

# Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444 • Founded 1920

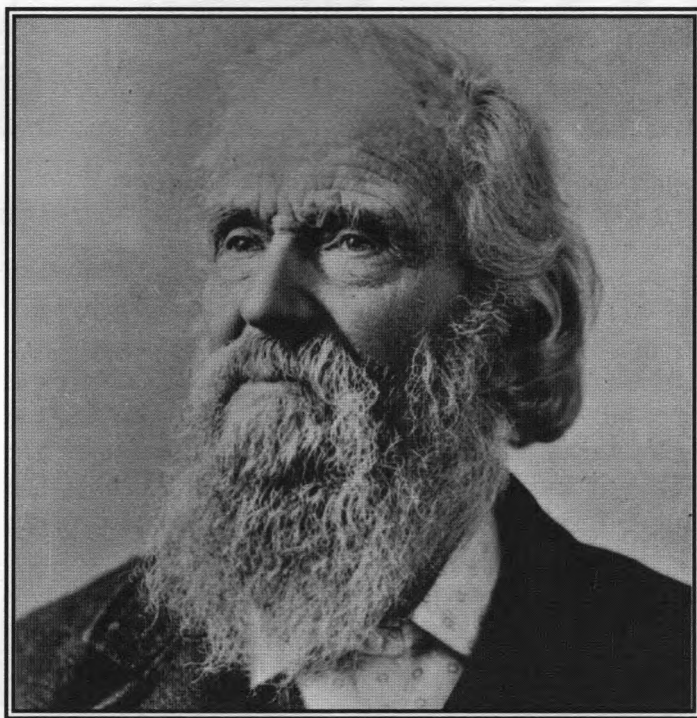
Newsletter No. 78 – February 2010

*In the 19th and early 20th century, many people were drawn to Dublin for its gentle rolling landscape, its tranquil lake and majestic mountain. But at least one resident left Dublin to discover – and revel in – the more dramatic settings of the American West.*

*Galen Clark (1814 - 1910), known as the Guardian of Yosemite, was the first white man to come upon the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoia trees in California, and was instrumental in working for legislation to protect the grove and the Yosemite Valley.*

*Hildreth Allison (1896-1990), whom many of us remember as Dublin's "Mr. History", was a prolific writer of essays, mainly on historical subjects. He gave a typescript of this essay, which seems not to have been previously published, to the Society in 1988.*

– Jane Eklund



*Galen Clark in old age. The photograph is undated, but he lived to his 96th year.*

*Dublin Historical Society – Gift of Hildreth M. Allison*

## GALEN CLARK, YOSEMITE'S GUARDIAN

*by Hildreth M. Allison*

**"I**n their sublime presence I was filled with a sense of awe and veneration. It was as though I were treading on hallowed ground, for their sublime grandeur appeared to me as a miracle of God."

In these reverential words, Galen Clark, explorer, homesteader and later guardian and interpreter of Yosemite National Park, expressed the emotion that engulfed his soul when he first looked upon the mighty sequoia trees of Mariposa Grove, Calif.

Clark was the tenth child of Jonas and Mary (Twitchell) Clark of Dublin. In 1804 Jonas sold his rather unsuccessful woolen mill in the part of the town which became Harrisville and moved in

the dead of winter to Shipton, now Richmond, in the Province of Quebec. There he carved out a farm in the wilderness territory and there ten of his children were born. Galen arrived on November 28, 1814, although he mistakenly asserts in a short biographical sketch that he first saw the light of day in New Hampshire.

After enduring the privations and winter cold of Canada for fifteen years, Jonas and his family returned to Dublin in October 1819. Galen was a rather sickly child with weak lungs and a tendency toward tuberculosis, a disease at that time with a high rate of mortality. Between the ages of five and seven-

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*Galen Clark's house at Wawona, about 26 miles from Yosemite. At the right rear is his stable and the carriage he used to drive for hire in the interval (1880-1889) between his two terms as Guardian.*

*Dublin Historical Society – Gift of Hildreth M. Allison*

teen he was placed in the home of a farmer friend of the Clarks and came under the influence of Dr. Leonard and his teachings Clark never forgot, a fact attested by a poem he wrote in after years in which he reminisced on his early life in Dublin.

When he was seventeen years old, Galen Clark was apprenticed to a cousin in Genesee, N.Y., to learn furniture making and painting. Although he became proficient in furniture production, the occupation was not at all conducive to the improvement of his health and the dust from the wood aggravated his cough. In 1834 he went to work in Boston for a painting contractor, but after two years returned to Dublin and in the fall of 1836 enrolled in Melville Academy in Jaffrey.

Since the winter climate of Cheshire County caused him to take cold easily, Clark spent only one term at the academy. Deciding to seek a milder milieu to which he might be better adapted, Galen set forth for Philadelphia where he soon joined an expedition under James Whittemore going to Missouri in quest of wider opportunities.

