

Life on Sausal Creek, 1868-1888

From "The California Recollections of Caspar T. Hopkins," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 27(1), 65-73, (1948).

In the spring of 1868 I sold my lovely home, 524 Post Street, for \$18,000, and once more set out to find a suburban residence where large grounds, fresh air, freedom from obnoxious neighbors, a horse and carriage, fruits, flowers, milk and eggs of our own production, should add to our family comforts and gratify my innate love of country life.

The creation of our beautiful home "Alderwood" in Fruitvale, about five miles out of Oakland, was the result of our present removal. For \$6,000 I purchased six acres of an apple nursery that had been allowed to grow up, there being no market for the trees. There was a small house which I repaired, thinking we could live in it while the children were at school. But it was close quarters. The location was, however, beautiful--in the bottom of the long narrow valley of Sausal Creek, which penetrated the mountains east of Oakland through a steep, narrow, well-wooded cañon, and only a quarter of a mile below its debouchment from the hills. The place was sheltered from the prevailing northwest winds, and its altitude being 125 feet above sea level, it was rarely visited by fogs. The soil was very rich, and the vegetation consequently rank. The creek meandered through the lot in form like the letter S (it has since been straightened and spoiled) and was lined with huge oaks, laurel alder and buck-eye trees. The large alders of California, a tree resembling the eastern beech, were the most numerous; hence we gave the place the name of "Alderwood." They were the charm of the place, and bowers fitted with rustic seats, a rustic bridge and summer house (all my own handiwork at early dawn and dewy eve) soon made the most of their beauties. The improvement of this lovely spot was for several years the joy of my life and I was greatly aided therein by the sympathetic and artistic concurrence of my wife.

I designed a large, low, Gothic cottage with wide porches on three sides. The old house, removed to a new location in a bend of the creek, formed a part of it. The apple trees were nearly all dug out and replaced with two hundred and fifty fine cherry trees, peaches, almonds, apricots, etc. The grounds were laid out in winding avenues, lined with cypress and eucalyptus. A new street was opened and fenced on the north side, shortening the drive to Oakland from five to three miles, and our street lines were planted with walnut, fig, and gum trees. A nice barn, carriage house, hen and cow houses, were built and appropriately occupied. I bought four more acres across the creek, on the hillside, and planted thereon 2500 mulberry trees, intending my girls to earn their pocket money by raising silk (a scheme badly addled by Mrs. Grundy), at whose instance I dug out the trees again and converted the lot into a cow pasture.

We widened Fruitvale Avenue from forty to sixty feet; the work of two years ere the cooperation of all the property owners could be secured. The neighbors clubbed together and built a water work which cost \$20,000 and has since supplied the vale with water in pipes to every house. We again clubbed together and built the Brooklyn and Fruitvale Horse Railroad across the hills, which is still running [1888] with constantly increasing profit. (I was president both of the water works and the railroad, and did most of the work of organizing and constructing both.)

Around our cottage were lawns, flowering vines, and shrubbery which grew to perfection; and the perfume of violets and jasmine, of roses, melissa, Spanish broom and heliotrope, the tall plumes of pampas grass, the perpetual flowers of the solanum, the massive bloom of the wisteria, the luscious treat of abundant cherries, blackberries, and other fruits, plenty of milk and delicious cream, good horses, comfortable carriages, and fine roads, all these now made our place a heaven on earth for my family and haven of delight for old and new friends, who could not come often enough to please my hospitable wife and daughters. The house was nearly always over-run with company, especially in the season for ripe cherries, and I suppose California cherries are the finest in the world...