

**Memoirs of Old-Timer Alphonse Bell**  
**As told to the *St. Helena Star* on April 9, 1953**  
**Reported by Mariam Hansen**

In May 1879 I had the first glimpse of St. Helena after coming across the country on the Overland Emigrant Train. My brother, who was living here, met us at the train station and escorted us to Otto Rampendahl's hotel.

My brother Ben was working at the Taplin Dairy Ranch [now Joseph Phelps Vineyards]. After a day of visiting with him I had to find work of any kind to make money. I was a greenhorn at farm work, but ended up in a hay field with 100-degree heat. The man I worked for was living alone in Conn Valley—just Mr. Rodgers and I [*sic*] with livestock, two milk cows, saddle horses and work mules. It was the haying season and I knew a little about mowing machines, so Rodgers told me to hitch up the mules. It all worked well, so when the boss returned he asked who had helped me. I said I had worked the mules late and the job was done.

The two of us helped to round up a herd of cattle to drive to market. It was my first bronco ride, but the horse knew more about herding cattle than I did. One of the cows made a wrong turn and my horse turned with it, spilling me onto the road. No damage done.

Rodgers was not good cook, but we had plenty of soda crackers and fresh milk. He returned from the cattle sale with a big round steak. After a week of chewing on that I got hungry and wanted to visit my brother at Taplin's over the hill. He told me of a shortcut through the woods [between Conn Valley Road and Taplin Road] which would end at the Milk Ranch. I got lost and finally got there hungry and tired.

After a splendid dinner with the Taplin family and a good night's rest, I left town for a while. Returning in the fall, I helped Matthew Vann [on Zinfandel Lane] with the grape harvest. I then secured a job with Dimsdill B. Carver in his general store as a delivery boy. After a few months I had my first promotion. Mr. McGeorge was demoted to delivery and I was to be shelf stocker. Mr. Carver was pleased with my changes and told me to fix things as I thought best. I also boarded in his home.

In 1882 Carver sold to Townsend & Anderson, but I kept my job. In 1885 the Greenfield brothers and I bought the store and renamed it Bell & Greenfield. In 1887 I bought out Greenfield and took my brother William as partner; thus was Bell Brothers formed. The store moved from the Carver Building [1269–1289 Main] to the Richie Block in 1893 shortly after its completion [Goodman's today]. In 1920 my brother sold his share to Otto Jursch and Fred Rossi, so the firm became A. N. Bell & Co. In 1933 the store was sold and dissolved.

*Mr. Bell's memoir will be continued next month. Mariam Hansen is research director of the St. Helena Historical Society. She may be reached at [shstory@shstory.org](mailto:shstory@shstory.org).*