

EAST BAY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 20417
OAKLAND, CA 94620-0417

LIVE OAK NEWSLETTER January/February 2008

JANUARY MEETING

Wednesday, January 9th - 10 A.M. at the Oakland Family History Library Meeting Room.

RESEARCHING LAND AND PROPERTY RECORDS IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

John Fenstermacher, recently retired Chief of Real Estate for The County of Alameda, has offered to share his vast knowledge of Alameda County property records. Where to find them, how to find them, and everything else we may want to know regarding county property records and perhaps an insight into researching probate records as well.

FEBRUARY MEETING

Wednesday, February 13th – 10 A.M. at the Oakland Family History Library Meeting Room

SCOTTISH RESEARCH with Cath Madden Trindle

Scotland began keeping records long before 1855, and some records even date back to the 16th century. Cath Trindle knows Scottish records well. She will cover statutory records, census records, old parish records, testaments, and an insight into web sites where you may find these records.

Joan Soo's discussion at the November meeting with regard to how our present day "fast food" menu might appeal to the Pilgrims was most interesting. To our surprise, most items on the menu would not have been strange to them at all.

The Annual December member's exchange and cookie "tasting" was a success as usual. What a delightful array of goodies to sample and take home. Many thanks to Marge Bell her husband for opening the Family History Library especially for us - I think they like our cookies too!

.EBGS NEWS

Mark your calendar – May 14, 2008. EBGs plans to celebrate their 29th year with a luncheon meeting. Place and time will be announced in an upcoming newsletter. Golly, have we really been around THAT long? Time flies when you are having fun.

Lois Kline could really use some help with data entry on the computer and some filing at the library. Please call her and offer to help on a Monday afternoon –510-562-7694. She would really appreciate the help and the company!

NEW MEMBER – Welcome! Joyce Schliecher

Researching: Swain, Montgomery, Lewis, Sperry, Collins,
Hamilton, Adams and Stanford

NEW BOOKS IN THE EBGs LIBRARY

Oakland, Hub of the West (1981) by David Weber

F869 W42 1981 Tulsa, OK Continental Heritage Press, Inc. 1981

DVDs: CAL10004D 001-01 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 A-AZZ
001-02 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 B-BLACKTIN
001-03 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 BLACKTIN-BURG
001-04 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 BURG-CHO
001-05 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 CHO-CURRIE
001-06 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 CURRIE-DUNKIN, M.M.
001-07 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 DUNKIN, M.M.- FONTES
001-08 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 FONTES-GOLDEN, D.D.

CAL10004D 003-10 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 TOVAR-WATSON
003-11 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 WATSON-WRIGHT, N.L.
003-12 Alameda County Obituaries, 1985-2002 WRIGHT, N.L.-ZYELOUESE

OAKLAND FAMILY HISTORY CENTER

New hours: Tuesday & Wednesday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Thursday through SATURDAY 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed Sunday and Monday

Check out their website at www.oaklandfhc.org for listing of new FREE classes beginning early in 2008

What do you have planned for the cold winter weeks ahead?

Order that film you've been meaning to read and spend a pleasant day at the Oakland FHL catching up on the research you put aside during the holidays or summertime. Can't think of more pleasant surroundings in which to relax and "search" and avail yourself of some good, intelligent help should you need it.

CONSTANTINE – THE BELGAN

Constantine Simoens was the fifth child of Eduardus and Amellia (Couveur) Simoens. He was born in Tielt, Belgium March 28, 1872. Eduardus was also born in Tielt and both Constantine's parents died there. Constantine was the first of Eduardus' children to immigrate to America.. He came in 1891, at the age of 19. and settled originally in Cook County, Illinois. His brother Julius, at the age of 20, arrived in America in 1894. In 1902 two more brothers and a sister came. They were Rene age 25, Henry age 19 and Elodie age 20. Another sister, Emma, followed in 1907 at the age of 40.

In Belgium the family attended Catholic Church and the children went to Catholic school.. Some complained of the harsh treatment from the priests and nuns and also the fact that the church required so much money from families who could hardly afford to feed their families. Times were hard in Belgium in the late 17th century and into the 18th century. Flemmish speaking citizens, as the Simoens were, were considered inferior; the well-to-do could manage to "plural" vote in elections and also escape the required military service. It is felt that these social problems are the reason Constantine and his brothers and sisters immigrated to America.

In America the stock market crashed in 1893 and by 1894 a great depression swept over the country. Many immigrants who had fled Europe for a better life in America found themselves not much better off and suffering through hard times. Gold was discovered in the Klondike and the gold rush to Alaska soon became a stampede, which lured many immigrants. Constantine and his brother Julius joined them in 1897.

It is thought they traveled by train to Seattle. The most popular and sensible route to the Klondike gold fields was up the Inside Passage from Puget Sound to Skagway and Dyea. Chilkoot Pass was the established route to the Yukon from the Inside Passage.

Constantine and Julius traveled to Skagway by ship and endured being infested with lice the entire trip. From Skagway they chose the Chilkoot Pass route from Dyea to Lake Lindeman – 26 miles of incredible hardship through which many did not survive and many did not even go on to the gold fields, but returned home.

