

The following was submitted by Cassie Hill whose great-great-grandfather was John Dickson Stephens. Cassie's grandmother gave her this manuscript in 1967. It is, as far as is known to her, unpublished. But recently a man in California told her that he found it in the Bancroft library and it is from Hubert Bancroft's notes for his History of California series. Cassie transcribed it because she wants to do a booklet of Joseph Stephens's family genealogies for the state DAR to keep at Roslyn Heights. As she say, "People are always asking about family history".

## JOHN DICKSON STEPHENS

The great valley of California, particularly the northern and middle portions of it, was little better than a wilderness, though one of the most beautiful wilds of nature that the sun ever shown upon, when there appeared upon the scene a party of emigrants, among whom was John Dickson Stephens and his associates from Missouri, who began to test the possibilities of that region for the maintenance of civilized communities. The superficial efforts in this direction had thus far been confined to the strip of seaboard extending from San Diego to San Francisco bays, where it was clearly proved that from a little scratching of the soil great returns would follow. But in the vast and sometimes called arid plain back of the Coast range the problem had yet to be solved, whether or not cattle-raising and grain-growing could be made profitable. To the solution of this problem Mr. Stephens early devoted his energies, and with what success will be full shown by this narrative of his life.

John Dickson Stephens was born on the spot where now stands the town of Bunceton, Cooper county, Missouri, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of September 1826. His father, Joseph Stephens, was a native of Virginia, and the son of Welch parents, who immigrated to America prior to the revolutionary war. His mother, nee' Catherine Dickson, was the daughter of Josiah and Isabella Dickson, both of whom were born in Scotland, and of old-fashioned Presbyterian stock, which probably had some influence in imparting to him many of those high principles of honor and integrity which he processes. The elder Stephens removed to Missouri in 1817. He was in comfortable circumstances, and a successful stock-raiser and farmer in a then sparsely settled portion of Missouri. During the years of his youth, therefore, John had but few associates beyond those of his immediate relatives. He was one of twenty-four children, and the offspring of the second wife of his father who had four sons and five daughters, of whom he was the second child.

His father was a man whose character was unimpeachable, and his word was as good as his bond. While exercising stern discipline in his family and instilling the strictest moral principles, he was not averse to engaging in such recreations as were appropriate, pleasing, and healthful. At that time the surrounding country was infested with wolves, foxes, and deer, and the settlers frequently engaged in the chase, meeting together for a day's sport. He kept a large pack of hounds, and a number of good horses-horse-breeding being, indeed, an

industry as well as a pastime-and these expeditions were looked forward to by the young folks with the greatest pleasure.

Young Stephens acquired his education at a private school, as at that time there was no public school in this section of the state. It included all the higher English branches, though to his tastes and ability inclined to mathematics. His tutors were trained instructors, and men of learning. After completing his course, he taught school for two years, up to 1846, when, war with Mexico having been declared, his patriotism led him to join the service, and he enlisted in a company then being organized in Cooper county, Missouri, of which his relative, Joseph L. Stephens, was elected captain, and he was chosen first sergeant, being mustered into service at St. Louis in June 1846. About this time news was received that General Taylor had gained an important victory, and the company was ordered home to be held in readiness for active service, though it was never called upon, and at the close of the war was disbanded.

Mr. Stephens then commenced the study of medicine, which he diligently pursued until the news of the discovery of gold in California created such an excitement in the Atlantic states that he determined to investigate the matter. With his brother, George D., and a few relatives, he joined a company of mountaineer trappers at Independence, consisting of about forty-five persons, and the party was so thoroughly mounted, equipped, and organized that the trip to California was one of pleasure rather than a hardship. They traveled by the way of the South pass, Fort Bridger, and Salt Lake, and were piloted by two of Fremont's men, one of whom was Captain Cosgrove. Reaching Sacramento August 1, 1849, they went immediately to the mines near Mormon island, on the American river, and commenced operations with the pan and rocker. The net results were not satisfactory to John D. Stephens, as he could earn only about eight dollars per day, and after spending about one month in the mines he passed the winter in Sacramento and Yolo counties, examining the country with a view to raising cattle. The Yolo plains were covered with wild oats and other grasses, and there were but few white men in the country at the time. William Gordon, J. R. Wolfskill, William Knight, and Paddy Clark were the sole residents of that portion of the country west of the tules. Stephens selected his land, and settling in the valley near the present town of Madison, entered upon the business of cattle farming.

When leaving his home, he and his brother had taken the precaution to bring with them sufficient money to carry them back, but after a year's residence in California they became so attached to the country and the climate that they had no desire to return, and decided to sell their farms in Missouri.

