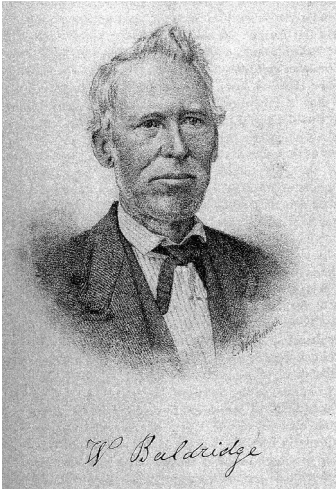


William "Uncle Billy" Baldrige

From *History of Napa and Lake Counties, California* : San Francisco, Ca, Slocum, Bowen & Co., 1881, page 379-385

This worthy pioneer of pioneers, whose portrait we take pleasure in presenting to our readers in the body of this work, was born near Newport, Cocke County, Eastern Tennessee, December 2, 1811, and is the son of James and Mary Thrash Baldrige. His father was of the Scotch-Irish descent. He remained at his birthplace until 1819, when he started West with his father's family, and arrived in Missouri January 2, 1820, settling in Saline County.

At the age of seventeen he went to learn the mill-wright's trade, under an Englishman by the name of Michael Rice. He followed that business in various places in La Fayette and Jackson Counties, Missouri, and in the Indian Territory (now Kansas), until 1843. In 1830 he spent a night at a hotel in Lexington, Missouri, and there heard a man by the name of Mills, who was a partner of the famous William Sublette, telling wonderful stories about California, and giving a glowing description of the country generally. He said that he had been out there for the purpose of buying mules for the firm of which he was a partner. This set Mr. Baldrige to thinking that he would like to pay the country a visit and determined that, should an opportunity present itself, he should certainly embrace it to come out.



At the close of the Florida War Colonel J. B. Chiles returned home a well and hearty man, having been afflicted very severely with dyspepsia before that, and he attributed his cure to the fact of his rough life during the time of his service, and was loth to go back to his former habits of life, lest his old affliction should come upon him. In the course of a conversation with him, Mr. Baldrige told him what he had heard about California, and proposed that they pay the country a visit. To this the Colonel readily assented, and all arrangements were made for starting out on the trip in 1841. Mr. Baldrige was detained,

however, on account of a mill which he had on hand, and was under contract to complete. Colonel Chiles, however, proceeded to organize the company, and crossed the Plains during that season. There came with him Charles Hopper, lately deceased, and for years a resident of Napa County, John Bidwell, Andrew, Samuel and Benjamin Kelsey, three brothers, and others, whose names are not now at hand. Benjamin Kelsey brought his wife along with them, and she was the first white woman other than Spanish ever in California. In 1842 Colonel Chiles returned to Missouri, and gave a good account of his trip to California.

WAGONS FOR CALIFORNIA

In the spring of 1843 a party was made up, consisting of Colonel J. B. Chiles, William Baldrige, Thomas Wesley Bradley, afterwards a resident of Contra Costa County, Jesse Beasley, William Hicks, who subsequently lived on the Cosumnes River, Sanford, Major Walton, who had come to California with Colonel Chiles in 1841 and returned with him in 1842, P. B. Reading, Samuel J. Hensley, who afterwards lived and died in San Jose', Atkinson, commonly called "Old Wheat," on account of his sterling worth of character, Julius Martin, the pioneer of Gilroy, Santa Clara County, Mrs. Martin and their two children, Bartlett Vines, son-in-law of George C. Yount, Mrs. Vines and their two children, Miss Elizabeth Yount, who subsequently married J. C. Davis, Adam Fisher, Milton McGee, William Martin, who was the Colonel of the Oregon emigration, Captain John Grant, formerly an officer in the United States regular army, now dead and buried in the graveyard at Yountville, Milton Little, Charles McIntosh, John Conn, of Conns Valley, since deceased, James, John, Squire and Isaac Williams, four brothers, who afterwards settled at Santa Cruz. This list comprises the whole party, with perhaps one or two exceptions.

