



Upcoming Webinar

**History of the
Pacific Coast Air Museum
February 20, 2025
6:00 to 7:30 p.m.**

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A First-Person Tale of an Arduous Trip to Santa Rosa

by John Shackelford Taylor

John Shackelford Taylor (1828-1927) settled in Santa Rosa in 1853, purchasing land near Kawana Springs Road. In 1907, he recorded this account of his trip west from Missouri to the gold fields of California, starting when he was 20 years old.

**“In the days of old, in the days of Gold,
In the days of forty-nine.”**

In the year 1849, when the news of the rich gold finds of California became known, the excitement in the older settled states ran high, especially among the young men and boys, and I, being one of the latter, determined to cast my lot with other adventurers and seek the gold fields.

I left my adopted home (being a Virginian by birth) in Ray County, Missouri, near where the town of Orrick now stands, went to Independence, and got a chance under Gen. Lucas to drive a six-yoke ox team across the plains to El Paso on the Rio Grande.

A day or two later, Tom Gordon, also a Ray County boy, put in an appearance and got a chance to drive a team with the same train; knowing each other we were glad to be together, and the ties of friendship were strengthened by the arduous trials of our long journey, even to the closing scene where I sat by his side and closed his eyes in the last sleep.

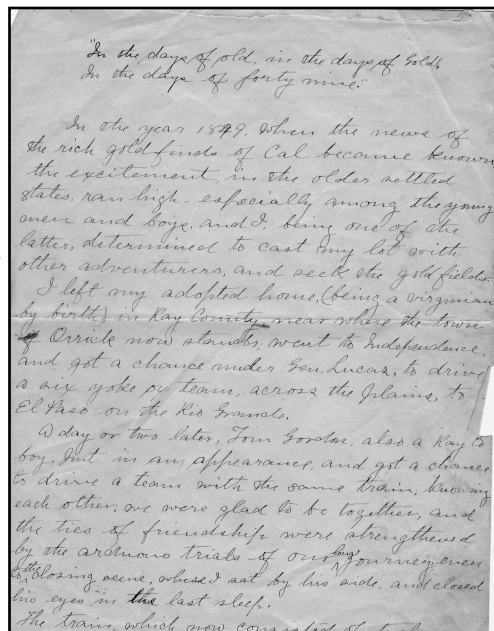
The train which now consisted of twelve wagons, soon started on its long and perilous trip. The first weeks were uneventful, save for the novelty and newness of our

experience in “roughing it”, and getting used to the swing of camp life.

About the 15th of Sept. we reached the Arkansas River, the water was getting scarce in the mountains, where the buffalo ranges in the summer, and they had collected into the beautiful valley of the Arkansas until it was literally black with them. We travelled for about eight days up this valley, the buffalo crowding out ahead of the train and closing up behind it, keeping about three hundred yards away. We shot one every day, taking out what meat we needed for present use, leaving the rest to be eaten and fought over by the band of wolves, which is the invariable accompaniment of every herd of buffalo which ranges the plains. They act as scavengers eating all that die from any cause, and often killing the calves, which however, are closely guarded by the older buffalo forming a strong phalanx round them as they move.

When we reached the Cimarron an impressive scene met our gaze; here, piled by the roadside, telling a tale of desolation and possible despair to human beings, were the skull bones of 98 mules which had perished in a snow storm the winter before. We were not in the native haunts of the death dealing blizzard, yet too early in the season to fear them. However, a few weeks more of travel, which was very slow, brought us within 25 or 30 miles of

Red River, where we struck camp, got our supper of coffee and bacon with flap jacks cooked in a frying pan, over a fire of buffalo chips, put out our guards and “turned in”, when the alarm was given by one of the guards that a snow