In the year 1850 Mr. Stephens tested the qualities of the soil for producing small grain, and his experiment proved a success. He planted a crop of barley, though merely for feeding stock, for at that time the market was too far away to think of raising grain for shipment. This was about the first trial of the capabilities of the land for the cultivation of cereals in this section of the state, and the yield was abundant.

In 1851 John D. and George D. Stephens, John Q. Adams, and John S. Jurey purchased about a league and a half of the Mexican grant known as the Rancho Canada de Ca-

pay. This is considered the choicest piece of land in the county, situated in the valley below the mouth of Capay canon, with Cache creek running through it. The same parties were interested with him in raising cattle and other stock, though in the management of all their affairs, he took a leading part, and they continued to prosper, making frequent trips to Missouri for cattle, mules, and horses, until with the decrease in mining and the increase in farming, the business became less remunerative. In 1856 Jurey sold his interest in the grant to the Stephens brothers, and a few years later, that of J. Q. Adams was transferred to them, and to a kinsman of the latter. To avoid annoyance from squatters, John D. Stephens repaired to Washington city and secured a patent for the land.

In the early days of California cattle-stealing and land-grabbing were considered crimes demanding capital punishment, and lynching the usual mode of execution. Mr. Stephens was connected with one case of lynching a thief who had stolen cattle from him and his neighbors, and one wherein he defended a neighbor against four land-grabbers, when two of them were seriously shot. In both cases he was tried by the lawfully constituted tribunal and honorably acquitted.

After ceasing to raise cattle on an extensive scale, Mr. Stephens and his brother established an agency in Ohio for the purchase of fine horses and brood mares, which were brought to California, and with this was combined the business of raising mules, which was also a source of profit, valuable animals being bought for this purpose. Mr. Stephens has been tireless in his efforts to improve the grade of his stock, and on their extensive ranch can now be seen fine stock of all descriptions, including game chickens, swine, sheep, Durham cattle, mules and horses.

During the year 1856 he purchased and drove to his rancho about two thousand head of sheep from Rowles & Rawson, who were engaged in the business on land now covered by the city of Oakland. This was the first attempt at sheep husbandry on a large scale in Yolo county. From its first organization till 1864 he was a constant patron of the state fair, and was always successful in securing premiums on the merits of his fine stock. As an instance of his pride in the way of improving stock, he and his brother bought the celebrated Southdown ram "The World's Prize," which had taken the premium at all the important fairs in Europe, including those held at Berlin, London, and Paris prior to 1860. It was imported by Mr. Taylor of New Jersey, and for this animal Mr. Stephens paid \$2,000 shipping it to California in 1862.

On the first of April 1861, Mr. Stephens took passage on a vessel for New York, having with him his wife and daughter, for the purpose of visiting Missouri. They traveled by way of Nicaragua, and after leaving Greytown, the officers of the vessel were astonished at the scarcity of sails on the ocean, which astonishment increased until they arrived in New York harbor, and learned that the civil war had begun in earnest. From New York they proceeded to St. Louis, via Cincinnati, and the sound of fife and drum and the call "to arms" were heard at every station on the way. Being a man of keen observation and excellent judgment, he was not slow in making up his mind as to the final result. During his stay at his old home in Cooper county, he witnessed some exciting scenes, as that part of the state,

was at the time, the seat of war, and within a few miles of the place he was visiting were fought the battles of Boonville, where General Lyon drove Price to Wilson creek, and of Wilson creek where Lyon was killed. The noise of the cannon at Boonville was very distinct, and stragglers from the army passed the house, terror-stricken and demoralized. He remained in the east until the following autumn, and after placing his daughter in a female seminary at Tipton, Missouri, returned to California. In 1862 he again visited the east, this time going by way of Panama, and remaining during the following winter and spring.

In his political creed Mr. Stephens has always been a democrat, as was his father before him; the latter being a great admirer of Jackson and Benton, after whom he named two of his sons. Though never a candidate for office, he has always taken an active interest in national, state, and county politics. He considers that of all the modern statesmen, Samuel J. Tilden and James G. Blaine stood at the head of the two parties in point of ability. Though a firm supporter of his party, he thinks that honesty, integrity, and ability should control in the selection of all civil officers.

His theory in regard to labor and capital is that their relations should be reciprocal, and that where invested capital is receiving but a moderate income, labor should be regulated accordingly, and the burden of one borne equally by the other. He is also of opinion that a tariff, framed solely with a view to revenue, would be that most beneficial to the government. His ideas in regard to railroads, which he considers the most dangerous of monopolies, are, that the power which grants franchises, whether state or national, should have the right to regulate them and adjust all differences arising between the corporation and the people. Aggregated capital in corporate bodies is dangerous because it remains intact, while that which is in the hands of individuals is distributed at their death.

