

## **A VERY BENEVOLENT CITIZEN OF SUTHERLAND SPRINGS**

William Waldo was one of the early burials in the Sutherland Springs Cemetery. He is best remembered for his help and contributions in assisting American Emigrants from the plains states of Midwest United States in crossing the high Sierra Mountains into California. Waldo and his volunteer assistants faced great risks of their lives and unnumbered perils during this time in the mid 1800's. It was later said of him, "There was at that period no name upon the Pacific slope around which the heart of public gratitude and affection so clustered as that of William Waldo". In 1851 and later, bills were introduced into the legislatures of Missouri and Illinois and also before the U. S. Congress in recognition of his unstinted contribution of great work and material assistance to provide relief to the groups traveling west over the mountains.

William Waldo, in his early youth, left Virginia for Missouri and soon made his way to the Great Plains, which were being crossed by the Santa Fe and Chihuahua trails. On these routes, traders freighted goods to support the traveling emigrants going west and Waldo became involved with them. William Waldo wrote of his adventures in a collection of letters called "Recollections" which described some of his adventures on several of these freighting expeditions before 1831. The Missouri Historical Society later published these letters in 1880.

After crossing the plains several times, William Waldo enrolled in the College of the Christian Brothers at Saint Louis. He remained there until failing health forced him to relinquish his studies and return to the plains community of Union Mission in the Arkansas Territory. Here, he met a lady who soon became his wife. She, Elizabeth Fey Fowler was born September 27, 1811, the daughter of Reverend William Fowler and Asenath (Selden) Vail. Her birthplace was at North Guilford, Conn. She died December 20, 1878 at Sutherland Springs, Texas. Her education was through her parents at home and in some of the leading schools in New England. At the time of their marriage her father was superintendent of the Union Mission School among the Osage Indians. After the marriage, the couple moved to Southwestern Missouri and established the first dry goods store in Bates County. Later on he opened a similar business in Osceola, Missouri, plus two other locations in neighboring counties. During his time in Osceola he became a very active local citizen and assumed the superintendent position of improving the Osage River, so as to make it more navigable for steamboats at different stages of the river flow and water level. Once this work was finished, he was commissioned to go to Cincinnati to purchase a steamboat to take advantage of the additional freighting opportunities along the improved river. On his way eastward, he was shipwrecked on the Ohio River and was very instrumental in saving the lives of many passengers on the wrecked vessel. Once he reached his destination, he purchased a steamboat named "Ocean Wave" and returned with it to the Osage River. Because of the recent improvements he had completed on the Osage River, the vessel was able to reach a higher landing place than ever reached previously by a steamboat, much to the pride and amazement of the affected river people.

In 1849, Mr. Waldo left Missouri in charge of one of the largest and better equipped companies of individuals and families emigrating to the new Eldorado of the Pacific. The party reached its destination with the group being mostly in good health and their stock in good condition.

In 1850, being aroused by the suffering and lack of leadership among the emigrants, he directed all his support and guidance into the work of developing a public sentiment to furnish immediate relief to meet the survival needs of these new emigrants. This story of his determined efforts to promptly act to help these people caused him to convert his own assets such as land, provisions and money to help these starving people. The efforts of his spirited and determined effort in providing assistance at his own expense were written in many a record of this troubling period. Subsequently, an act was passed by the California Legislature to at least partially reimburse him for the personal financial expenditures and monetary loses he incurred. Thousands of individuals suffered the misery of this period including diseases such as cholera, depredations of their stock by Indians, lack of subsistence and inability to cross the mountains before the heavy snows of winter began. Waldo and his fellow helpers risked their lives and suffered through unknown perils in helping these unprepared families reach a better life.

After 1851, he returned to the east settling in Minnesota to engage in farming and land speculation. He continued moving afterwards to various other states and territories of the west and south. In 1853, the Whig Party of California nominated him as its candidate for governor of that state, but failed election. In 1866, he moved to San Antonio, Texas and spent most of his time farming. In 1875, he was issued a patent of land totaling over 200 acres near Sutherland Springs by the State of Texas and spent most of his farming there. He also became a fluent writer, contributing many articles to publications related to western questions and events such as the character and treatments of Indian tribes west of the Mississippi River.

William Waldo died in 1881 and was buried at a site in the Sutherland Springs Cemetery shaded by Evergreen Live Oaks near the burial site of his wife who died in 1878. Among tributes to his memory written after his death, he was spoken of as an individual with a very diversified life. In one year it might be rapid execution of a major project that he completed with easy competence. At another time he would expend a goodly portion of his assets by giving to the poor and needy. He was known as a man of integrity and honor, with a great intensity of feeling in the support of the Christian faith.

The above article was compiled by Gene Maeckel from notes and oral conversations with Shirley Grammer. Wilson County Historical Society, P.O.Box 101, Floresville, Texas 78114