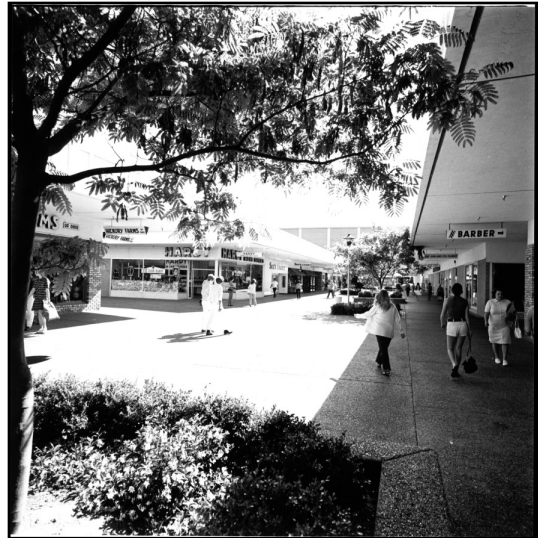
A page from original document written by
John S. Taylor in 1907
Courtesy Private Collection

Message from the Board

History Rescued! An HSSR board member recently purchased a box of over 200 photos and letters of the John Shackelford Taylor family. Taylor is the namesake of Taylor Mountain in southeast Santa Rosa, and he developed the White Sulphur Springs Resort at its base. The dealer possessing the collection is not from Sonoma County, wasn't sure what to do with it, and had it stored on a shelf in his garage. It's great to see these items returned to the city the Taylors called home from 1853 to 1970. The collection includes the fascinating account of John S. Taylor's incredible journey from Missouri to the gold mining fields of California in 1849, reprinted verbatim in this newsletter.

February is Black History Month, a time to honor and celebrate the history and contributions of Black Americans. The theme for National Black History Month 2025 is "African Americans and Labor," which aims to highlight the significant contributions of Black people to the workforce throughout history. A new local exhibit is opening in February at SRJC's Multicultural Museum titled, "Stereotyped to the Margins: A History of Black Characters in Comic Books."

Where in Santa Rosa?



Do you recognize this Santa Rosa location? If so, send an email to newsletter@historicalsocietysantarosa.org identifying it. The first five correct answers will win a copy of *Santa Rosa: The Chosen Spot of all the Earth* DVD. The location will be revealed in the Spring 2025 newsletter.

Courtesy Sonoma County Library Photograph Collection



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“Miss Bea” Harris: Dedicated Educator of Young Children

by Danielle Garduño

Editor’s note: This article was originally published in 2021 as part of the City of Santa Rosa’s Multi-Cultural Roots Project (srcity.org/3445/Multicultural-Roots-Project)

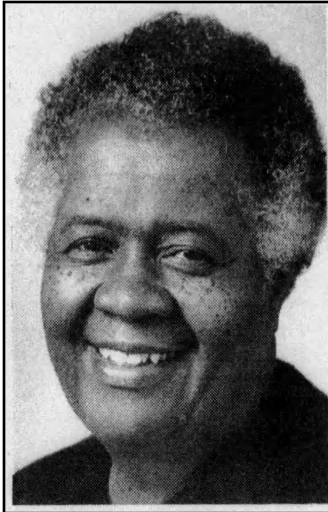
If ever there was an educator in Santa Rosa whose students still benefit from as adults, it was Bea Harris, or as most adults remember her as, “Miss Bea.” A dedicated educator, Bea tried to make every moment a teachable moment while she worked to understand little ones and ensure that they all received the education and respect they deserved.

As one of 10 children, Miss Bea was born Beatrice Cooper in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on March 24, 1926. She was two years old when her family moved to West Virginia to follow coal mining work, and it was here she attended segregated schooling until the eighth grade. After, her father sent her back to Pittsburgh to live with his mother so she could attend an integrated school. Bea made money cleaning the bathrooms in the house, but at 16, she decided she needed to find a way to better support herself.

Beatrice found a job after school babysitting and housekeeping for a white couple with a preschooler. She was quick to find that she had a gift for working with children. The couple, an Army major and his wife, clearly appreciated her work. So much so, that they invited her to live with them. Bea became the only one of her siblings to complete high school (in 1945) and was asked by the couple to move to California with them as their maid and nanny. She agreed, and traveled from Pittsburgh to San Carlos, California.

