

The Samuel Martin Story Told

by Karin Kinney
DR Reporter

William Henry Martin Smith, previous owner of Stonedene, the 19th century house in Suisun Valley, now a federal landmark, made available historic photographs of his family.

His great-grandfather Samuel Martin, founder of the house, was born in 1813 in Pennsylvania. As a young man, he traveled west and settled in Indiana. In 1839, he married young Jemima Hillis and moved to Kentucky and later to Missouri.

News of the gold discovery drew them to California. Martin sold all his possessions and equipped with a team and provisions, he journeyed across the plains, with his wife and four children.

By fall of that year, they arrived at the Feather River and he began working in the mines. Although moderately successful, Martin considered it not the proper place for bringing up a family.

In the spring of 1850, he surveyed the land further south and arriving in Suisun Valley, he settled on a portion of land, adjoining that of Jesus

Molino of Rockville. It is said that the splendid growing grain of the Indians attracted him to the spot.

When the land subsequently was offered for sale in 1853, by the owners of the grant, he was the first settler to put a deed upon record as a purchaser.



HENRY Martin became the owner of Stonedene in 1885 when his pioneer father, Samuel Martin died.

—DR Photo by Kinney

Nonetheless, when squatters' troubles erupted, he was arrested along with the others as a turbulent squatter and taken to San Francisco. The mistake was discovered

quickly and he was released with ample apologies.

By 1860, Martin had become



SAMUEL Martin remodeled Stonedene in 1929 with the help of Julia Morgan, famous as architect of Hearst Castle.

—DR Photo by Kinney

a successful farmer. On a trip to Missouri, he purchased 660 head of cattle and with proceeds from the sale, began building Stonedene. He hired a German stonecutter and, with the help of "coolie" labor, the original three-story house with 13 rooms was constructed.

When Martin died at the age

of 74, his son Henry Martin, became the new owner of the stone house.

Henry's wife, the former Carrie Pittman, came from San Francisco to Cordelia, when it was still called Bridgeport. Her parents operated the Pittman Hotel, famous as a stage stop in the gold rush days. Located within three minutes walk from the train depot, the hotel also housed many hunters and people from the city, who rented horses and buggies for outings.

Their son, Samuel Martin, remodeled Stonedene in 1929, with the help of Julia Morgan, famous as architect of Hearst Castle. A rear wing was added, increasing the house to 25 rooms and a carriage house, in the same Gothic revival style, was built in the yard.

Samuel's sister, Mrs. William J. Smith, was the mother of Fairfield resident William Henry Martin Smith, the last descendant of Henry Martin, whose roots are deeply entrenched in the history of this county.

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