Near the town of Waterloo, Galen purchased a quarter section (160 acres) of land for fourteen dollars an acre and boarded with the family of Joseph McCoy Sr. on McCoy's farm. He paid his board by turning out chairs made from solid hickory wood grown on the premises; and after soldiering in Missouri's Mormon War of 1838 married on April 27, 1839, Rebecca Marie, McCoy's seventeen-year-old daughter. But Galen Clark was at that time of his life a rover,

and after seven or eight years in Missouri he returned to Philadelphia with his wife and their three children. Two more were born to them there; but on February 16, 1848, nine days after the birth of their fifth, Rebecca died.

Whether Galen Clark went to California - via the Isthmus - in 1853 to hunt gold or as a consumptive seeking relief in a balmy climate is debatable. Perhaps his reason was a combination of both. But the lush days of gold rush times were over. He secured employment with a government survey crew running section lines in the San Joaquin Valley region as a camp hunter to supply game. Then in the summer of 1854 he went into Mariposa County avowedly in quest of gold.

Although the climate of the region thoroughly agreed with him, the laborious work of mining did not. Furthermore, his

mining claims brought him no returns. Reduced to penury, he sought and found employment with the Ditch Company of John C. Fremont, the erstwhile Pathfinder, formed to channel water to Mariposa from the South Fork of the Merced River.

It was while surveying with two companions that Clark first saw the tall sequoias of Mariposa Grove which so impressed him. Their average height was about 275 feet, though some towered to 325, while their diameters at the ground averaged from 25 to more than 30.

Clark resolved to spend the balance of his life among the big trees, and in March of 1856 he filed a claim for 160 acres on the South Fork of the Merced "for agricultural and grazing purposes." By December 1869 he had increased his holdings to 1,200 acres. His only near neighbors were the local Nuchus Indians who came to respect him highly. While working in the mines, his lungs had grown progressively weaker and bleeding had begun. His physicians prognosticated that in all probability he had but a few months longer to live, but life among the sequoias where he hunted, wandered and explored the mountains breathing the pure air worked wonders, and the bleeding was healed. He wore no hat and often went barefooted.

In 1857 he thoroughly explored the Mariposa Grove, counting and measuring the trees. In the fall of the year he found the two-miles-square Fresno Grove, some six or seven miles distant from the Mariposa,

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and farther and farther he wandered into the Yosemite Valley. At Wawona, Galen built a twelve-by-sixteen-foot cabin which he kept constantly stocked with food – game of all kinds, potatoes and mountain berries. Any chance passerby was welcome to step in and refresh himself, even in the absence of the owner. “Walk in and help yourselves, but please close and fasten the door,” read his hospitable sign.

1857 was a year of rapidly developing horse trails and rudimentary highway construction in the region, and the settlers were eagerly anticipating the arrival of tourists with the trade they would bring. Clark built and opened an extensive hotel at Wawona on borrowed money, but ran the place with a large staff, a high overhead and in the most haphazard and incompetent manner. He set a fine table, but Clark was never a successful businessman and was happy to sell out in 1874.

On March 24, 1864, California’s Senator John Conness introduced in the United States Congress a bill providing that the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove of big trees be granted to the State of California on condition that the premises be held for public use for all time. Governor Frederick F. Low named eight competent persons as a Board of Commissioners, his happiest and most popular selection being Galen Clark. The board named Clark Guardian of the

Yosemite Valley in May 1866, his duties being similar to those of a modern park ranger. Always a conservationist, he was charged with the grant’s prudential oversight – forbidding the unauthorized cutting of trees and breaking of boughs, discouraging the lighting of fires in dry grassy areas, clearing trails and repairing bridges, disallowing the posting of advertising signs and putting a stop to vandalism of any kind. In the performance of his duties, Galen displayed both tact and subtlety and gave universal satisfaction.

It was as an outdoorsman that Galen excelled. During his many years in the region, he had familiarized himself with every species of shrub, grass and flower. John Muir spoke of him as being the best mountaineer he had ever met. On his first trip to the Yosemite, in 1868, Muir had stayed with Clark and knew him as the Guardian of the Valley. Clark found in Muir a kindred spirit and accompanied him on all three of his excursions. Muir states that he could hardly keep up with Clark as Galen forced his way through twisted vines, tangled underbrush and densely grown thickets. When they cooked oatmeal or made tea, it was always Clark’s pot that was the first to boil. He could shin a tree as readily as a ten-year-old and with a body now hard as nails sleep

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## Gone But Not Forgotten

Galen Clark never returned to Dublin, but he didn’t forget it. While staying in New York in 1851 on his way to California, he wrote a set of verses of which the first stanza is a fair sample.

