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TIEMELEC HALL - SONOMA COUNTY

Registered Landmark #237

by

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TEMELEC HALL

The great stone house now owned by Mrs. Edmond D. Coblentz, built by Captain Granville Perry Swift in Sonoma County on the west side of the Valley of the Moon, was and still is an ostentatious reminder of a successful gold miner. The Captain was a typical example of many brave and fortunate pioneers who came to California during the Forties and Fifties. When Temelec Hall was completed in 1853, it was one of the two most expensive houses constructed in northern California; the other house, three or four miles to the north, being Lachryma Montis,¹ the home of General Vallejo.

Swift was born in Kentucky in 1822. He was one of the many men of that state who went west to blaze trails across the Mississippi Valley, over the Great Plains and through the passes of the Rockies to the Pacific. He was typical of the virile Kentuckians best known through the romances about Daniel Boone whose exploits are exemplified by Indian fighters, trappers, pioneers, soldiers of fortune, and irrepressible adventurers. It has been said that Swift claimed to be a direct descendant of Daniel Boone. Evidently

1. Aubrey Drury, California: an intimate guide, 330, "Tears of the mountain."

that is not true, but he did come from the same pioneer ancestor who came to Pennsylvania early in the eighteenth century. Daniel's cousin Hannah Boone of Caroline County, West Virginia, married Edward Swift in 1793. Later they went to Kentucky, and were the ancestors of G. P. Swift.²

In 1843, while still a youth, Granville joined the second Kelsey overland train which went to Oregon by way of California. Already he was a handsome, manly looking fellow well over six feet. His features were regular and finely chiseled. The thirty-six travelers reached California and Oregon without any casualties. Bancroft says that Swift went to Oregon, but returned to California in 1844 or '45.³ There is much evidence that he stayed at Fort Sutter and did not continue on to Oregon. Many illegal residents of Napa Valley in 1844-46, were accused of deprivations. To avoid expulsion from California, they signed a paper claiming that they had just arrived from Oregon and consequently could not have been guilty of the charges. However, by 1844, young Swift already a skilled mountaineer, had secured employment with Captain Sutter as trapper and Indian fighter. In 1845, he went south with Sutter as a soldier in

2. Hazel Atterbury Spraker, The Boone family: A genealogical history of the descendants of George and Mary Boone, 611.

3. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, IV, 444.

his force composed of 220 Americans, Europeans and Indians.⁴ This little army marched to support Governor Micheltorena who was faced with civil war in California. After Micheltorena's resignation Sutter's force was for a time held captive, but was soon released. Swift returned with the rest to the Sacramento headquarters, keenly disappointed in having backed the losing side in California politics. For this reason he knew he would be unable to procure a grant of land from the new governor, Pio Pico.

Swift next left Fort Sutter and went to the Napa Valley where he joined men who were in the country illegally. Many of these had come from Oregon; others were deserters from ships, mountain trappers, Americans and Europeans. To put it mildly, these interlopers were unpopular with the Mexicans of California. They had to live, so they squatted on land and were accused of stealing horses and cattle. The friction led to fist fights and shooting between these ad-⁵venturers and the Spanish-Americans. No specific mention of Swift is made regarding this period. His older companions, the Kelsey brothers, Dr. Bale, Ezekiel Merritt and others evidently participated. It was to this group of "foreigners ... persons who had nothing to risk, either

4. Bancroft, History of California, IV, 435.

5. Ibid., 445.

In this fight Swift shot Agaton Ruiz through the lungs. Bancroft tells that Swift and Ruiz often "drank together in later times, the wound being exhibited and the circumstances narrated."¹¹ Sargeant Swift, Kit Carson and two others were sent out by Fremont to intercept three unarmed messengers who were rowing from San Pablo to the Marin side of the bay. Kit Carson asked Fremont what to do with them. Fremont answered, "I have no room for prisoners," and so they were shot down, "murdered" as Bancroft says, while not resisting capture.¹² Carson tells the story as if he were in command, but most writers report Swift as in charge of the killing of the twins Francisco and Ramon de Haro, and the old man José de los Reyes Berreyesa. Swift took his full part in the subsequent scouting and searching for Mexican soldiers on the north side of San Francisco Bay, but Castro had safely moved all his men south across the bay by way of Sausalito.