One Thursday after arriving in California, Bea ventured to San Mateo to visit a church. She felt right at home and decided to attend services on Sundays. Here she met the ordained Methodist pastor, Homer Harris. He was a reliably upbeat, endearing, and grateful man of God. The two dated for a time before marrying on June 30, 1946. Bea would find work cleaning houses and preparing dinner, while Homer worked in yards and gardens as a landscaper. They welcomed their first child, Homer Jr. in 1947, and their second child, Wanda Jean, in 1950. On one of their weekend drives across the Golden

Gate Bridge into Sonoma County, they found a rundown Victorian house across West Third Street from Imwalle Gardens that reminded Homer of his childhood home. Although Bea initially refused to move herself or her children into the rundown farmhouse, Homer fixed it up, and in 1953 the family moved in.



Bea Harris, from article about Women of Achievement Press Democrat 3-7-1990

They soon found that they were among the very few Black families living in Santa Rosa in the 1950s and experienced both “in-your-face” and subtle discrimination. They were welcomed by the Methodist Church on Montgomery Drive as the only Black family, where Bea started teaching Sunday School in 1960. Later, she met the principal of Cook Junior High School, who encouraged her to become a teacher’s aide. She worked at Lincoln and Burbank elementary schools for eight years before enrolling at Santa Rosa Junior College and becoming a certified nursery school teacher in the mid-1960s. Through her work, Bea taught children just as much as she taught their parents. She often reminded parents to practice patience and to say what they mean and mean what they say. “I’ll tell parents, please don’t tell your children you’ll throw them out of the window if they don’t behave, because you’re lying.”

Her talents were clear to all witnesses and in 1973, the founders of the Multi-Cultural Child Development Center



Bea and Homer Harris in front of their Third Street farmhouse Press Democrat, May 26, 1971

asked her to be the director. Bea was honored and took the position to provide subsidized preschool to families that couldn’t afford full-priced preschool or qualify for the federally funded Head Start. Throughout her 16 years as Director, the school redefined itself as it grew. She received honors for her efforts to advance the education of many low-income and diverse children and retired from the Multi-Cultural Child Development Center in 1990 at the age of 64.

During her time with the Multi-Cultural Child Development Center, Bea accomplished another milestone in her journey as an educator. As told by her friend, Siegrid Smith, Bea attended Sonoma State University and obtained her Baccalaureate Degree at the age of 65, a significant accomplishment for someone leading an

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Hugh Coddling and his Elephant, Millicent

by Karen Stone

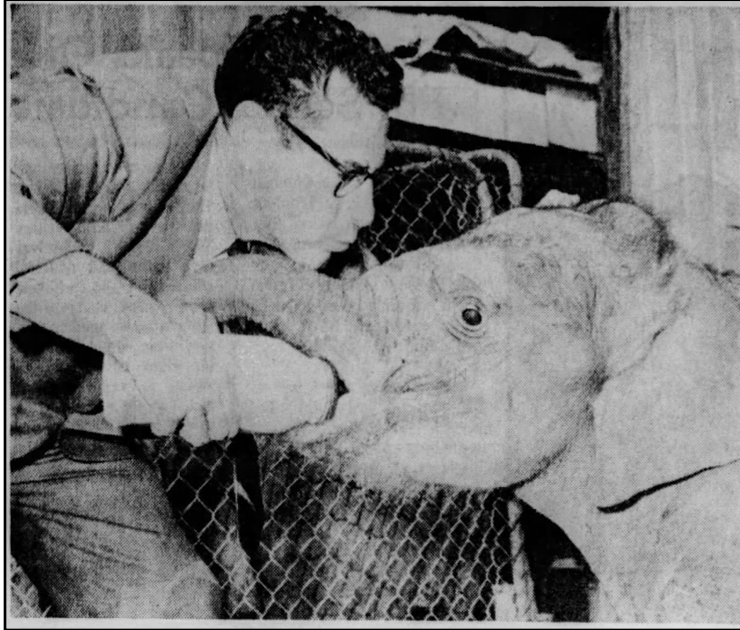
In 1966, Santa Rosa City Councilman Hugh Coddling was running for State Senate as a Republican candidate. He bought an elephant calf to use in his campaign. He planned to use the elephant and a donkey he owned in campaign promotions. He said, "The elephant [symbol of the Republican party] will pull the jackass [donkey — symbol of the Democratic party] out of office".