The party left Westport, Missouri, May 30, 1843, with a full equipment for the long and tedious trip over new and undiscovered routes and mountain passes. They passed up the Platte by old Fort Laramie, on the north fork of that river; thence to Fort Bridger; thence to Fort Hall. Here the party divided, Chiles, Hensley, Reading, Grant, Bradley, McGee, and the four Williams brothers going on ahead on horseback, by way of Fort Boise, Idaho, to the head of Pitt River, and thence down the Sacramento to Sutter's Fort. The object of dividing the party was, that those who remained with the teams might have provisions enough to last them through. The horseback party secured their own provisions as they went along.

At Fort Laramie the party had secured the services of that noted old trapper and hunter Joseph Walker, to pilot them through the mountains, paying him the sum of \$300. From Fort Hall the party with the teams, of which Mr.

Baldrige was one, proceeded to the Humboldt River, near the head of the north fork, and followed that stream to the sink; thence south by way of Carson, Walker, and Owens Lakes, on the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

At Owens Lake they left their wagons, not being able to proceed further with them. They had with them a full set of saw-mill irons, including three sash saws, and these were cached there. Some years ago some miners unearthed them, and they were the subject of much speculation as to how they got there, and who could have buried them in that out of the way place. They then packed their goods on mules and rode their horses, and proceeded on their way. They went along on the eastern side of the Sierras until they came to what is known as Walker's Pass, east of where Visalia now stands. Here they crossed the mountains, arriving at the summit at eleven o'clock, December 3, 1843. The snow was then six inches deep, and soon after it was so deep as to bar the passage altogether. They pushed on into the valley, and then started for Sutter's Fort.

Walker insisted on crossing the Tulare Valley, stating that there was an abundance of game in the mountains on the west side of it, and water in it. So finally they consented to go, and they were three days and nights without anything to eat or any water to drink, the valley proving to be a barren desert. Colonel Chiles and his party arrived some time previous to this at Sutter's Fort, and with three men he proceeded to Walker's Pass to meet the party, but failed to find them. At the end of the third day McIntosh succeeded in killing a mountain sheep, which was the first thing they had found that was eatable during the trip across the valley. When they got to the west side of the valley they found game very plentiful, consisting of deer and antelope, which were as thick as sheep, also wild horses, which were very fat, and so palatable that their meat was preferred to that of either deer or antelope.

Walker kept bearing off to the westward, and the first they knew they were very close to Monterey. Mr. Baldrige and Atkinson went to that place to purchase passports, and it took them three days to get them, owing to the indolence and indifference of the Mexican officials. At last, growing exasperated, he used some Saxon oaths which had the desired result. By this time the rest of the party had gotten so far away that they never saw them again as a whole. Julius Martin and others stopped in that vicinity or a little farther north, while others came on to Sutter's Fort. Mr. Baldrige and "Old Wheat" came up to Gilroy's, and there they met with James M. Hudspeth, now a resident of Green Valley, Sonoma County, and Alexander Copeland, who were at work at that place, and they provided them with fresh horses and escorted them as far as the Pueblo de San Jose. Chas. Weaver then took them to Juan (John) Livermore's place, and thence they proceeded across the San Joaquin River, near where Stockton now stands, and thence to Sutter's Fort, where they met the most of their party, and also Colonel Chiles, who had returned from Walker's Pass. Just at this time General Sutter was about to dispatch the schooner "Sacramento," a craft which had been included in his famous purchase of the Russian effects at Fort Ross in 1841, to Napa Embarcadero to get lime from Nicolas Higuerra, and Colonel Chiles, Mr. Baldrige, Miss Yount, and the Vines family were given passage upon the vessel.

But all this tedious journey was not without its pleasures and its romances as well, one of the latter of which it is well to record in this connection. When the party had gotten well out upon the plains they fell in with an Englishman and his family, consisting of a wife and a sixteen-year old daughter, by the name of Eyer, who were bound for Oregon. The man was brutally cruel towards his family, it being no uncommon thing for him to severely castigate both wife and daughter. Mr. Baldrige was younger then than he is now, and his heart may have been a little more tender, and his sympathies a little more easily wrought upon; but be that as it may, he saw a sweet-faced, innocent girl subjected to the brutal treatment of a father with a vicious and capricious temper, and his chivalrous nature resented the insult thus given to injured innocence, and he resolved to liberate the girl from the abject bondage of her inhuman father. He asked Mrs. Julius Martin if she would take the girl in her charge and care for her on the way to California if he could succeed in inducing her to come with them. To this that excellent lady readily consented, so he proceeded to the camp of the Eyer family, and consulted the mother on the subject. She was only too glad to give the girl a chance to escape the outbursts of the father's wrath, and the consequent punishments. He then made the proposition to the girl, who "jumped at the chance" to get out of the reach of her father's stinging lash and heavy fist. Accordingly, she was transferred, bag and baggage, to the California party; and the poor mother was left to bear the brunt of rage, which evidently welled up in torrents when the father discovered what had taken place.

