

Alpine History Mystery for September 2013

Caroline was born in 1845 into a family that had lived in Massachusetts since Deacon Thomas Thaxter arrived from England in 1635. Carrie, as she was called, was the sixth of seven children: three girls and four boys. After such a long family attachment to Massachusetts, it must have come as a surprise that all the children would move westward. The third child Caleb became a newspaper editor in Ohio. All the other siblings ended up in California.

Carrie's oldest brother, Charles, was the first to leave. He moved to San Francisco and set up a store, becoming a merchant in that burgeoning city. But this life in the Wild West was apparently not like living in Massachusetts, for in 1864 Charles wrote to Carrie: "I hope you will go to camp meeting and have a good time and enjoy yourself while you can, for if you ever come out here, you must bid goodbye to good times."

A few years later one of her sisters wrote this to her: "You did not ask my advice about becoming Mrs. Ned but as I am in the habit of speaking when not spoken to, sometimes to my own detriment, too, I make a few remarks. The married life should be the happiest part of one's life and will be if their spirits are in harmony. But at the present time I think there are but few happy families and whose fault is it? A lady is usually willing to give up her own will in nearly everything for a while, but there comes a time when it is irksome to be dependent on another for every trifle. It is very different to have one's own purse and know what is in it is your own and you can go and come as you please. In one way it is so after marriage and in another it is not. When the fact dawns upon you that you own neither yourself, your children, nor anything else, what then? I could say more, but I defer till I hear from you."



Carrie & Ned in 1870

Well, Caroline may have gotten lots of advice from her siblings, but she also inherited a strong will and determination from her ancestors, and she charted her own course in life. In 1870 she did marry Ned (Carrie's nick-name for Edward), and in 1875 they moved to California to become ranchers & beekeepers in an even more remote and wild area called Alpine. Here she raised her own family of six children on the ranch they called Tule Springs. They attached a lean-to structure to their home which served as Alpine's first school and they also held church services there for the family and neighbors. Later Carrie was one of the principal founders of the Alpine Community Church.

This mystery gets complicated when we consider the story of Sophronia who was also born in Massachusetts, but she took a different course in life. She attended Normal School to become a teacher. She married and had 5 children, but only 2 survived. Possessing a curious mind and a strong womanly determination, she decided to become a physician so she could understand what caused the death of 3 of her children. This she did at a time when very few women attended university and even fewer

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became doctors. Sophronia graduated from Boston University School of Medicine in 1874 and set up her first medical practice in Corry, Pennsylvania in 1875.



Sophronia in 1894

In 1876, Sophronia moved to San Francisco and received her California Medical License – she was the 26th doctor to be licensed in this state. She went on to practice medicine in Washington Territory, Oregon, and nearly a half dozen localities in California before finally moving to Alpine in 1894. She was the first doctor to set up a medical practice here and her home on Tavern Road is now a key feature of the Alpine History Museum.

So here we have two very strong and determined women. Both born in Massachusetts, they took very different courses in life but ended up in Alpine, where they served unique and fundamental roles in the growth and development of our town. Their lives seemed so very different – can you imagine there was anything about them that was similar; something that connected them in a way that would ultimately bring them together in this little pioneer village? Well, that dear Readers, is our September History Mystery. What did Caroline and Sophronia have in common, these two women whose essential work in the community proved instrumental in Alpine's development?

You can solve this mystery by visiting the Alpine History Museum Open House on September 28 -29 from 2 to 4pm. Docents will be on hand to help guide you through the maze of clues until the solution becomes "obvious". The museum is located at 2116 Tavern Road in Alpine. The mystery and solution are also posted on our website: http://www.alpinehistory.org/alpine_history_mysteries.html . If you know the answer, send a note to mystery@alpinehistory.org.