In early April 1966, he paid \$7,000 for a young, female Indian elephant. She was 6 months old, weighed 325 pounds, and came from Jungleground in southern California.

Workmen immediately began construction of an elephant barn, "Jumbo Land", on Encina Court near Coddling's residence on Miraloma Drive in Lomita Heights. Jumbo Land was a 20'x24' structure located on two acres near a small lake. Sharing the house with the elephant would be a donkey, a goat, ten ducks, and a goose. Norman Renard was hired to tend to and train the elephant. The elephant arrived in Santa Rosa on April 19.

Before the elephant arrived, a citizen living on Montgomery Drive made a complaint with the Santa Rosa City Attorney's office. The citizen stated that keeping an elephant in city limits was a violation of zoning laws and might constitute a nuisance. Jumbo Land was on land zoned agricultural; the City Attorney ruled that keeping a zoo-type or wild animal was not consistent with agricultural zoning. The same week that the elephant arrived in Santa Rosa, Coddling withdrew from the Senate race.

The Coddlingtown Merchants' Association sponsored a "Name The Elephant" contest with a \$500 cash prize. Out of 1,130 entries, the winning name, "Millicent," was submitted by George Higgins. Other entries included Melon Coddling Baby, Tusk Tusk, and Peanut A Go Go. Contest judges were Hugh Grider, manager of Roos-Atkins; Press Democrat columnist Gaye LeBaron; and Hugh Coddling.



Hugh Coddling feeds his elephant, Millicent
Press Democrat, April 8, 1966

Millicent's daily diet consisted of two gallons of milk, four times a day, donated by Petaluma Cooperative Creamery, supplemented with rice and raisins. By July, she weighed 438 pounds.

Millicent made appearances at local shopping center promotions and the Rose Parade. In late summer, Coddling sent her back to southern California for further training. He offered her to Coddlingtown Optimists Club, but the club declined, after calculating future housing and food costs. Millicent never returned to Santa Rosa.



In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the elephant barn was used as a neighborhood voting precinct.

Millicent, her trainer Norman Renard, naming contest winner George Higgins, and Coddlingtown Merchants' Association representative Robert Ordonez

Press Democrat June 17, 1966

storm was upon us. We yoked our cattle immediately and travelled all night, reached Red River about 3 o'clock the next afternoon; here we found wood and water, but no feed for our cattle, as the snow covered the ground to the depth of eight inches, so we made our corral as usual, which is by drawing the wagons together with heavy log chains, the front wheel to the hind wheel, until all are connected. Into this corral we put our cattle, about ten o'clock the weather cleared, the moon shone clear and full on the snow, and as I stood guard that night I thought it the brightest and lightest night I ever saw. The next morning, we made an early start as our cattle must have food, we travelled until noon before we found grazing for them. They had grown so weak they could hardly pull the big wagons.

In due course of time, without exciting incident, we reached Las Vegas [New Mexico], the first Spanish settlement we had struck - here a battle was fought the year before between the Americans and Mexicans, in which some of old Ray's brave sons took a hand, and the chivalrous Captain Hendley* of Richmond was killed.

On New Year's Day, 1850, we crossed the Rio Grande, and first set foot on Mexican soil at the town of Paso del Norte which had a population of about ten thousand at the time. We had now reached the end of our journey with the ox train and must make different arrangements if we wished to extend our trip to the gold fields of California. Tom and I were fortunate to fall in with a train of Texas men, thirty-three in number, who were going to the City of Durango, we were aiming to reach the sea coast and take [a] ship to San Francisco so this was just to our liking. We started and the third night out had camped at a big spring, put our guards out around our mules and rolled up in our blankets, when we heard the blood curdling Indian yell. The Indians dashed in between our wagons and the stock and away they went with every animal we had. We slept with our clothes on, and our guns ready to our hands in case of emergency.

