the introduction to his graphic narrative.

He said:

“George Yount, who settled here in 1840, wrote to his nephew, John B. Yount (Clarke’s brother-in-law), when gold was discovered here. John Yount was an engineer on a Mississippi River steamboat, upon which I was employed, and a group of the river men heard the letter read. We waited for no more but hurried from New Orleans to St. Louis and thence across the plains. I arrived in Sacramento on August 20, 1850. John Yount went to the Napa Valley and the rest of us paired off to prospect. I had for a partner Ham Hawley, and we located diggings in Big Canyon. We panned about \$20 a day, which we considered a fair return. One day, I remember, Hawley wanted to quit the place to go prospecting, but something told me not to leave. We discussed the matter during a frugal lunch, and in the afternoon a small bank caved in and we washed two pans that were nearly pure gold.”

Trading at French Creek (now known as Frenchtown)

“Dr. Anderson sold to us his trading post at French Creek. I did the teaming for the store, bringing most of our stock from Sacramento. At the same time, in Spanish Canyon, four miles below, Charles Fair teamed for another trading post he had established. “I remember one deal I made in this city in 1850. I went to an auction sale and bought \$1000 worth of liquor. I stored it at Ninth and J Streets and hauled it as I was able to give it room. On one trip I found that the town had been flooded and all my liquor was afloat in the yard. Nevertheless, that sale cleared over \$10,000 for us. Meanwhile Fred Cox was running a butcher shop at Shingle Springs, where he had located in 1851. He supplied us with meat for our miners’ boarding-house, and I gradually became acquainted with him. Hawley and I finally came to the place where we agreed to separate, and I bought out his interest, paying him out of a can of gold dust I dug from the floor of the store. I bought an interest in the business of Fred Cox in 1852. He then intended to leave and return to England, but we did well and finally sold the business in 1854. That year we went East, sailing from San Francisco on the Yankee Blade. He went to Chicago to visit relatives and I visited mine at New Indiana, now Louisville.”

## Buying and Selling Cattle

“In October 1854. we returned together and went to Grass Valley, where we opened a butcher shop and soon began buying and selling cattle. One of our first big deals was the purchase of 2000 head of cattle from Briggs & Burrows, on the Mokelumne. We moved them up between the Bear and Yuba Rivers and fattened them up, afterwards disposing of them at a profit. We remained in business at Grass Valley until 1857, when our interests in the Tulare Lake region began to require all our attention.”

At one time they had 27,000 head of cattle pastured around Tulare Lake, and about that time they acquired by right of entry a great area of country bordering on the lake.

Intruders were kept off by a fence nearly ten miles long, and the partners made it a halfway station and a fattening ground for the great herds that were purchased beyond San Luis Obispo and slowly driven northward to the centers of population in the mining camps.

## Lost 11,000 Head of Stock

“It was in 1877, I think,” said Mr. Clarke, “that we lost 11,000 head of cattle in one season through drouth. They got so poor they could not stand. I can remember making one trip across trails to the Napa Valley. I came down through the tules, and they were alive with herds of elk and antelope. In the San Joaquin Valley, I often saw bands of wild horses numbering 300.”

## Trade With Nevada Miners

“It was no easy undertaking to drive cattle from San Luis Obispo County, through level, untrailed prairie to Virginia City. Nevada, as we often did. From the Kings River mountains, clear across to the Coast Range there was not a habitation in those days, and we traveled by sighting some peak and traveling to it day after day. The fords or crossings of the streams were few and far apart and were a continual source of danger and trouble.”

## When Putah Creek Broke

“In the year that Putah Creek broke its banks and ran into its present channel I was driving cattle in a heavy storm. I had reached the Tule House, just this side of Monument

Ranch and found there a man with a band of mules. There was water all around, and only the corral was out of water, but I was sure I could make the trip to Sacramento and persuaded the man with the mules to accompany me. We reached the banks of the city drainage canal, then freshly made, and I agreed to go first, the bell mule to follow, the other mules after, and my cattle last. I got across all right, but in the water, the bell on the lead mule did not work, and the mules became panic-stricken. The cattle also turned back, and I was finally compelled to bring across a calf. The mother cow and the rest of the herd were driven after her. When I reached, Sacramento cattle were selling at 7 cents a pound, with a heavy demand and a scant supply. I raised the price to 10 cents and disposed of the entire herd.

#### Partner Couldn't Swim

"Fred Cox could not swim, and for this reason I was delegated to do most of the cattledriving, while he attended to the trading at home. Once I remember, I had crossed a stream in the San Joaquin, setting the ford with stakes and making the crossing carefully. After I had gone on, Frank Jordan of Visalia came along with a herd and was told how I crossed. He tried to follow suit, but made a miscalculation somewhere and lost two of his herders and his entire band of cattle. That was the gamble in the business we had undertaken. We could buy cattle in Obispo at \$5 per head, fatten them at Tulare Lake and drive them to Virginia City, where they sold for \$45. We have driven cattle through the tules when the water was up to a steer's back."

#### Accumulated Ranges

"By degrees we accumulated many ranges whereon our stock grazed. Fred Cox was the conservative member of the firm, and when many a time, we were forced to buy thousands of acres of land in order to secure possession of the cattle that fed upon them, he almost wept at the waste of money. Along the road we made many bargains of a speculative character, buying oats by the ton and cattle by the band merely after looking them over."

#### Many Kinds of Brands.

"The XL brand, representing the firm of Clarke & Cox, was known from Southern

Oregon down into Southern California. We also had the 23, the 76, the cross, the ace of clubs, the Q and H S brands, and at one time we had herds of hundreds scattered between the headwaters of Kings River and San Luis Obispo. Fred Cox and I traveled past Tulare Lake when it had a narrow neck of land known as Skull Island, which was covered with skulls from an Indian battle so thick that they looked like gourds."

#### Oil Wells Called Tar Springs

"Many a time we have passed where oil wells bubbled out of the ground, and if we had known their value we could have had them all. But we called them Tar Springs, and thought them worthless. Fred Cox and I spent most of our time out buying cattle because the community had grown to depend on us for the greater part of their fresh meat. I remember when Fred Cox first complained of the rheumatism, about ten years ago, when we were at the Lakeview ranch. It had troubled him occasionally since, but I never believed after all the hardships he has survived, that it would break up the partnership in which we were so long engaged."

And therein Crawford Clarke paid to his dead associate the tribute that he had been earning ever since 1851. When he had the butcher shop at Shingle Springs, when the strongest survived and when men of iron blazed the way over trails that are now highways where their children ride to-day in the luxurious ease of cushioned coaches.