On July 5 Fremont commenced organizing his battalion which soon numbered 250. By the time it left Monterey, there were over 400 men. News of the war with Mexico reached California, and on July 7 the Stars and Stripes were hoisted over the barracks at Sonoma. A campaign to

11. Bancroft, History of California, V, 165-166.
 12. Sabin, Kit Carson days, 262.

William B. Ide, came from the region of the upper Sacramento River, others came from Fort Sutter, but most of the first contingent came from the Napa Valley. Fremont changed camp frequently, but always towards the south, closer to Fort Sutter. In the meantime, the California-Mexicans, totally uninformed of the approaching revolution, were about to stage another of their farcical civil wars. General José Castro was busy raising an army with which to challenge Governor Pio Pico of the south. In order to procure horses for his cavalrymen, Castro sent Lieutenant Francisco de Arce from the Santa Clara Valley to the Marin country. There Arce collected a number of horses, variously estimated from 170 to over 400, which he, with the help of a few soldiers and Indian cowboys, drove east; they crossed the Sacramento River not far from Fort Sutter and there they started south.⁷ The first night after crossing the river they camped at the ranch of William Knight. He slipped out after dark and informed Fremont, who quickly recognized the opportunity to create an incident, a provocation which would cause an overt act from which there could be no retreat. He appointed Merritt the captain of a band to capture the horses. Kit Carson and perhaps one or two others were loaned to Merritt.

7. Edwin L. Sabin, Kit Carson days, 259; John C. Fremont, Memoirs of my life, 509.

Swift was with the group who the following morning, June 11, caught up with Arce at Martin Murphy's ranch on the Cosumnes River. An easy capture was made. The Mexicans were permitted two horses each, and ordered to return with haste to the Santa Clara Valley. There Merritt had his men choose the best horses; the remainder were driven north across the Sacramento River where they were turned loose. The party returned flushed with victory, to Fremont's camp.

Fremont with well thought out tactics, sobered the exuberant victors with the remark that the attack and capture of the horses placed the freebooters in a very precarious position. They were not merely outlaws but armed insurrectionists in the eyes of the California authorities. They would either have to flee the province, or revolt and seize power by overthrowing Mexican rule. Naturally the latter was chosen. Merritt, Swift, Ide, Ford, the Kelseys and others, numbering approximately three score, were induced to march without delay, to capture Sonoma with its garrison commanded by General Vallejo. Fremont again was forced to stay at camp and take no part in the filibustering expedition, because in the absence of declared war an

8. Tipton Lindsey, "The California Republic," Overland Monthly, 224, February 1896. Bancroft, History of California, IV.

army officer could not openly take part in hostile acts towards a friendly government. But, again, he loaned Kit Carson and several of his men,

On June 12, 1846 the colorful band of adventurers left their camp at the mouth of the Bear River, and started for Sonoma. That night they camped at John Grigsby's ranch at the head of the Napa Valley, where they were joined by several others including William L. Todd, a nephew of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln. Next day they rode to within a few miles of Sonoma where they camped until daybreak. Then they rode into the village where the unsuspecting inhabitants slept peaceably and wholly unguarded.

Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo who had been in command of the military force of the north, no longer held the commission. Except for six or seven Indians retained by himself, he had no soldiers, so when Captain Merritt led his band into the pueblo he was unchallenged by sentries. The deserted barracks were surrounded and the sleepy Indian guards placed under arrest. Vallejo was awakened and told that he was a prisoner. All this was easily accomplished without the firing of a shot. The whole Bear Flag incident has been told a thousand times.

9. Bancroft, History of California, IV-V; Sabin, Kit Carson days; Celeste Murphy, The people of the pueblo; and many others.

Captain Merritt and a guard took Vallejo, his brother Salvador, Jacob Leese and Victor Prudon, Vallejo's brother-in-law and son-in-law respectively, to Fort Sutter, leaving the adventurers without a commanding officer. In true democratic style, they elected Ide, a prolific orator, as their leader. Ide had not enjoyed the confidence of Fremont and consequently was ignorant of Fremont's mission - to secure the annexation of California to the United States. With visions of being the first president of California, Ide at once proceeded to issue a high-sounding proclamation and ordered the making of a flag for the infant republic. About the only individual of the Bear Flag Party who has been recognized, without dispute, as one of the makers of the Bear Flag, was William Todd and he said that Granville Swift aided him.¹⁰ Ide headed the group for a few days; officers were elected and Swift was made a sergeant. After the arrival of Fremont on June 26, all the foolishness of a separate republic was soon pushed aside, and Ide's few days of glory ended.

Swift took part in the fight under Lieutenant Henry Ford, with Lieutenant Joaquin de la Torre at Olompali or Camilo Ynitia's rancho, halfway between San Rafael and Petaluma.

