

SQUATTER WAR AND RESULTS

--From notes by H. C. Bailey.

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Ever since I was a boy I've heard of squatters and squatter rights. Stephen A. Douglas was the great champion of squatter rights fifty years ago, but failed to get his theories adopted.

The squatter wars of California like all other California products was peculiar and differed in many respects from eastern squatterism. In California it had no individuality, but was a community of settlers or squatters jointly against the Spanish grant claimant.

The fight was long, expensive and bitterly contested. Large sums of money, much time lost and some bloodshed was the results.

Settlers began to locate claims on the O. Larkin grant of eleven leagues on the west bank of the Sacramento River in 1850-51 to convert the timber into cord wood and charcoal for the boats and city trade.

As soon as settlements began protests from the claimant accompanied by threats which only made things worse, as at that time they had no titles.

There was fine timber up to the bank of the river and a fine profit cutting and selling it and a sure thing the squatters choose to believe the claim was no good and proposed to fight.

A squatters league was organized, leaders chosen, assessments collected and all were ready for business when I arrived and the fight was on in dead earnest.

There was at stake 55,000 acres of as fine land as any in the state, most all heavy timbered. With each party feeling sure of success, a bitter

war was inevitable. The first act opened a short time after my advent and before I was interested.

The effort of the grant men was to enjoin the squatter from cutting the timber. The squatters' fight was to prevent enjoinderment and so keep out of court and keep on cutting wood. In April '53 one of them (Dr. Stoddard by name) came from Frisco to attempt to stop the cutting and remained all night. About midnight the squatters took him from the house where he was staying to a squatter's camp on the river for trial. Some wanted to hang him, but better council prevailed they took him across the river and left him on a sand bar with the admonition never to return and the consequences if he did.

There was no chance of escape till a boat passed. There was no one living on the east bank and an almost impenetrable thicket of vines, trees and tules supposed to be well stocked with grizzlies, extended several miles eastward.

The Dr. played Cruoso till four o'clock next day when a steamer came down the river and took him aboard, badly used up. He had plenty of water and skeeters and had fleshed up wonderfully in both face and hands.

The Dr. never rested when he got home till he sold out his claim. He never returned.

The issue was to prevent the service of all papers at any and all risks. Hence U. S. marshals were a little slow about going into the woods hunting twenty or more determined men, believing they were right and the others land sharks.

All was quiet for three or four months when a boat landed at Holaday's wood yard and took on what she wanted. A fellow who had been looking on a nd gassing a little in an off hand way, handed Holaday a paper. As soon as Holaday looked at it he said, "I serve you with an injunction." "Damn you," said Holaday, "I will serve you with an injunction," and with a stick of cord wood knocked him into the river.

The boat hands fished him out and away went the boat. Now all hands were looking for trouble and on the alert. It was a serious offense and Uncle Sam behind it.

All went well for sometime and the excitement had blown over. The boats continued to take wood and ask no questions. A boat stopped and wooded every day while Holaday was in charge and he was asked on board to get his pay. He was called up to the Pilot house to settle.

What kind of a deal they made with Holaday none ever knew. He lived here in the willows three years, but would never tell me. He was gone about six weeks, came back well dressed and left in a few days and I never saw or heard of him till I met him here.

We now formed a wider and (as we thought stronger) organization, invested \$15 in four-foot tin horns to be distributed in hearing of each other and in case of danger at any point, the alarm to be sounded by the nearest station and answered by the others to call to arms.

Monthly and call meetings were held to discuss news or anything for the general good and protection.

Our chief source of expense and trouble was with our lawyers. We paid a contingent fee of \$500 and expenses while gathering evidence. They

never traveled second class and we had strong suspicion of their selling us out.

In '54 they got an injunction service and damage suit served on Corbier et al. A number joined and paid U. S. senator Bates of Iowa to attend to their interest. Paid the regular \$500 and heard no more of it till 1858 and then through the papers.

I went to Frisco to look it up. Bates had virtually answered the suit away and had returned east. We invested \$500 more in Cal Crocket from St. Louis in the hope of getting a new answer.

In the interval the first parties to the suit had sold out and turned the whole business over to Shattuck and Spencer for their fees. We heard no more of it till 1862 when we saw in the court news judgement against Corbier et al \$3200.

It had laid still till Crocket had gone east, when it was called and went by default. And though the parties had never cut or sold an end of wood they had to pay all the same. To the credit of Shattuck and Spencer they demanded only their fee and costs, \$1300, although they could have collected the whole.

In '55 eight of us bought the grant claim on our land. Another man named Wilson bought 4000 acres adjoining us and started in rough shod to drive off the squatters which soon resulted in one man being shot, and came near resulting in a dozen more. All that was lacking was a competent leader.

Wilson owned a mill. Corbier went there on business when Wilson ordered him off. Corbier refused, claiming the mill was public place. Wilson

ordered him off. Corbier refused, claiming the mill was public place. Wilson started for his shot gun and though Corbier had a revolver he started for his horse and just as he mounted Wilson fired at about 60 or 80 yards range. Five shot struck but one flattened against his pistol carried in left breast. This saved his life as the shot struck just over the heart.

Corbier and a friend with him was able to ride home (two miles), send for a Dr. and send out the news to the settlers. In a few hours about thirty men had met at Corbier's house with word from the sheriff to meet him at the mill.

Wilson was a rather desperate man. He had a grown son and abundance of arms and was fortified in his house with his wife and girl about twelve years old. With a determined leader we would have stormed the house. But a mob without a leader is about as dangerous and much like a flock of geese --noisy and harmless. And the larger the crowd, the less the danger.

As soon as the Sheriff came, Wilson gave himself up and claimed his protection. An exciting trial of three days and he was committed with bond at \$3000, which after two days effort was procured.

We were expecting a grand row all those days. He had his friends all armed and we all went armed and not adverse to a scrap. But peace finally prevailed. Corbier got well and after four years lawing and three changes of venture, Wilson got clear.

Soon afterward he shot another man on an adjoining ranch who died from his wounds a year later.

The Squatters continued to fight the grant title at a total expense

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of about \$50,000, but were finally beat in '59 or '60, and had to vacate, which they did voluntarily if not cheerfully.

All that could, moved their houses off and the others burned theirs, also the fencing. Many miles of eight or nine rail worn fencing was burned.

They also gave notice to the public not to attempt to farm the land; that if they did they would be burned out.

It was lying idle when I left the State in 1866. I don't know how long it remained so.