### *The Old Country Church*

*On a lofty hill’s summit the old church stood,  
With its tall pointed spire constructed of wood;  
Its high ridg’d roof did the rains so divide,  
They by two distant rivers flow’d to Atlantic’s bold tide;  
It commanded a view of the country around,  
And the finest of scenery which there does abound.*

The church referred to was the second meetinghouse, which stood on the north side of the Old Common, right on the divide between the Connecticut and Merrimack watersheds.

Nor was Clark forgotten in Dublin. In 1956, Emma Brayton, a great-niece of Clark’s, sent a copy of these verses, along with photographs and other Clark mate-

rial, to the late Henry D. Allison, father of Hildreth and author of *Dublin Days Old and New*. Using this information, the Rev. Lyman Rutledge, then minister of the Community Church, held a special service to honor Galen and Galen’s brother, the Rev. George Faber Clark, on Sunday, November 17, 1956.

In 1912 John Muir, Galen Clark’s better-known successor and founder of the Sierra Club, published a book of memoirs entitled *The Yosemite*, in which he devoted a laudatory chapter to Galen Clark. In her book, *Galen Clark, Yosemite Guardian*, published by the Sierra Club in 1964, Shirley Sargent acknowledges Henry D. and Hildreth Allison as sources of information on Clark’s childhood in Dublin. The book is still in print, and is available at the Yosemite gift shop.

Most recently, Galen Clark is mentioned as John Muir’s precursor in Dayton Duncan’s *The National Parks – America’s Best Idea* (2009), the companion volume to Ken Burns’s television series.

as easily upon a bed of flinty stones as on a feather mattress.

With the adoption of a new state constitution in 1879, the old Board of Yosemite Commissioners was unseated. Clark was removed as Guardian and a new custodian was named in his stead. Galen, who as usual possessed little money, was granted a lease on the house he had occupied in the Valley at one dollar per annum. He eked out a living by driving his nine-seater buggy for hire to all points of interest within the Park; but ten years and three Guardians later Galen, now seventy-five years old, was returned to his former job. He continued as Guardian of the Yosemite Valley until October 19, 1896, when at the age of eighty-two he notified the Commission of his pending retirement.

In 1890 he had built a winter home in Summerland, California, and to this he now retired; but always at the first indication of spring he returned to the Yosemite for many a summer to come, guiding tourist parties, answering questions on the Park's geology, flora and fauna and interpreting the Valley.

Galen Clark was a writer of sorts, sending articles, usually in letter form, to such publications as the *Mariposa Gazette* and *California Farmer*. He was the author of three little books: *Indians of the Yosemite* (1904); *Big Trees of California* (1907); and *The Yosemite Valley* (1910). Occasionally, too, he composed a poem.

Clark's death occurred at the home of his daughter, Elvira Lee, in Oakland just after making arrangements for the publication of his last book and as he was preparing for another season in the Yosemite. He contracted a cold and died of bronchial pneumonia on March 24, 1910. Some years before he had selected a plot in the Yosemite cemetery and planted sequoia seedlings about it that by the time of his demise had grown into healthy saplings. Marking his grave is a rough granite boulder upon which only the name *Galen Clark* is chiseled.

Tributes to Clark were published in the leading California newspapers, but the most fitting was that written by Ben C. Truman in his introduction to Clark's *The Yosemite Valley*:

"There have been many noble Knights of the High Sierras, but Galen Clark was one of the noblest of them all."

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## SOCIETY NEWS

### NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following as new members for 2010:

Holly Alderman

Ian & Grace Aldrich

Bruce & Carol Armer

David & Louisa Birch

Diana Burnham

Charles Champagne & Carole Monroe

Arthur & Margaret Flick

Allan & Christie Greene

Barbara Duckett & John McPeake

Rob & Jodi Seaver

Bruce & Ying Simpson

Roderick & Alfre Spencer

Warren Wallis

David & Rosemary Wolpe

### A NEW TRUSTEE

At their meeting on January 9, the Trustees elected **Ian Aldrich** to the Board for a three-year term. Ian is an editor-at-large at *Yankee*, and has distinguished Dublin roots, being a great-great-grandson of George deForest Brush. In addition, he is married to Nancy Perkins's grand-daughter, Grace. The Aldrich's live on the old Perkins property off the Upper Jaffrey Road.

### CALENDAR

The Society's **2010 Calendar** was both an artistic and a commercial success, and is very nearly sold out. Of the 550 copies printed, we have about four left. Final figures aren't in yet, but the Treasurer estimates that we cleared about \$2,300.

All praise and thanks to President Henry James and Vice-President Sarah Bauhan, who conceived the theme of paintings of the mountain by Dublin artists, and between them did all the photography, layout and production work.

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## C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society Newsletter was edited by John Harris.

Design & layout by Heidi Thomas of Little House Graphics.