10. Bancroft, History of California, V, 147, note 1.

In this fight Swift shot Agaton Ruiz through the lungs. Bancroft tells that Swift and Ruiz often "drank together in later times, the wound being exhibited and the circumstances narrated."¹¹ Sergeant Swift, Kit Carson and two others were sent out by Fremont to intercept three unarmed messengers who were rowing from San Pablo to the Marin side of the bay. Kit Carson asked Fremont what to do with them. Fremont answered, "I have no room for prisoners," and so they were shot down, "murdered" as Bancroft says, while not resisting capture.¹² Carson tells the story as if he were in command, but most writers report Swift as in charge of the killing of the twins Francisco and Ramon de Haro, and the old man Jose de los Reyes Berreyesa. Swift took his full part in the subsequent scouting and searching for Mexican soldiers on the north side of San Francisco Bay, but Castro had safely moved all his men south across the bay by way of Sausalito.

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11. Bancroft, History of California, V, 165-166.

12. Sabin, Kit Carson days, 262.

conquer California was at once planned and put into execution. Swift was made lieutenant and later captain of Company C. In the latter part of July the battalion started south by a roundabout route. Fremont took his men to Fort Sutter and there recruited more Americans. In addition to the Plains Indians already with his force, he recruited as many California Indians as he could persuade or coerce. Then all mounted on horses, they started for Monterey.

Granville Swift evidently was an efficient officer because he retained his captaincy in Company C during the campaigns of both 1846 and '47 under the exacting Fremont. The force saw little fighting, but it endured long marches, heat, wet and cold. Swift apprehended and received the surrender of Ex-Governor Alvarado, Jesus Pico and fifteen men.¹³ Bancroft speaks of Swift as "a fine looking man ... a crack shot, and of undoubted bravery," but "a bitter hater of the Mexicans."¹⁴ The young Kentuckian was mustered out of service in April 1847. He then moved to Stony Creek in Colusa County where he prepared to become a cattleman. Though only twenty-five, he had already seen more adventure than many contemporaries twice his age. On Stony Creek was a brush corral used by the Mexican ranchers, far to the south, in

13. Bancroft, History of California, V, 154.

14. Ibid., 741.

which to brand and cut out stock which had drifted a hundred miles north. It was a good place to build up a herd by mavericking, or claiming all unbranded stock, a custom not recognized as legitimate by the established stockmen of California.

When gold was discovered in 1848, Swift with Franklin Sears, who later became his brother-in-law, rounded up Indians of their region and took them to the Feather River to wash gold. During 1848 and '49 they were extremely successful, especially Swift who accumulated great wealth.¹⁵ The partners then returned to Colusa County and the livestock business. As part of the improvements on the ranch, they built the stone corral on Stony Creek, a portion of which still remains and is now a landmark.¹⁶ With the new-mined gold Swift bought J. S. Williams' cattle including his brand. He trained Indians as cowboys, and also to do other ranch work.

In 1854 Swift and Sears purchased 14,000 acres in Sonoma County, which they grazed and planted to wheat until the fall of wheat prices, following the close of the Civil War. Swift then planted many of his acres to fruit trees

15. Bancroft, History of California, V, 741.

16. George Tays, Swift's Stone Corral, 2. (Registered landmark #239.)

and grapevines.. He went to the Washoe mines of Nevada after the great gold discovery of 1859, and it is said he added to his great fortune there. He also became interested in quicksilver mines in Solano County. It was there he was accidentally killed in 1875 at the age of "about 54."¹⁷

Temelec Hall, built by Swift, is now Registered Landmark #237. It is located almost four miles west and a little south of Sonoma. The name Temelec is the corruption of the word, te'mblek, the name of an old Indian village which once existed about one mile and a half almost due west of Sonoma.¹⁸ Some writers insist the name was also carried by an early Mexican land grant, but the government records fail to include any such grant or, at any rate, any that was ever approved. The acreage on which the house stands, "appears to be a part of Vallejo's Tract," the Petaluma Rancho.¹⁹ On the other hand, that portion of General Vallejo's vast holdings may well have been designated, Temelec.

Captain Swift owned thousands of acres of farm and grazing land in the county, but the site of his new home contained but one thousand acres, triangular in shape. It lies

17. Bancroft, History of California, V, 741.

18. S. A. Barrett, Ethno-Geography, U. C. Publications, VI, 313.

19. Thompson and West, Historical Atlas Map of Sonoma County, California, 53.

on the southerly side of Sonoma Valley bordering the foothills. The land was first purchased by Persifer F. Smith, early in 1849. He was placed in command of the army of the Pacific, and superseded Colonel Richard B. Mason as military governor of the conquered territory of California. General Smith held the land for some years without making any permanent improvements. He sold it to Major Beck who in turn, sold it to William Swift from whom his brother Granville acquired title.²⁰

