

The Story of H.J. Van Ness,
and of the early days of Northern California Mining
as told by Louise E. Van Ness

A Van Ness Family History

Based on the David Riker Manuscript titled: The Ancestors and Decendants of Simon Van Ness and Hester DeLamater

About 1897 or 1898 an old fellow by the name of J. Wes Moore, a Civil War Veteran, Located on a river bar on the opposite side of the Trinity River from Five Pines about one mile distant. He cleared off land for a garden, built himself a cabin and also a ditch to the upper end of the bar for a water supply to irrigate the garden and mine the top sand on the river bank which carried in some places quite a concentration of flat gold. With what he could raise plus the gold he found, he made a living. We of Five Pines became well acquainted with the old fellow. He liked to have my brother and I visit him and go hunting which we did quite often as the deer and bear liked to range along the little creek back of Moore's cabin. We would go over to his place in the evening and stay all night and go hunting in the morning. Moore was a poor shot but would ramble through the brushy patches and play dog, and we most always got a deer. We hunted quite often as in those days all the meat we had was venison. In fact during five or six years we had or saw no other kind of meat except bacon. We had to have that to go in the beans as they were the main dish at all meals. When it happened, sometimes at breakfast there were no beans on the table, I have heard some of the working miners exclaim, "What, no beans!"

To sit by old Moore's fireplace and have him spin yarns of his younger days, dances and parties he had been to, and antics of the girls and boys of his Civil War days was very interesting. These tales were as interesting and exciting to our sixteen or seventeen years as a moon romance is to the kids of that age today, and more so as our associates with a few exceptions were old men and all they talked was mining with a political argument thrown in now and then.

Moore would get his old fiddle out and rattle off the three or four old fashioned tunes he could play and he played them well. Leaning back, with his eyes shut in a kind of revelry with the fire giving off a steamy vapor, the smell of which made us hungry. The memories of these things, I would not trade for all the amusements furnished our kids of today to keep them out of mischief.

Moore made his living for many years from his garden and mining. A man named Brown came by and said he was busted and asked Moore where he might find a job. Moore did not know of any job this man might get but took him to his cabin and fed him and told Brown for a while he might work the river sands along with him and they would split what they made. Brown went to work with Moore and in a few days along came another busted man looking for a job. Moore told him that he and Brown were making a living out of the sand and there was room for one more as the sluice would carry through all the three of them could shovel in. So this man named Alverson went to work with them.

Thus they lived for several weeks. During this time Brown was told by someone of a bar several miles further down the river where the sands were richer. He and Alverson decided to go down there and locate this bar. They found some old boards and made a sluice box. Moore gave them all the help he could and they rustled some old tin buckets and cans to cook in and moved down to the bar which they had located. Several days later Brown was up at Moore's and as Moore had two dish pans he loaned one to Brown.

Alverson was ambitious and a hard worker, Brown was lazy and they didn't agree very well so Alverson came up to Five Pines and struck Dad for a Job. Dad sized him up as a big, pleasant looking fellow, and as he needed a man to help him gave Alverson a job. He worked for Dad quite a long time. Dad learned to like Alverson quite well and in time confided to him that some parties had bought a portion of the railroad ground thinking they could take from Dad part of his Five Pines claim as the section line split the mining location in the center lengthwise. He was going ahead with his mining and tunnel work anyway and no one had interfered with him yet. He told Alverson that Uncle Edd had had a location south of Dads mining location on which was a seam and out of this vein or seam Uncle had taken a hundred dollar pocket. Alverson had read in some mining magazine that the railroad could not hold mineral ground as the government had reserved all mineral. He asked Dad if he would object to him taking up that piece of ground. Dad said he didn't claim the ground and didn't care but in his opinion it wasn't worth fighting a lawsuit for. Alverson put a mining location up and said he was going to try and find a pocket as in his circumstances a small one would be a help, and on Sundays he would put in his time digging. He did but it wasn't long until some one informed those who had purchased the railroad title that Alverson had put a location on a portion of it and they sent a couple of men to order him off and they came and did. He told them he was going to work there until the parties that had sent them to order him off proved their title to the ground would hold. The men acted real mean and Alverson told them if they were looking for trouble to just pick in and he would give them all they wanted. They thought better of it and walked away.

