

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Pine Grove Potpourri

#### I. Pine Grove House<sup>1</sup>

One looks in vain...for any history of the community of Pine Grove.

Our county historian, Jesse Mason, mentions in passing that the town was probably named after the pine trees which festoon the area. A chamber map mentions that Pine Grove was once a station on the Kit Carson emigrant trail.

But the community is not mentioned in "Historic Spots in California." Not having checked other sources Logan can't say there aren't some facts and legends somewhere.

Perhaps the reader has knowledge of Pine Grove's earliest days, and how it got its name. Now, the writer will share what he has found, and hope that his facts will stimulate you to discover or report others.

In the early editions of the *Volcano Ledger*, a close reader will occasionally catch an allusion or mention of the "Pine Grove House," but never a mention of a camp, town, village or community by that name.

Although the principal early-day trail, and stage and wagon road between Volcano and Jackson passed through what is now Pine Grove, a village seemingly did not appear until after the Pine Grove house did.

That stage and wagon route followed the present county road out of Volcano, up the steep hill to highway 88, westerly along 88 to the Ridge road, and down it to the New York Ranch road.

In the earliest days, 1849 and 1850, almost all the traffic went to Jackson via New York Ranch road before heading to other communities and valley towns. Later, the Ridge road would be pushed through to join the Drytown-Sacramento road and save many miles.

Who can say without exhaustive research that there wasn't a roadhouse, station or inn on that route in what is now Pine Grove prior to January, 1855? The writer certainly can't.

But the "A" lien book in recorder Tony Sutton's office tells us that the "Pine Grove House, on the north side of the road between Saw Mill Valley and Grass Valley, was completed on or about January 15, 1855."

Its owners and future proprietors were Albert and Caroline Leonard who ran the hostelry until they sold it in 1858. One day we may ascertain that the Leonards were Pine Grove's founders, too.

Logan made his first notes about Pine Grove house several years ago but other projects prevented him from completing preliminary research and finding out where the inn was actually located.

Recently, having a spare moment, he pursued the chain of title through Leonard, Jolley, Rawlings and Sargent, J.F. Johnson, L. McLaine and the Soracco brothers of Volcano, and, in 1868, to a John Wagstaff.

Then, on the 1870 townsite map of Pine Grove, Logan located a lot abutting the northern boundary owned by a "J. Wagestaff." Conclusion: that was the location of the historic Pine Grove house.

Extending beyond the boundary of the townsite was the bulk of the 60-acre ranch which then made up the property.

That site (at a key junction of the Jackson and Clinton roads) is "north of the road" as the lien record says, and is about "three miles" from Volcano as deed descriptions tells us.

It appears reasonable, then, that Albert Leonard - and Logan has not researched his antecedents - selected a lovely stand or grove of pine overlooking the Jackson Road for his hotel sometime in 1854.

By early '55 travelers between Volcano and Jackson, and the straggle of emigrants or trans-Sierra travelers coming down the Volcano cut-off from Leek springs, had another inn, the Pine Grove house, for recruiting animals and themselves.

#### II.

"This is one of the most delightful locations in Amador County," observed Tom Springer, sometime roving editor of the *Volcano Ledger* in June, 1856.

"The mines in the vicinity are paying well, and the prospects of a large and flourishing camp are flattering.

"The hotel kept by Mr. Leonard is situated in a delightful grove, and we know of no place where an hour can be spent more pleasantly than at this house."

It's as if no flea, ant or bedbug would violate such a bower! Logan supposes, however, that despite its natural endowments, Pine Grove House had those beasties, too.

Anyway, four months after Springer's glowing boast in print, the camp had flourished enough to get its own post office. Albert Leonard, innkeeper, was the first postmaster.

In April, 1856, the friendly assessor, H.A. Eichelberger, dropped by to chat with the Leonards, perhaps to also sip a julep beneath the pines, and talk of values - real and personal property particularly.

Eichelberger increased the hotel's value from \$1,500 to \$2,000 and placed a \$100 value on the Leonard's personal property.

Incidentally, their total tax bill that year was \$27.72, with an extra \$3 for poll tax, and 25 cents for miners' tax.

Business must have been good at the hotel in the grove. The Leonards enlarged the place in the winter of 1856-57, adding "among other improvements a fine ball room."

That ball room in March, 1857, would resound to a "Grand Inauguration (sic) Ball" with Shaffer's cotillion band providing the three-quarter time - at \$5 a ticket.

In following years the ball room would witness numerous dances and socials as the Pine Grove house became an "in" place for higher country camps and committees.