In 1858 Captain Swift had been in California almost fifteen years and had reached the age of thirty-six. He had gone far since as a 21-year-old, he had crossed from Kentucky to the Pacific Coast. He had been trapper, Indian fighter, soldier for Sutter and Governor Micheltorena, filibuster with the Bear Flag Party, captain under Fremont during the conquest, cattleman and extremely successful gold miner. Wealthy, and perhaps surfeited with the rough pioneering life, anxious to enjoy the tangible evidence of his riches, he decided to marry and found a family. The Captain determined to build a mansion on his estate that would exceed in splendor any other house in northern California, and especially that of General Vallejo who still refused to

20. Murphy, The people of the pueblo, 154, 215.

socially recognize the former freeboater Swift. Adobe, of course, was rejected with contempt as Mexican material. A wooden house, all cut and processed and brought around the Horn from Europe or from our northeast coast, was neither sufficiently lasting nor expensive to please Captain Swift. He decided the house should be constructed of stone, solid and lasting as the native rock from which it later was built. The grandson of the original owner gives the following description of the old landmark:

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Temelec Hall is made of stone, on Colonial style, and consists of about twenty large rooms, fitted with all the conveniences of that day and age. There were nine fireplaces in the house, all with fine marble mantels. A large ballroom extended across the entire rear upstairs. The whole mansion was furnished elegantly, a large library of books therein costing sixty thousand dollars; and furniture, all of a suitable kind, filled every room. Large veranda, both below and above, extend around three sides of the house, supported by stone columns.

A marble slab above the large door bears the name and date - 'C. P. Swift, 1858,' enclosed by a wreath carved in the marble.

At the rear of the house is built a high stone wall the entire length of the house and grounds. This wall is twelve or fifteen feet high, and has abutments of stone built out from the western side (along the driveway) every

ten feet or so, which makes it resemble a fort. At the south end of this wall is built stone quarters for his Indian servants, about forty of whom Swift kept as vaqueros, gardeners, guards, and househelp. Directly north of the mansion, is a very large bathing pool enclosed by a stone wall with fountains in the center.

The spacious grounds of the house still contain many of the original shrubs and trees planted by Captain Swift. Receipted bills from the Golden Gate Nursery Company, San Francisco, show that cypress, acacia, euonymus, lemon verbena, and many others, now living there, were purchased shortly after the house was built. A picturesque stone wall about five feet high surrounds these grounds on the south and east, and joins the wall of the bathing pool on the north. At the northeast and southeast corners of this front wall are stone cottages or 'summer houses,' one at each corner, with gothic roofs. Stone steps, flanked by pillars, lead up through this eastern wall; in front of the house into the grounds and directly in front of the house is a circular fish pond with a stone figure fountain in the center.

The outward appearance of 'Temelec Hall' has never been changed, the original cornices and wooden trimmings being preserved. All the stone work is exactly as built in 1858 except the Indian quarters on the western side, which were dilapidated and has since been rebuilt by the present owner as nearly like the original as was possible. A large two-story barn was built at the same time as was the house, with inclined driveway for carriages. In one room of this structure, in February 1861, Swift's second son, Granville Perry, Jr. was born, for no other reason than a whim on the part of the expectant mother....

Captain Swift was very wealthy, having made a large fortune in gold mining on Feather River in 1848-49. He engaged in

stock raising and farming on a large scale on his ranch of over twelve thousand acres in Sonoma Valley. He was ... popular and entertained largely many prominent San Francisco people:...

The cost of the complete estate, buildings, furnishings and grounds has been estimated at from \$60,000 to ²² \$300,000. The latter figure is perhaps more nearly correct. To this ostentatious estate Mr. Swift brought his wife, the former Eliza Jane Tate. ²³ Miss Tate with the "fascinating smiles, dimples and curls," was much sought after by the beaux who outnumbered the women in California at that time, almost three to one. She chose the wealthy Captain Swift, and bore him three sons. Evidently the union was not a success, because after a few short years she secured a divorce. Conflicting reports regarding the causes of the marriage failure have been handed down through the years. These details of domestic relationship are of importance only as a part of the history of the old stone house, which was built by a man who found his wealth during California's fabulous Days of Gold.