When the Martin family decided to stop at Gilroy, Miss Yount prevailed upon the girl, Mary Eyer, to accompany her to her father's home in **Napa Valley**; and accordingly, when Mr. Baldrige arrived at Sutter's Fort, he found them both at that place. We now leave our heroine, for we must go to look for the hero. While Mr. Baldrige has already shown himself a true hero, and was destined to do yet more noble and unselfish deeds, yet he is not *the* Hero of this truthful romance.

We must go back twelve years, and take the reader to the then frontier town of Lexington, Missouri, then the rendezvous of many of the trapping and hunting parties that made periodical peregrinations into the almost unknown,

and but little traveled, mountains and wildernesses that lay beyond toward the setting sun. In 1831, there arrived in Lexington a party of thirty men, under command of Captain Wyatt, bound for Oregon. They were all old sailors, and were dressed in uniform as marines, and marched out of town in grand style, and on into the dim haze of the wide, outstretching prairie. Along with the party, in the capacity of private secretary and book-keeper for Captain Wyatt, was a young Scotchman, of genteel appearance, and a man of evident intelligence. His name was John Sinclair.

Among those who stood upon the street, and saw this party pass through the town of Lexington, was William Baldrige, then a stripling boy of only twenty summers. The party passed on, and of its history but little is known. Captain Wyatt was the man who built Fort Hall. Sinclair went to Oregon, and thence to the Sandwich Islands, where he was married to a Kanaka or native woman. He then came to San Francisco, and engaged in business; and finally located on the place now known as Sinclair's ranch, near Sacramento and was at Sutter's Fort when the party, of which Mr. Baldrige was a member, arrived.

In the meantime his Kanaka wife had died leaving one child, a bright girl of some five years, who could talk almost a language for each year of her life. In Mr. Baldrige's protegee, his veritable "Prairie Flower," Sinclair saw all that his heart desired, a woman of his own language and blood, and he forthwith laid seige for her hand and heart. Like the dutiful child that she was, she consulted her guardian, Mr. Baldrige, who after making due inquiries in regard to the character he sustained, gave his consent, and they were married, and the match proved to be a fortuitous one in every respect. Truly "there is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we may."

TO NAPA COUNTY in 1845

Mr. Baldrige worked at his trade of mill-wright for the first year or two after his arrival here. In 1845 Colonel Chiles and he made preparations to put up a mill in Santa Clara County, getting out all the timbers and shafting at the Yount Saw Mill, but the Micheltoreno Revolution broke out at that time, and the project had to be abandoned. In 1845 Colonel Chiles got his grant from the Mexican Government for the Catacula Rancho, and Mr. Baldrige being a partner in it, they went upon it and began operations, taking a band of cattle into the valley and building a house there. In 1846 the indistinct mutterings of threatening troubles with the Mexicans began to be heard, and the American settlers were all agog to learn what it would culminate in. Neighbors lived far apart, and communication between them was rare, especially in such out of the way places as Chiles Valley.

THE BEAR FLAG REVOLT OF 1846

One day in June, Mr. Baldrige and Mr. Thomas Wesley Bradley, took a mule and went over to the Sandstone Mountains, (the Blue Ridge,) east of Berryessa Valley, to get some grindstones which he had previously cut out. Two poles were cut and fastened on either side of the mule like the thills of a buggy, and the ends were allowed to drag on the ground. The stones were lashed securely to these poles, and a genuine Indian vehicle was thus constructed. That night they camped on the west side of Putah Creek in a clump of willows, and while sitting by the fire after partaking of their evening repast, and discussing the aspect of the impending difficulties with the Mexicans, Mr. Baldrige spoke up suddenly and said, "We will know all about it before we leave this camp." "Why, what makes you think so," exclaimed his companion. "I don't know," he replied, "but something tells me that we will." They continued talking for perhaps an hour, when they suddenly heard the tramp of horses' feet, and someone shout out, "Hold up; don't come here."