The "traveler," who tracked all over the county in 1857, reported what he observed in a *Ledger* series. That August he visited Pine Grove. He wrote that it was a "finely located village, and one long known as a favorite stopping spot for travelers.

"Leonard's Pine Grove House," he reported, "is the resort of all lovers of good eating and comfortable quarters."

The "traveler" tells us that there was some mining activity on the community flat and in nearby gulches, when water was available. Otherwise, the lone "industry" thereabouts was shingle cutting.

Shingles, in fact, were legal tender or exchange for other goods in the area, hay and farmer's produce among them.

As an aside, Logan notices where the 1856 assessment roll mentions a "Shingle Machine" location or site owned by Towsley and Hammond, maybe the same one to which the "traveler" referred.

Pine Grove, he said, is "situated in a forest of young pines, on elevated ground, and where the travel from several places centres...(making) this a desirable place for a residence.

"And having a good school house and at present a school, families find it very convenient. It has ever been a favorite place for parties and public dinners....

"We have our choice of roads here to Jackson, either by way of Clinton...or the old stage road (or today's Ridge road)...."

Not long after the "traveler" visited the village, the Leonards sold their 50-acre ranch and hotel to Jolley, Lewis and Kyle for \$1,000. In later years owners were J.F. Johnson and Frank Look.

Pine Grove house...was a pioneer hostelry in a grove, or that bit of sand around which a pearl of a community grew. Until Logan learns otherwise, that's how the town got its name, and the Leonards - Albert and Caroline - were its founders.

### III

Logan should not let languish in some historical limbo the final annals of the pioneer inn. Over four decades had gone by since Albert Leonard built the hotel in the grove beside the stage road. In those years a succession of owners and proprietors refurbished, remodeled and enlarged the hotel.

Yet, of course, its lovely setting remained the same. It could still be described, as the *Amador Record* did in 1897, as "the hotel, the Pine Grove House, with W.O. Green its genial host, (that) is prettily surrounded by some sturdy pines."

That special edition of the *Record*, Logan adds parenthetically, also reported that "the large new town hall is about completed...." Does that date square with what is alleged today? No matter now.

Early in the morning on Wednesday, July 25, 1900, fire claimed the old hotel.

It was but a half hour past midnight. Proprietor

O.L. Webster had checked the pump outside, then closed the house and retired. His stirrings, however, awoke a boarder named Pitts.

Once awoken, Pitts suddenly saw the darkness beyond his window flicker with light. He went to the window, looked down upon a shed in flames, and sounded the alarm. It was too late to save the buildings but time enough to save some furnishings.

"The inhabitants (of Pine Grove)," reported the *Amador Dispatch* two days later, "were startled by the thrilling cry of fire. In a second ... Main Street was thronged with citizens who beheld the beautiful hotel and saloon adjoining it in flames.

"Eagerly they thronged into the hotel to save what they could, for they knew there was no hope of saving the building.

"Furniture, clothes and dishes were grabbed and carried out into the street...Everything was quickly removed from the hotel, but the liquors in the saloon which were quickly devoured by the flames.

"Some of the out houses around the building caught fire but the flames were soon extinguished. The heat from the hotel was so intense," continued the *Dispatch* account, "that the post office, which was located a few yards east, was soon in a blaze.

"A desperate effort was made to save it, but was finally given up as a useless task, and the office was left to its fate; the contents, however, were removed to a place of safety.

"After the consuming of the post office, the wind subsided and no further damage was done. The hotel and part of the furniture was (sic) insured but the contents of the saloon was a total loss. There was no insurance on the post office."

While Webster ran the saloon, and leased the hotel, the latter was owned by Richard Webb, a Jackson landlord with numerous rentals and real estate holdings.

Earlier, Webb had been a fighting and controversial editor of the *Amador Ledger*. That paper reported that Webb had \$1,000 insurance on the hotel, and \$400 on the furniture.

Thus...the Pine Grove house, like so many pioneer edifices before it, died by fire.

In subsequent weeks (and issues of the papers) you can follow Webb's plans to rebuild in brick. By September 7 the *Dispatch* could report "twenty men at work on the new hotel."

On the eighteenth the paper said, Webb fired up his brick kiln on the property to make the first 100,000 bricks. Chief brick mason was William Fortner. Meanwhile, Webster was repairing his saloon.

By March the hotel was virtually completed. Adam Huberty leased the hotel from Webb but had to delay the opening because muddy roads prevented him from hauling his new furniture up from Ione.

Finally, on March 30, 1901, there was a dedicatory grand opening ball and the new Pine Grove house or hotel was again in business.

The same building, fronting highway 88 where the Clinton road begins or deadends, is now the El Pino club.<sup>2</sup>