Half of our men, including myself, went after the stock; after travelling about two miles, we heard something coming toward us, which we naturally supposed to be Indians, but which dissolved itself into a lone, badly frightened, white-faced sorrel mule, which had been stampeded with the rest, but had made its escape and was coming back to camp. We then gave up and half our men returned to the wagons, - the owners of the stock and half our men returned to Paso del Norte [now El Paso, Texas] and bought other teams with

which to continue our journey.

We were now in the Apache Indian country where no white man was sure of his fate. We travelled about two hundred miles through this country without being molested. We camped one night without water, and made an early start next morning to reach Gelleo Springs (a bad place for Indians) by noon. Just before reaching the Springs, we were attacked by a band of sixty Indians; they were dressed in red gauze, which they had taken from a Mexican train just a few days before, at this same place; their faces were covered with war paint, they were mounted on beautiful horses, and armed principally with bows and arrows, yet some of them had guns and others spears. They were tall, well-built fellows. We heard the war whoop, looked around, and the Indians were upon us and had possession of half our wagons before we recovered from surprise. They held them for some time, but the fight became too hot

for them, and we recovered our wagons. They got possession of one of our men, whom they killed; they cut off his head, stuck in on a lance, and galloped around us, holding it so that we must see it. The battle lasted about three hours, but we were finally victorious. Several of our men were wounded, and we took them to a hospital in Chiyahya [sic] where we left them.



John Taylor's route from Missouri to California in 1849 - 1850. Stars indicate locations of major stops between start and end points. United States Geological Service Map

We remained in this city eight days; and while here saw a bull fight, there were nine wild bulls turned into the ring that afternoon, one

at a time, each would fight until exhausted, then some tame cattle would be driven in, and he would follow them out. One bull killed two horses and crippled a man. The following morning after the bull fight, we resumed our journey and passed through many strange towns, and saw many strange sights before reaching Durango, a City of thirty thousand inhabitants. We tarried here for nine days, then hired pack mules to carry our belongings over the Sierra Madre Mountains to the sea port town in Mazatlán.

In port lay a sail vessel, the "Barkazam", it was loading for San Francisco, we took passage and after five days sail dropped anchor at Cape San Lucas, and thirty days later passed through the world renowned "Golden Gate" into the harbor of San Francisco. We Went ashore next day, May 12th 1850.

San Francisco at this time was simply a collection of canvas tents and board shanties perched upon the barren sand hills, or a very inviting or homelike picture for two

Taylor, continued from page 5

young, unexperienced fellows who had suffered such hardships as we had, and to add to the gravity of our situation, Tom was sick and despondent. Our assets were running low, our clothing, which was but little, was almost worn out, my wardrobe consisting of a pair, each, of half worn shoes and pants, two shirts and a tattered old hat; Tom's ditto. It devolved upon me to replenish our exchequer if possible.

I applied for work and found it hard to get, but finally found a job in a lumber yard; the man said I was too young and small to handle that heavy lumber but I was determined to that job. I went back to camp and put on both of my shirts to make me look larger and stronger and went back and applied for the same job, the man looked me over and said, "All right, go to work". For that afternoon's work I was paid one dollar per hour. I had expected no more than one dollar for the half day.

When Tom was well enough, we pushed on to the mines and got our initiation in the work on Deer Creek near where Nevada City now stands. Here, Tom was stricken with a fever from which he died on the 20th of November. Some miners whose claims adjoined ours helped me to bury Tom. I marked his grave with a carved wooden head board and enclosed it with a paling fence. Years afterward I returned there, to see the silent monument on the lonely hill where many others so soon followed him.

I spent the winter here, and in the Spring moved further North into the Sierra Nevada Mountains to a small mining camp on Cannon Creek. There was another mining camp just a mile below us, from this camp a miner came and told us that a man had been arrested down there for the theft of a pistol. Fifty or sixty men, from surrounding camps, collected there, and from them the man who was bound and guarded was allowed to select twelve men as jurors to try his case. They found him guilty. The sentence; twenty-five lashes on the naked back and expulsion from Cannon Creek after ten o'clock next morning, or hang. They tied him to a pine tree and on his naked body laid the twenty-five lashes with a rope. He begged them to kill him. He was helped on with his clothes and ordered to leave, which the poor wretch was glad to do no doubt.