Alversons ex-partner, Brown, had left and he had not returned the dish pan that he had borrowed from Moore. Moore came by our place one day when Alverson was sitting on the steps in front of his sleeping quarters. Moore stopped and asked him when he intended to bring that dish pan back that he and Brown had borrowed. Alverson said he had nothing to do with the borrowing of it but if he ever got down to where he and Brown had camped and could find the pan, he would bring it up to Moore. Moore said it is hanging on a nail on an alder tree where your camp had been. Alverson asked if you were there and saw the pan why didn't you take it. Moore said you fellows borrowed it and it is up to you to bring it back and by gosh you are going to. Moore waked away before Alverson could answer. Soon after this Moore got up one morning and went out to his sluice boxes and they were gone. They had been dumped in the river and floated away. Shortly after this, Moore's boat was gone. Moore looked for miles down the river but couldn't find it so he built a raft and it soon was cut loose and floated off. Moore was tormented until he was wild. I believe he thought Alverson was the one who was doing him all the dirt. When these doings came to our knowledge at Five Pines Alverson said I'd like to catch the stinkers that are doing those kinds of tricks to get Moore mad at me. Alverson wasn't the kind to stoop to low tricks and was working every day for Dad during this time, and sleeping in the same cabin with me every night so we knew he had nothing to do with it.

One day after all this had happened, **Mr. Hubble** came up from the place he and Ed Butler had taken up and were farming, raising beans and potatoes for which there was always a good market at the mines. **Hubble** asked Dad if he could spare Alverson for a day as he needed a big heavy man to hold the plow as he was breaking some new ground. He wanted to get his potatoes in as soon as possible and he told Dad he would pay Alverson for his time. Alverson said you don't pay me anything. I will get a kick out of it, I haven't plowed since I came west. He knew **Hubble** and Ed were having a hard time getting started. The next morning, Alverson, after breakfast, left for **Hubble's** place. He asked me to go along but I couldn't as Dad couldn't spare us both. Dad and I worked at the Five Pines. At about three o'clock **Mr. Hubble** came to our tunnel all out of breath and greatly excited and told us Moore had come to his and Ed's cabin about two o'clock, just as they were finishing their midday meal and stood in the open doorway and shot Alverson down in cold blood. That he believed Moore was about half drunk. Alverson had just finished his meal and had got up from the table and was looking at some books in a box nailed to the cabin

wall. **Hubble** spoke to Moore and Alverson turned and faced the doorway. As Alverson turned, Moore raised his rifle and drew a bead on Alverson's chest and said will you get that dish pan. Alverson said pull up that gun or I will take it away from you and give you a spanking. Moore pulled the trigger and Alverson fell, face down on the cabin floor. Moore now turned and drew a bead on Ed Butler who was sitting at the far end of the table and said you were mixed up in this dirty work too. **Mr. Hubble** grabbed the gun barrel and swung it away from Ed and said Moore you have just killed one man, I know Ed had nothing to do with anything that has happened to you. All the time Moore was jerking the rifle with the hammer raised valiantly back and forth across Hubble's stomach. **Hubble** finally lost his hold and Moore switched the gun on Ed again but Ed had ducked under the table and Hubble was still pleading with Moore. Ed was in position now where Moore could not get a good aim at him. **Hubble's** word was good with everyone and under **Hubble's** pleading, Moore cooled down and asked Ed if he could swear he had nothing to do with the damn dirty things that had been done. Ed swore he had done no dirt to Moore or anyone else which was undoubtedly the truth. By a hairs breath Ed was spared Alversons fate. Moore shouldered his gun and started back up the river toward his own place. The minute Moore was out of sight, Ed Butler started **for Weaverville, twenty seven miles** away. Moore must have decided to go to Weaverville and give himself up and taken the trail over the long ridge that ran between the **Weaverville road and the Trinity River** and Ed must go over this trail too, by a miracle they did not meet. Ed was young and a very rapid walker and probably got onto the trail before Moore did. At Old Minersville, Jesse Twitlott ran the general store and the post office and was also deputy sheriff. Then Ed reached **Minersville** he told what had happened. Jesse Twitlott saddled his horse and started out to get Moore but had only gone a short way when he met Moore coming down. Moore surrendered to Jesse and willingly went with him. At Minersville, Jesse hitched the horse to a buggy and drove Moore to Weaverville. They did not pick up Ed as under the stimulus of what he had been through he undoubtedly beat them to Weaverville.

In time Moore was brought to trial and I was summoned as one of the witnesses. Dan Hall who was District Attorney of Trinity County at that time called each witness into his office and found out what evidence we had to offer. When I told him I thought Moore had been tormented and goaded in to what he had done and what Alverson said when he heard about Moore's boats, sluices, etc., Mr. Hall said the evidence I had to offer would not help his case and I could go home if I wanted to. I stayed and listened to the trial. Moore was convicted and given a life sentence but became ill and his sentence was commuted so he could go back to the old home town from which he came. He died within a few days after reaching there. Thus ends the life of two men whose end I believe was due to cowardly acts of others.

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Dad finished his job and sprayed the coops. Dad said he would sell the dang place lock stock and barrel or give it away one way or another. They were pretty blue and a day or so later they received a letter from a **Mrs. Hubble**, and she said she and her father were looking for a chicken ranch. They gave the date she and her father would arrive.