The Royal Northwest Mounted Police required a year's supply of food for each person entering Canada.. The list read something like the following:

400 lbs flour	200 lbs bacon	25 lbs dried apricots
50 lbs corn meal	36 lbs yeast cakes	25 lbs fish
50 lbs oatmeal	15 lbs salt	10 lbs pitted prunes
35 lbs rice	1 lb pepper	50 lbs dried onions
100 lbs beans	¼ lb ginger	4 doz. cans evaporated condensed milk
40 lbs candles	½ lb mustard	24 lbs coffee
100 lbs sugar	25 lbs dried apples	5 bars laundry soap
8 lbs baking soda	25 lbs dried peaches	25 cans butter
60 boxes matches	15 lbs soup vegetables	

Add to this list a small metal stove, gold pan, granite buckets, cup, plate, silverware, frying pan, coffee pot, saws, whetstone, hatchet, shovels, files, drawknife, axes, chisels, nails, sled, rope, pitch, oakum, and a canvas tent. Also needed were several changes of clothes suitable for country with a 150-degree range in temperature, mosquito nets, bedding, and a small medicine kit. By the end of September 1897 the trail was strewn with unnecessary gear. The stampede had to carry roughly a ton of gear from tidewater to Lake Lindeman.

Constantine and Julius must have hiked as much as 1,000 miles shuttling their loads from cache to cache before they were ready to travel by boat to Dawson City.

The original route was up a streambed, necessitating fording the stream several times. There were rapids to contend with, dense coastal forests, moss-slicked rocks and gravel deposits. They were forced to wade back into the stream when granite cliffs dropped straight down to the river's edge. Many times snow covered the well-worn trail.

Constantine discovered that tobacco spit left alongside the trail froze into odd shaped projections and, though covered with snow, became trail markers. When darkness fell they found their way by following the smell of kerosene stoves burning in camps of other stampedeers. After five miles of this they reached the first wide, level spot in the canyon called Sheep Camp...the last stop in the forest before emerging into the open, windy, and usually rainy area of the pass itself.

Just beyond Sheep Camp the trail becomes steep and gains 1,000 feet in elevation in the next two miles and snow covers the rocks until July. This area known as Long Hill terminates at Stone House. The trail goes up and down slightly, gaining more elevation until it drops down into a little bowl of boulders called The Scales, surrounded by steep scree-covered mountains on three sides. (scree is an accumulation of small broken stones) Almost straight up is Chilkoot Pass itself. Dead ahead is a 40-degree scree slope, which goes straight up the mountainside to the crest...the Golden Stairs of Chilkoot Pass. The climb was best made in the dead of winter because steps could be hacked out of the snow. Constantine's account of the climb: "As soon as the person ahead would lift his foot from the step the person behind would place his hand there. The summit climb itself was so steep that a man standing in the footholds out in the hard snow could touch the wall in front of him without losing his balance. Sometimes one would pull out to the side to rest, but it was nearly impossible to re-enter the line of packers."

What made Chilkoot Pass such cruel punishment was the necessity of tackling it time after time as repeated "back-tripping" or relays were the only way stampedeers got their provisions up the trail. This meant that twenty or more crossings had to be made after reaching Sheep Camp.

Constantine talked to a young Jack London who had expended two days arduous labor in advancing two miles on a difficult piece of the trail. By the time London's party reached the last stage of the pass, London exclaimed, "I back-tripped it four times a day, and on each forward trip carried one hundred and fifty pounds. This means that over the worst trails I daily traveled twenty-four miles, twelve of which were under a burden of one hundred and fifty pounds."

By spring 1898 the shores of Lake Lindeman were crowded with tents and shacks of every description. The quiet valley echoed with the sound of timber falling, saws, hammers and men's voices. The spruce was almost depleted in the area as the rush to build boats and have them launched as spring breakup approached. On May 29 the ice broke and began moving slowly north toward the Yukon River. Some 800 boats followed the ice out that first day, and the last lap of the race to Dawson City began. For the next two or three weeks the water-borne stampedeers rode the swift Yukon down through the rapids and the murderous Miles Canyon. At last they rounded the bend and saw Dawson City and Klondike City (or Lousetown, as most called it) on the right bank divided by the magical Klondike River. They caught the eddy created by the Klondike flowing into the Yukon and swung into shore on Front Street to be checked off by the ever-present and ever-caring Mounties.

The stampede was over, but it was little more than an exercise in futility. All the good claims had been staked before they arrived. Only the businessmen among them made any money. Most of those looking for gold

returned home empty-handed. For the rest of their lives, perhaps defensively, they insisted the trip was worth it. If nothing else, it gave them a sense of accomplishment.

Constantine and Julius remained for five years, managing to eke out enough gold to support themselves. Finally Constantine returned to the lower states with about as much money as he had when their incredible adventure began. One has to be in awe of the stamina and courage these men must have had to endure such a rigorous, demanding, and sometimes quite dangerous journey.

Constantine settled in Nucla, Montrose County, Colorado where he became a farmer, it is believed he may have been so in his boyhood in Belgium. Here he married Vessie Vera Wilson in 1915. They had three children, Daniel Constantine, Eunice Julia, and Alvin Cosmon. Constantine once suffered an accident with a harrow. The accident heavily scarred his face and neck. Forever afterward he wore a beard to conceal his scars. He died March 28, 1945 on Nucla, Colorado one day before his seventy-third birthday.

The above was condensed and edited from about nine pages submitted by our member Karen Reynolds in Illinois. I believe the original was written by a relative of hers. Constantine and Julius were brothers of Karen's great grandmother, Emma Simoens, who immigrated to America in 1907 (ed.)