They recognized the voice of Captain John Grigsby, and immediately went to him, making themselves known. He was accompanied by William Elliott, and they had been to Sutter's Fort to have a consultation with General Fremont, and were then passing back into Napa Valley by this little-frequented route, and in the night, so as to avoid being seen by the Mexicans and thus arousing their suspicions. The trail led up to a steep bank of the creek, and turned abruptly to one side and passed down into it; but Grigsby's horse had gone right over the bank in the dark, hence the exclamation quoted above. And so Mr. Baldrige's prophecy was fulfilled there and then. Who can tell whence came the impression that so soon became a verity? Mr. Baldrige proceeded home, and, on the day following the capture of Sonoma, he and Colonel Chiles started for Sutter's Fort, being anxious to join Fremont's force and engage in the active campaign.

That night they stopped at William Gordon's on Cache Creek, and during the night a courier came by on his way to Fremont's camp, stating that a large force of Mexicans were marching toward Sonoma for the purpose of recapturing it. Mr. Baldrige and Colonel Chiles set out at once to go to the relief of the American party, and arrived at Sonoma on the 16th. He remained at the town of Sonoma until Fremont started to Sutter's Fort to begin the active campaign. The 4th of July was celebrated at Sonoma, and the Declaration of Independence was read by Lieutenant Woodworth, of the United States Navy, from a book belonging to Mr. Baldrige, which he had brought across the plains, and which he still has in his possession as a relic of those by-gone days.

On the 5th an organization of the American volunteers was effected. Mr. Baldrige was chosen chairman of the meeting which was held for this purpose, and John Bidwell was secretary. The force was divided into three companies, and the captains were voted for *viva voce*, resulting in the election of John Grigsby—who remained in charge of Sonoma with his company—and John Ford and Granville P. Swift, who took their companies upon the campaign with Fremont. Mr. Baldrige was elected orderly sergeant of Captain Swift's company at this time. On the 6th the whole force, including Fremont's men and the volunteers, took up the line of march for Sutter's Fort. Fremont and his men went by way of Soscol, Green Valley, and Knights Landing, while the two companies passed through Berryessa Valley, for the purpose of gathering up some horses. They found none, however. They proceeded down Cache Creek to a point opposite Sutter's Fort, where they crossed the river in small boats. They dismounted, and began making preparations for camping near the fort.

Mr. Baldrige, desiring to procure some supplies from the fort, took his rifle in his hand and proceeded to the door, which, to his great surprise, he not only found shut, but also barricaded. This was an unusual state of affairs, for the doors of the fort usually stood open for all who chose to enter. He knocked loudly at the door, and an Indian, who was a guard, told him that he could not enter. Just then General Sutter opened the wicket of the door, and on seeing who it was, opened the door, saying: "I surrender to you; I held out as long as I could, but you were too strong for me." Mr. Baldrige could not make out the meaning of such a queer expression, for there stood two large field pieces facing the door, besides other guns at the embrasures, and a lot of small arms. The truth was that Sutter was a Mexican officer, and as such had to make a show of resistance, at least, to the "Americanos," although he was heart and soul in sympathy with them. And so it was that the subject of this sketch added one more romantic adventure to his already long list, and to him can truly be given the honor and credit of capturing a well armed fortress single-handed.

A man by the name of William Scott brought the news of the war with Mexico to Sutters Fort. From that place Mr. Baldrige proceeded with Fremont's Battalion to Monterey, where he was first appointed and then elected by the members of the company to the position of Lieutenant of Company "C," Fremont's Battalion, which position he honorably filled till the close of the war. From Monterey they went in vessels to San Diego, and there made an incursion or two into the interior, but were not in any very hard fought battles, and were at Cahuenga at the time of the surrender. It was generally supposed by the soldiers that they would see Pico's forces drawn up in grand array, and that they would march into camp and lay their arms at the feet of the victors, as they had seen pictures in their old histories of the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. What, however, was their surprise and consternation, about 10 o'clock in the morning, to see a couple of "Greasers" come over the hill, each with a riata fastened to the horn of his saddle, to the other end of which was a mountain howitzer.