Dad met them at the depot and drove them to the ranch. The chickens were all looking quite perky after their bath. **Mr. Hubble** the father had come from the mountains of Trinity County and was quite favorably impressed. He had been an early day placer miner and school teacher at Trinity Center, and also a Justice of the Peace. He and dad were like old friends from the start. A bargain was made and dad threw in old Nell our little black horse and the spring wagon and that clinched the deal. **Mr. Hubble** went into the chicken business.

The course of life's road men travel must sometimes be mapped ahead, as the add in the San Francisco paper brought two old men over sixty, together, with a friendship and close association

that lasted through the remainder of their lives, twenty five more years. This brought to dad more success and great adventure than he had experienced in all his young life.

After the sale of the chicken ranch, dad purchased a house on Wilder Street in Los Gatos. He paid for it with the money he had received from the chicken ranch. When we moved in, mother, my brother's and I thought it was a pretty fine house. It was plastered with hair and lime that wouldn't stand hard knocks but was the best to be had in those days. There was a bathroom with a zinc tub, a toilet in one corner, this was all luxury in the extreme, but there was a drawback. On one corner of the house there was a five hundred gallon tank over the well and every day my brothers and I had to pump the tank full, while the rest of the boys on the block were doing their marble playing in front of our house.

The style for boys under fourteen was short pants and long ribbed black stockings, which were always in holes with our knees sticking out. This shocked our mothers very much. One of the boys mothers had a scheme that worked very well. When her son would rush in just before school time with a hole in his stocking at the knees, she would roll down the stocking and dab the spot with black shoe polish, roll back the stocking and it worked very well. It saved lots of last minute worries.

Dad worked at carpenter jobs and built a winery for someone near Mountain View. **Mr. Hubbell** and dad visited one another almost every Sunday. They both thought and talked the same language, Mining and more mining. The wealth taken from the earth would hurt no one and was a benefit to all. Digging gold was the honest way to gain wealth, a beautiful dream. Most old men's dreams are just dreams, but this one was destined to become true. **Mr. Hubbell** told many yarns of Trinity and Siskiyou. He said that there were still some good mines to be found up in that northern part of California.

One evening at supper time dad said he was going prospecting. He said we didn't have anything and never would if he stayed in Los Gatos. My mother thought that we were at least eating and had clothes on our backs. Dad was determined, he knew that at his age it was going to be harder to get work and his son's would not be old enough to support themselves for a long time. He got a small loan on the house and gave mother most of it to live on while he was away, taking only a few dollars for himself. Dad said he would not be back till he had found a gulch creek or a bar on a river, where he could dig out a living in his old age.

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Mr. Hubble and dad renewed their friendship. **Mr. Hubble** had had all the chicken business he wanted and told dad he was coming back up to Trinity as soon as he could sell the damn chicken ranch. He wanted to know about the formation and how it looked and where the pockets formed and so forth. **Hubble** knew much more about formation and quartz mining than dad and told him that he probably was on a slate and porphyry contact and he bet it would make more pockets. In this belief he was right. Dad said he believed he had a chance for a good placer mine in the gulch and creek and if he could make anything he would rather be there to take the lease. The winter slipped by and February, dad thought it time to go back. Our old neighbor, the Butler family, was still living on their side hill ranch. Their oldest son Ed came and asked dad if he had a job for him. Dad gave him a job placering in the gulch with him and Uncle Edd. Ed Butler, like most of the young fellows of those days, hadn't been very far from his home. So to go to far off Trinity County was a chance for adventure. If he had known of the hair raising experience he would live through while there, he might not have been so happy in anticipation of events to come. I will tell you this story later if I get that far with this tale.

We were soon on our way back, Ed Butler with us. The camp was all intact. There was lots of water and Dad Placer mined to his hearts content. Ed Butler went hunting the second morning we were there and killed a deer, the first he had ever shot at. He let out a couple of big whoops

and I went up the hill and helped him pack it down on a pole and there is no harder way. When we got it to the cabin, Uncle Edd showed us how to skin the lower part of the leg and tie the skin and cut the legs off at the lower joint. In this way one man could pack a fair sized deer much easier than two could on a pole.

Dads' placering paid very well. One nugget weighed fifteen ounces. Ed Butler drove his pick through it while digging down gulch gravel. One day, about the time the rain and snow water had just about gone, the stage stopped and Mr. Hubble got off. Dad and he were as tickled to see one another as a couple of kids. Hubble left his pack bags and blankets and said he was going on to Trinity Center and visit some of his old friends. He would be back in a day or two and take the lease dad had promised him and he was sure that he could show dad that there were more pockets. In a few days he came back, he and Ed Butler became partners. Dad gave them a lease on the quartz vein out of which dad and Datin had taken the pocket. Dad told them they were welcome to occupy the cabin with us, so Hubble built himself a bunk filled it with straw. We all did the same because spring beds through mining country were not common in those days. Although we had only one long room we lived very peacefully and got along fine. Hubble was a Republican and dad was a Democrat when there was a Republican to argue with. In front of the old fire place most every evening there were arguments so hot it kept the cabin warm. Like a couple of lawyers they always got up good friends in the morning.