The question of immigration he regards from the true American standpoint, and is in favor of checking the constant influx from Europe of the pauper element now crowding into the United States. He is also of opinion that a law restricting the immigration of Chinese, though not entirely in sympathy with the present law, is essential to the welfare of the country, and that by the time the Mongolian population shall have disappeared, through the operations of the existing law, the Caucasian race will be educated to take their places in the workshops and other branches of industry, but that a sudden expulsion would prove disastrous. The elective franchise, he thinks, should be securely guarded by some qualification that would insure a responsible and intelligent use of the ballot. He believes that the perpetuity of the government is based upon the social equality of citizens, and hence no aristocracy, in the usual acceptation of that term, can ever exist in this country so long as it remains a republic. The true aristocrat is the individual of good morals, strict integrity, noble instincts, and high resolves.

While thus entertaining sound practical views as to the affairs of the nation, his own enterprises and liberality have contributed in no small degree to the welfare of the state. In 1859 he organized the Capay Ditch company, of which he was appointed president, for the purpose of conveying the water from Cache Creek canon to the valley, whereupon a preliminary survey was made, though actual work was not begun until the dry season of 1864.

During that year several miles of ditch were constructed, and a few years afterward the canal was sunk to a level with the bed of the creek at its headwaters; and since that time water has been used by the people for irrigation. It is about ten miles in length, terminating near the town of Madison.

In 1864 he went to Virginia City, Nevada, taking with him a considerable amount of capital wherewith to operate among the business men and miners. There were others occupying the same field, and while taking stock as surety they would often go to bed rich and arise poor, their security having faded away during the night. After an experience of three years, Mr. Stephens was justified in entertaining a fair opinion of his financial abilities, for he found that he had as much money remaining as he brought with him to Virginia City.

Returning from Nevada, he made an overland trip to San Diego, in company with Major Wilcoxson, in search of grazing lands. Not finding sufficient inducements, he returned to Yolo county, where he decided to organize a bank in Woodland, the county-seat, and a flourishing town of about one thousand inhabitants. He presented the subject to a few of the more wealthy citizens, who seemed to be favorably impressed, and, as his custom was to act promptly, the capital was at once subscribed, and the Bank of Woodland was established and incorporated in 1868, with a capital stock of \$100,000. The officers elected were John D. Stephens, president; F. S. Freeman, vice-president; and C. W. Bush, cashier. The business was a success from the start; and the capital stock has gradually increased from time to time until it reaches the sum of \$921,000. Since the organization of the bank it has been under the direct management of Mr. Stephens, who has held office continually, and his administration has been so entirely satisfactory that none of the stockholders have ever desired a change. During this time, also, all the first officers of the bank have been retained except the cashier, whose position is now held by C. F. Thomas, elected in place of Mr. Bush. Since the organization of the bank over \$900,000. have been paid in dividends.

Mr. Stephens has always been a liberal patron of educational institutions. He assisted in establishing at an early day the Hesperian academy, in Woodland, is still a member of the board of trustees, and when it was incorporated as a college, and an endowment was asked for, he headed the list with a donation twice as large as that of any other subscriber. To all benevolent enterprises he has been a liberal giver, and but few churches in Yolo county have been erected without his financial aid. While not a member of any church organization, his assistance has always been extended to these civilizing institutions. He has been a member of the Masonic fraternity for about thirty-five years, and is a charter member of the Woodland Commandery of Knights Templar, of which he has occupied the position of Eminent Commander. He is also a member of the Sacramento Society of California Pioneers the California Historical Society, and has been a member of the Union Club of San Francisco since 1883.

In 1871 the Pneumatic Gas company of San Francisco attempted to furnish light for the town of Woodland, but after an unsuccessful run of a year or two, the works were purchased by a home association, of which Mr. Stephens was president, and under the new management coal gas has been used with success.

In 1872 J. W. Peek undertook by his own individual enterprise to furnish water for the town, and after succeeding in putting the works in operation, the supply proved both costly and insufficient; Mr. Stephens again came to the front, and, with two other enterprising men, furnished an abundant supply, sufficient for all demands for steam fire-engines, and domestic use.

As to the future of California, he thinks that her beneficent climate and productive soil will induce many to come to this coast who may prefer to reside here permanently, even at a sacrifice of business interests, and that within twenty years real estate values will increase one hundred per cent over what they are now in this section of the state. He believes that within that time the population of California will not be less than 3,000,000.