That virtually closed the war on California soil. At San Diego the marines were taken ashore first, to capture the place, and the volunteers were kept in the background. In the plaza a crowd of people congregated to see the strange soldiers, and among them was a dashing-looking personage, mounted on a well caparisoned horse. Finally, he attracted the attention of Lieutenant of Marines Maddox, and he inquired who he was. The man overheard the inquiry and answered, "I am Andreas Pico, and I will see you later." With this he rode away, leaving the Lieutenant to swear at his own stupidity in not being able to capture the leader of the Mexican forces when he was in the midst of his vaunted marines.

Mr. Baldrige assisted in constructing the breastworks that are still to be seen on Fort Hill, in Los Angeles. At the close of the war he returned to civil pursuits

1848 built the Chiles Mill in partners with JB Chiles

1851 elected to first trial jury in Napa County, establishes a farm near Oakville Grade (Weber120) In 1851 he settled on his farm near Oakville, where he has ever since resided, and where he has gained the esteem of all who know him.(Menefee)

in 1852 moved upon his present place, and has since followed farming and stock raising, and is to-day one of Napa's most honored and respected citizens, and a gentleman it is certainly a pleasure to meet. He is a Master Mason, and is an honorary member of Jerusalem Lodge, No. 1, organized in that city by Robert Morris, in 1875, being probably the only member of that lodge in California. He is still unmarried.

1854-county supervisor

1861 experimented with growing cotton, not successful, introduced the black locust tree from seed sent to him

1870 date of military warrant land grant of 165 acres near Oakville Grade

to the home of Mr. Wm. Baldrige, another one of the old Pioneers, who has established himself for the remainder of his existence in a very cozy nook in the hills that border immediately on Napa Valley. Almost every variety

of grape vine and fruit tree have been grafted, planted and raised here by its even now indefatigable proprietor. An everlasting stream of water flows to his house from a mountain spring, and every comfort that nature call lavish or industry furnish in the shape of fruit, can here be found. Near the house still stands the old log cabin erected here when first taken possession of by this gentleman, in whose memory lies enthroned the history of many a stirring scene in the annals of California.

1876 land shown on Napa County map

1895 Oakville grade 165 acres owned by H.W. Crabb

1902 ct 31 buried in Masonic plot

Menefee p. 109 WM. BALDRIDGE.

This old pioneer was born in East Tennessee, 1811. In 1819 he left his native State and emigrated to Missouri, where he learned the trade of millwright. In 1830 Mr. Baldrige, while in a hotel, heard a man named Mills, partner of Mr. W. L. Sublett, the celebrated Rocky Mountain trapper, describing the soil, productions, and climate of California. Mr. Mills had passed the previous Winter here, and gave a glowing description of the country. Mr. Baldrige was struck with this description, and knowing that a warm climate agreed with his constitution, determined to come out here. In 1840, his friend, Col. J. B. Chiles, now of Chiles Valley, had returned from Florida, and while on a visit to Mr. Baldrige, spoke of the benefit his health had derived from traveling. These two agreed to make a journey to California the following Spring, but on account of having considerable work to finish, Mr. Baldrige was unable to come as agreed. So Col. Chiles came out with the party that Spring and returned. He followed his trade in Missouri till 1843, when, in connection with Col. J. B. Chiles, he formed a company and came out to the Pacific Coast. The company left the Shawnee settlement on the 29th of May of that year, and traveled together to Fort Hall. Here it separated, one portion with Col. Chiles at the head, taking the Pitt River route, the other, in which was Mr. Baldrige, together with the wagons coming down the Humboldt River and crossing the Sierra Nevadas at Walker's Pass. They did not arrive at Sutter's Fort till January, 1844. Their Christmas dinner, consisting of horse flesh boiled in an iron kettle, was eaten on the bleak mountains East of Tulare Valley. He came then direct to Napa Valley. In 1844 he built the grist mill in Chiles Valley. In 1846 he joined the Bear Flag party, and was with the army during its operations in California under General Fremont. In 1851 he settled on his farm near Oakville, where he has ever since resided, and where he has gained the esteem of all who know him. He is brave and generous to a fault, a man of extensive reading and sound judgment.



1876 Map of Napa County, Library of Congress