Captain Swift evidently intended the palatial Temelec Hall to become a prominent social center for the

22. Murphy, The people of the pueblo, 216.

23. Ibid., 215. Also referred to as "Eliza Tate" and "Mary Jane Tate."

elite. Sonoma County, at that time was recognized by army officers and the aristocracy of California as dominating the social life of the state. It was the military headquarters of the Pacific Coast and until shortly before the Civil War had been the home of such outstanding army officers as Halleck, Sherman, Stoneman, Hooker and others. When the Civil War caused the recall to the East of many army officers, social affairs representing the wealthy of the county were largely limited to people recognized by Vallejo and his intimates. To this group, Granville P. Swift and his Bear Flag friends, were anathema. As already stated most of the guests entertained at Temelec Hall came from San Francisco.²⁴

It may be that both Mr. and Mrs. Swift were slightly eccentric which contributed to their failure to lead Sonoma society. Swift, brave, taciturn, with a brittle temper, seemed to have been of a suspicious temperament. He trusted neither financial institutions nor his own household. When he accumulated large sums of money, he buried the coin in secret spots on the ranch instead of depositing the money in a bank or placing it in a safe within his house. At one time a dishonest employee stole \$26,000 which he saw Swift bury.²⁵

24. This monograph, 16.

25. Murphy, The people of the pueblo, 216.

Mrs. Swift, too, was temperamental. Two conflicting stories²⁶ are told about her unhappiness in the castle-like house. One, that she never felt at home there. That she always remained a country girl, and often humiliated the proud captain by milking the cows. The other story is that she tired of country life and wanted to move to the more gay San Francisco, which Swift refused to do. At any rate the martial ship foundered. For a short time the great stone house was occupied by caretakers. It and the grounds suffered neglect until the estate was sold and again became the scene of gayety under the bestship of Colonel William K. Rogers, who was also known as Kissane.

Rogers, too, had trouble and the law soon caught up with him. His extravagant entertainment and political prominence²⁷ revived an old indictment against him in another state. The property was foreclosed and for several decades remained neglected. In 1916 Mrs. Edmond D. Coblenz, formerly Mrs. Melville Schweitzer of New York purchased the estate. She has lavished money on the house and grounds not only to stop crumbling decay due to age, but to restore it as far as possible,²⁸ to its exact original state.

26. Murphy, The people of the pueblo, 216.

27. Ibid., 217.

28. This monograph, 15.

The old mansion has been the scene of three distinctive social periods; the first when Granville Swift was owner and host, the second when the unfortunate Colonel William K. Rogers entertained so sumptuously, and lastly during the present ownership of Mrs. Coblentz.

The first period, covering a little more than a decade, is of the most historic interest. Until the outbreak of the Civil War, the gold braid of army officers added to the glamor of the social gatherings. Besides the many San Francisco guests, the John and Franklin Sears families would naturally have been in the social set. They were close neighbors; and Franklin, Swift's brother-in-law was for many years his partner. The Sears brothers came across the plains and mountains in the same Kelsey party of which the Captain was a member. Ex-Governor Lillburn W. Boggs of Missouri, married Panthea Grant Boone, a granddaughter of Daniel Boone, which made him a relative by marriage of Swift.

Another relative of Swift by marriage was Major R. Snyder who was active during the conquest. In 1849 he was a delegate to the constitutional convention, and later served as surveyor-general of California. Under presidents Pierce and Buchanan he was assistant secretary of the United States Treasury. Snyder was merchant and banker in Sacramento, and later retired to his El Cerrito Rancho in Sonoma County. In 1874 he married Rachel, the daughter of Franklin Sears, his

friend and contemporary.

Guests from San Francisco came up the bay on boats whose accommodations and lack of speed were the cause for much complaint. These boats discharged their passengers at the embarcadero, four miles from Sonoma. There was no railroad to the town during Swift's lifetime. Carriages drawn by high-stepping thoroughbreds from the Hall, met the passengers at the boat, and drove them seven or eight miles to the great estate.

Colonel Rogers during the early seventies, entertained more elaborately than did Captain Swift. Rogers' brother Rueben was a lawyer and a social leader in San Francisco, consequently they had many mutual friends in that pleasure loving city, who were frequent guests at Temelec Hall. Champagne flowed freely during the week-ends. At the peak of his popularity the Colonel was compelled to defend himself against an old indictment. Court fees, lawyers' retainers and noteriety soon broke him. The bank which held the mortgage took legal possession of the property and for a long time the place stood empty. The mansion fell into disrepair; the elaborate garden languished and the servants' quarters crumbled in ruin.

29. Ernest L. Finley, History of Sonoma County, 314.

Mrs. Coblentz, the present owner (1940) is restoring the glory of the estate lost through the tragedy of two families; one by a broken marriage, the other crushed by the law demanding retribution. The old stone house has been registered by the California State Chamber of Commerce coöperating with the Department of Natural Resources. It is now a State Historic Landmark worthy of permanent record because of its historical significance.

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