I did not want to winter here, as the snow got so deep that we could neither get in or out after it began to fall, so before October, I went to Natchez in the Honcut Mountains**. The day I arrived there they brought in and buried three men who had been killed by Juaquin Marietto [sic]*** and his band of

robbers. No one knew the murdered men, or how much gold the robbers got. It is probable that their friends never knew what became of them.

I stayed here four months mining in Robinson's ravine, where I found the largest piece of solid gold that my fortune in the gold fields ever gave me. It was worth seventy-eight dollars.

In April we heard of rich diggings at Downieville, now the County seat of Sierra County; myself and two others, John

Wade and John Prine, rolled our purses of gold dust inside our blankets, took them on our backs and after a four days journey over the rough mountains, arrived at Zumolts Flat, on the Yuba River; we were very high up in the mountains. Here we built a small log cabin to live in and went to mining in the Blue Banks across the river.

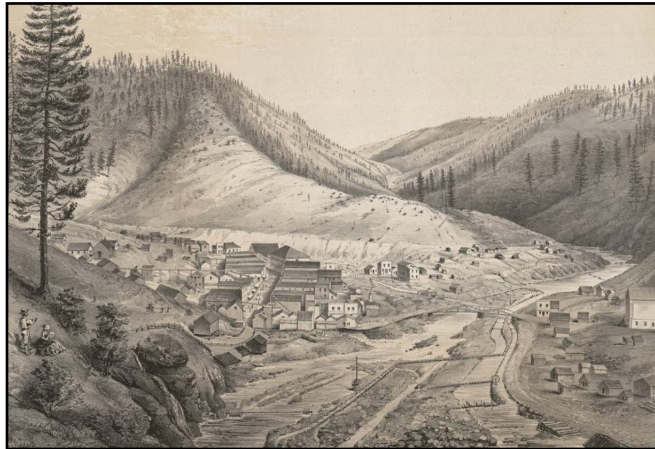
One morning, just at daybreak, I got up to cook breakfast – we each took our turns at cooking – I heard some shooting and looking down the trail saw

four men coming up, one of them was shooting off his pistols; just a few paces behind them four others came firing their pistols. I knew there was going to be a duel. I went with them to see it. They crossed over into the forks of the river and there I saw the famous duel between Kelley and Speare. Joe McKibben, afterwards a member of Congress, was one of the seconds. Revolvers were the law of the land by which many disputes were settled in those days. The more cool-headed men would arbitrate their difficulties, which were generally about mining claims.

I had now been away from home nearly three years, and had never heard a word from there since I left so my pleasure was great when a pack train of mules loaded with provisions and mail came into Downieville one day and I got a letter from home.

Our cabin was twelve feet square, covered with shakes and had a dirt floor. We were comfortable and concluded to winter there. The weather, until the 1st of December was fine, then one morning we got up and found the snow six feet deep and still snowing very fast. The storm lasted two weeks, snowing a great portion of the time until the snow was fifteen feet deep. Provisions could not be bought at any price and none could be brought nearer than thirty miles from Downieville. About one hundred miners were here and we must have food. We, in our cabin, had been living on small Irish potatoes for several days and had neither meat nor bread. The next morning the miners met and

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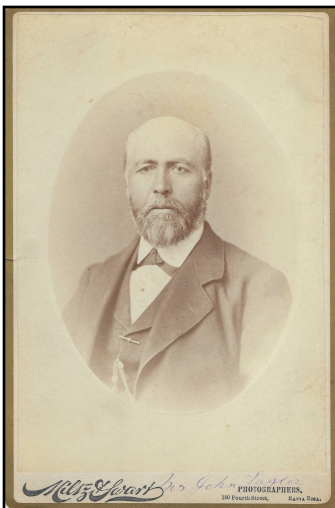
1854 sketch of the Downieville mining town by Harrison Eastman
Online Archive of California

Taylor, continued from page 6

concluded to take a man from each cabin, and try to best a trail out over the snow, and pack in provisions on our backs.