Mr. Stephens was married on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January of 1854 to Mary F. Alexander, at Bel-lair, Missouri. His wife's family was of Scotch descent, and settled in Virginia at an early day, the city of Alexandria being named after her grandfather. A native of Kentucky, whence the family removed in 1845, she is a highly educated and accomplished lady, possessed of remarkable dignity and grace. Three children were the issue of this marriage, of whom the two youngest died in infancy, and the surviving daughter is now living, the wife of Joseph Craig, at one time state senator from the tenth district of San Francisco and at present a member of the board of state prison directors.

Mr. Stephens' home in Woodland is a neat and tasteful abode, built in the most modern style, with large and beautiful grounds occupying an entire block in the southern portion of the town, and standing in the midst of a forest of shade-trees. Around it is an orange grove in full bearing, with magnolias, palms, cedars of Lebanon, and almost every variety of trees, including native oaks, while the lawn is covered with blue grass and a carriage drive of concrete stone leads from the street to its front. His house is well furnished with every comfort and in his trim and well kept garden-plat flowers of every variety bloom in season.

Among his tastes is a fondness for relics, and from every portion of the world in which he has traveled he has samples of their peculiar products. His cabinet of curios is one of the richest and most complete in the country, and he has specimens from all the rich gold and silver mines, together with most of the minerals of this country; molten lava from the crater of Vesuvius and Kilauea, and costly paintings from his native and other lands. While in Honolulu he purchased one of the masterpieces of Tavernier, a picture of the burning lake in the crater of Kilauea.

In physique and appearance he is a man five feet ten inches in height, and with a compact and well knit frame, his weight being one hundred and eighty pounds. His features are regular, with a broad, capacious forehead, steel-gray eyes, light brown hair, full whiskers, of a light color, and both hair and whiskers tinted with gray. From his father he inherited great firmness of character, with principles of the strictest rectitude, and habits of economy; and from his mother, a kind and liberal disposition; for, while he holds in high appreciation the honor and dignity of true manhood, his benevolence and liberality have ever been conspicuous. He is not what might be called a fluent conversationalist, but expresses

his ideas briefly, and to the point. He is never taken by surprise in conversation, is a ready reader of character, and makes but few mistakes in his estimates. In business he is punctual and is generally better satisfied when he attends to it himself. To this may be largely attributed the fact that he has never engaged in any enterprise that has not been a success. He has strong sympathies for the unfortunate and is always ready to extend relief to the distressed, though no one will ever know the extent of his private charities, while many have felt them, for his liberality is proverbial. He has been the promoter and patron of almost every work of public necessity and improvement in the town of Woodland, and to none of the pioneers is northern California more deeply indebted for the development of her manifold resources.

While Mr. Stephens has been very successful in his business ventures, he has not been so deeply immersed therein as to deny himself all pleasures and recreation, having traveled extensively both in Europe and America. In 1876 he attended the centennial celebration at Philadelphia, visiting nearly all the Atlantic states and Canada, and was present at the democratic national convention at St. Louis, which nominated Samuel J. Tilden. In 1878 he took a trip to Europe, visiting the ancient ruins, wonders, and curiosities of the old world. He traveled in England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and Prussia, and was particularly interested in examining the famous battle-field of Waterloo. During his stay in Paris, he celebrated the Fourth of July in company with other Americans. In 1881 he made a trip to Chicago, together with W. G. Hunt of Woodland, combining business with pleasure. In 1883 he visited the Yellowstone National park, going by way of Salt Lake, and returning by the Northern Pacific railroad, visiting Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. In 1885 he attended the New Orleans exposition, and also made a tour of several of the southern states.

In 1887 he accompanied the Masonic expedition to the Sandwich islands. During his stay there he visited all the principal cities and towns and the natural curiosities of that group of islands, including the famous volcano of Kilauea and the crater of Haleakala.

In 1888 in company with a number of Woodland and San Francisco friends he made a trip to Alaska for the purpose of investigation and to see the wonders of that country. He visited Glazier bay, Sitka, Fort Wrangel, Juneau, and all the points of interest as far north as Chilkat, inspecting the celebrated Treadwell mine with its 240-stamp mill, and studying carefully the peculiar industries of the natives.

Although Mr. Stephens has passed the meridian of life, and has been actively and energetically engaged in large business transactions, laying the foundation for still grander developments, he retains a very remarkable fund of vitality, both physically and mentally. His will force is powerful and vigorous, and having achieved success by a persistent endeavor to combine the social and physical forces which surrounded him in the work of progress, he does not consider his labors ended so long as his natural abilities can be employed to advance the best interests of the state of his adoption. By the labors of men of such mold has California emerged, in a short space of time, from a wilderness to a magnificent empire, where the highest development of manhood and civilization must eventually find a home.