Dad and Uncle Edd built on a wood shed and all hands cut wood and filled it. Hubble and Edd started an incline shaft or winze on the pocket seam following it down under the over laying slate. In four or five weeks Hubble made good on his boast. He and Ed Butler uncovered a fair sized pocket and also ran in to some bad luck as water began to come in to their winze in dismaying quantities. Hubble went to Redding and bought a double action hand pump but the water came so fast they had a struggle from now on to make any head way. The fall months were here and winter was close. Mother had written that she wasn't very well so dad decided to go home for awhile and take us boys with him so we could go to school. We both wanted to stay and see the snow. Mr. Hubble had been a school teacher and he volunteered to hear our lessons and teach us evenings if dad would send up the school books. It was arranged that way. For our schooling, dad insisted he would pay Hubble's share of the winters grub bill. Before dad got his gold cleaned and other things done he thought necessary, it started to rain and the water came in to Hubbles and Eds incline so fast that they decided to lay off till spring and then try to drain the surface water off with trenches. Ed Butler had been away from his folks for several months and he was home sick to see them. So he went home to Los Gatos along with dad. Uncle Edd had left for the winter. I was a pretty good cook by this time and did most of the cooking. Mr. Hubble had taught school in the earlier days of Trinity Center and was very good at getting along with boys. He showed us how to cut and split an ash tree, cure the pieces under water to keep them from cracking, and we make three pair of skis. We boys each made our own small ones, scraped them smooth with broken glass and with an old pick heated hot on one end and burned a groove along the center of the bottom side. Following Hubble's directions and watching him make his, we did a good job. With pitch and deer tallow we made dope to coat the skis with, and we used them for several years. Mr. Hubble, Lester and I got along fine. I am sure he taught us more than we could have learned at school.

Early in the spring an old Indian and his Squaw made their camp on a little flat near the creek and built a little shelter to live in. The shelter consisted of two willow sticks driven into the ground and were forked at the top. Across the forks which were about three and one half feet above the ground, they laid a good sized willow ridge pole. Two more poles one at each end ran at an angle down to the ground like a brace, two small willow rods across were laced to the braces. Across these there laid fur boughs with the big end of the branch up fastened to the ridge pole and covered this with small boughs to the thickness of about four inches with boughs at each end. This made an enclosure about six feet long and three feet wide. On the ground they

placed a few boughs, with rocks for a fire place just opposite the middle of the enclosure and about one foot out from under the ridge pole. In this shelter the old buck and squaw lived for about two months through rain, snow and freezing weather with the boughs for a bed and a ragged old blanket. The old buck sprawled in back and the squaw sat or laid in the front, took the weather and kept up the fire. If they had any cooking utensils, I never saw them. They came every year for a time and built fish traps out of willow sticks woven together with small willow branches and strips of bark and gathered a thorn covered bush that grew on the mountain side which they laced to poles and laid in the creek as sing damns to guide the fish to the trap. The whole thing was very simple, just a grafting of willow rods about three feet wide and five long, front end under water on some thorny bush held down by a few rocks with the back end sloping gently up to just above the water. Fish swam out on to the rods the water flowed through and left him mostly out of water and every flap of his tail sent him further up the rods. The fish never turned around. Lester and I made a trap just as the Indian had, and caught all the steel head trout we wanted to eat. The Indians dried the fish in this way putting up fish for the rest of the year. The white man catches his steel heads with a hook and line when they are running up stream to spawn. The Indians method was better; he trapped them as they were going back down stream after spawning. In those days the creeks were swarming with small fry every year.

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Hubble and Ed Butler had sank quite a deep shaft, bailing water and pumping most of their time and had found no more pockets. As the water came faster they had to give up. **Mr. Hubble** went to work for dad, maybe Ed Butler did too, I am not certain. At any rate, dad put in a ditch, built a flume, and an over shot water wheel thirty two feet in height. The wheel to furnish power to a arastra which had a bottom of flat rocks set in clay with sides of log section hued in to a circle mitered and doweled together forming a tank or tub about six feet across. In the center there was a shaft propelled by a belt from the water wheel. Across this shaft a timber called the arms, on to these was fastened some big rocks that went churning around in a circle inside the arastra. This arastra would pulverize about one thousand pounds of hard ore in twenty four hours.