When a trail is once packed on the snow it is easy to walk right along. That night we drew lots in our cabin to decide which of us should go; it fell on me. Twenty-eight men started next morning to beat a trail to Fosters Bar, the nearest point where we could get flour. We went a few miles down the river on a trail already beaten, then had to beat up the mountains to a station twelve miles away. We took turns at beating the trail, as it was hard work to pack the snow so that it would bear the weight of a man. Three of our men gave out and we had them to carry, night was coming on and we knew what that meant to us if we did not find shelter. We knew the station was not very far away, but had lost the direction; some thought it to the right of us, others to the left, and some said straight ahead. In the confusion some of the men commenced to halloo; their shouts were heard at the station, a mile and half to the left of us. The men at the station knew we were from Downieville trying to get out for provisions, they fired several shots, which we heard and turned in that direction. They started to meet us blowing a horn at intervals, which we answered until we met. We got in at eleven o'clock with all our men alive, but exhausted, cold, and ravenously hungry. Our meals at the station cost us each three dollars apiece. Our bill of fare consisted of bacon and beans with bread and tea, and a royal feast it was to us, for which we willingly would have paid twice the price if necessary.

The next morning, we continued on our way and as the trail was now down grade we made better time, finishing the journey about nightfall. We started on our return trip the third morning; each man was carrying a sack of flour and some of them took other things besides. I carried a fifty-pound sack of flour and was offered seventy-five dollars for it after I got back with it. I took it straight to the cabin where Wade and Prine received me joyfully, but the sack of flour more so, as



John S. Taylor, 1877
Miltz and Swart Studio Portrait
Courtesy Private Collection

they had not tasted bread for a week.

The weather was cold, but clear and pack mules soon began to come in on the trail we had made, and provisions became plentiful once more. We worked there the following summer, sold our claims, rolled our purses of gold dust in our blankets, bid farewell to Downieville and took a walk of ninety miles to Marysville, camping out at night; from there we took stage to Sacramento, a boat to San Francisco. John Prine went to Rushville, Indiana, John Wade went to Joliet, Illinois, and the writer came to Santa Rosa, Cal., where he lived for 74 years until his death in 1927.

*Mexican-American War – 1847 Captain Israel R. Hendley and eighty American troops marched on Mora on January 25 to restore order following the rebels' murder of the Missouri traders there on January 19. Hendley was met by a contingent of 150 to 200 New Mexicans prepared to defend the village. In the effort, however, Hendley was killed and three soldiers were wounded. The remainder of Hendley's command retreated to Las Vegas, carrying Hendley's body with them." (Crutchfield, James A. *Revolt at Taos*. Pgs. 89, 90)

** Rancho Honcut was a 31,080-acre Mexican land grant in present day Yuba County, California given in 1844 by Governor Manuel Micheltorena to Theodor Cordua. The rancho is named after Honcut Creek which bounded the grant on the north.

***Controversy surrounds the figure of Joaquin Murrieta—who he was, what he did, and many of his life's events. Historian Susan Lee Johnson says: "So many tales have grown up around Murrieta that it is hard to disentangle the fabulous from the factual. There seems to be a consensus that Anglos drove him from a rich mining claim... then, according to whichever version one accepts, he became either a horse trader and occasional horse thief or a bandit."

Harris, continued from page 3

organization and caring for so many children and their families at the same time.

Immediately after her retirement, she was asked to become the director of the preschool at her church. She decided to serve in the role for 2 months until they found someone else, and then agreed to come in to teach from time to time. As Bea continued making every moment a teaching moment, she found herself at the preschool full-time. When she finally retired for good, Bea was 80 years old.

Bea and her husband lived in the old farmhouse for six

decades, and when Homer passed away in 1999, Bea moved into a mobile home with a friend and then later, a retirement residence. Her dedication to the youth of Santa Rosa will live on through the lives of those she worked with and their future generations. Bea's teaching style shaped many institutions into what they are today.

Bea Harris died January 19, 2024. As noted by former Press Democrat columnist Chris Smith in Mrs. Harris's obituary, she suggested that she would like for her and Homer's epitaph to read, "They passed through Santa Rosa and made a difference." They certainly did.



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