

The Kelsey Family

In 1843, the Kelsey Family emigrated to Oregon with the Hastings Party. A short time later, they continued on to California with their own Kelsey party. They built what is believed to be the first home in what is now San Joaquin County. The family consisted of father David, mother Susan (Cazort) Kelsey, three daughters America, Mary Frances, and Josephine . . . as well as a brother, Samuel. The family built a home of tule near present day French Camp, south of Stockton.

The family possessed a cannon, which Mr. Kelsey would fire off each evening as a means of protecting the family against hostiles.

Food became scarce, and the Kelseys were forced to forage for food. A short while later they realized that they would have to leave their home in search of food, so the family buried the cannon and headed towards San Jose where they would spend the winter.

After arriving in San Jose, Mr. Kelsey went to visit a friend who was ill. He did not know that the man was infected with small pox.

In the spring, Mr. Kelsey took his wife and daughter America back to French Camp. The other two daughters and their son remained in San Jose. Shortly after arriving back at their home, Mr. Kelsey came down with the disease.

Desperate for help, the family picked up and headed for Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. En route, they encountered a man who invited them to stay for the night in a small cabin in what is now Stockton. The next morning, the man discovered that Kelsey had small pox. He was so afraid of contracting the contagious disease that he left the cabin to the Kelseys.

After a short while, Mr. Kelsey died. His wife had also become ill and was unable to bury him. Little America was too small to bury him without help.

The next day two fur trappers, Joseph Buzzell and George Wyman, camped near the small cabin. The two had ventured in to California's interior valley after hearing of the vast trapping opportunities from [Jedediah Smith](#). At first, they did not want to help America bury her father, because they were deathly afraid of contracting the disease, for which there was no cure.

Feeling sorry for America, the men finally agreed to help bury David Kelsey.

Susan was also suffering from the disease. She managed to survive, but was blinded. She died on August 16, 1856 at the age of 65 years.

The two trappers would be forever changed by the experience. Joseph Buzzell would later marry Mary Frances Kelsey. George Wyman married America Kelsey when she was 14 years old, on September 2nd, 1846. Captain John Sutter presided over the ceremony. America and George went on to raise ten children, including sons Benjamin, George, William, Frederick, Charles, Theodore, Richard and Grover. They had two daughters . . . Lizzie and Emma.

Tragedy continued to follow the family. Young Theodore died at the age of 22-days of age.

America Kelsey died at the age of 83 in Half Moon Bay, California on May 8th, 1916. George died at the age of 76 on February 14th, 1893 in Half Moon Bay.