

EXCERPTS FROM MOUNT ST. HELENA: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON STATE PARK

by Ken Stanton 2010, Bonnie View Books, St. Helena

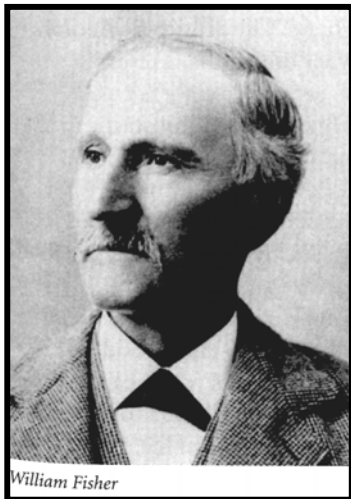
Early Travel

In the 1850's, the Old Bull Trail was carved out of the forest by volunteers to connect Clear Lake with Calistoga. It served as the official road in and out of the area for 18 years and was mainly used to drive livestock to market. It was so bad that a single man on horseback took the whole day to travel from Middletown to Calistoga. In some areas, St. Helena Creek served as the road.

Bill Spiers and the Calistoga and Clear lake Stage Line

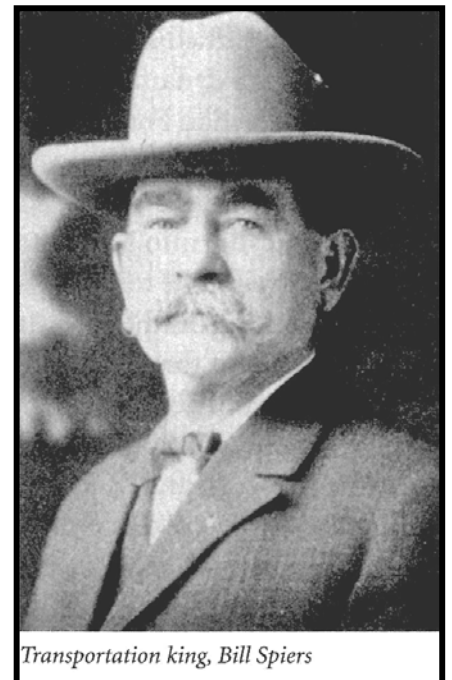
Bill "Finest Kind!" Spiers had a monopoly on transportation in the area for almost 50 years. "Finest Kind" was his reply to all questions about the weather, the nation, his health, etc. He cut wood in Napa and worked at the mine in Pine Flat (Sonoma County). He saved his money and started a freighting business in the late 1870's. He would haul merchandise and textiles to

Lake County and bring back wheat, tanbark and ore back to the railhead at Calistoga. He drove part-time for William Fisher who owned a livery in Calistoga.



In 1888, Spiers bought out William Fisher's business and started the Calistoga and Clear Lake Stage Line (which he ran for 37 years).

Learning from his father (a breeder of thoroughbred horses), at one time Spiers owned 700 horses.



He got contracts to haul freight for the Great Western, Oat Hill and other mines. Eventually he bought the individual stage lines that served the various hot springs resorts including White Sulphur Springs, Harbin, Anderson, Howard, Astorg, Spiers, Seigler, Adams, Hobergs, and Highland Springs.

By 1915, Spiers realized that the automobile was taking over transportation and he replaced his horse-drawn wagons with autobuses. He sold his Concord and mud wagons to Hollywood for use in the movies.

Spiers died in 1931 of a heart attack while driving his car in Calistoga.

Accidents

In 1883, one of Spier's drivers (Ace Butler) lost a wagon with 4 cords of tanbark off the Great Western grade. Team and all went down a 50-foot embankment with only one animal hurt.

In 1913, Joel Downey was driving a Spier 6-horse wagon in the evening between Middletown and Lower Lake when a carbide lantern exploded showering hot embers on the rumps of the wheel horses. The team spooked and took off. A male and female passenger broke their legs when they jumped from the stage. By the time the stage could be stopped, it had caught on fire, was badly charred, and the mail sacks destroyed.

Highwaymen

On the coaches, the Wells Fargo express box carried several thousand dollars of payroll due to the miners of the great Western, Oat Hill, Bradford, and Sulphur Bank quicksilver mines. Places like "Robber's Roost" and "Dusty Bend" were regular hideouts for the robbers.

Not all robbers were heartless: in 1899, one of Spier's drivers (H.T. Quigley) was held up at Dusty Bend (1 1/4 mile south of the toll house). The pleas of the passengers prompted the robber to return some of their money and valuables, leaving with only \$12.25 from the passengers and \$50 from the strong box. Quigley called from the toll house and identified the robber. Though the robber was caught when bloodhounds tracked his scent right to his house, the sympathetic court set him free.

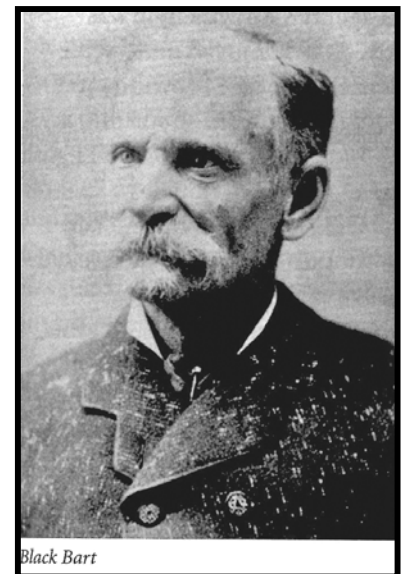
In 1900, A.R. Palmer was driving the stage with Mrs. T.C. Van Ness (of San Francisco fame). The lone robber covered his hands with charcoal, averted his face from the driver, used explosives to break the strong box padlock, and escaped toward Oat Hill, scattering cayenne pepper in his tracks to confuse the bloodhounds.

Charles Boles "Black Bart"

There is disagreement as to whether Black Bart ever pulled a heist on Mt. St. Helena. It is well known that he did hold up a stage on the Lakeport-Ukiah stage line. During 8 years (1875-83), he held up 28 stages all over Northern California. After his release from San Quentin in 1888, he is suspected of 2 more holdups, some say on Mt. St. Helena.

Since then he has never been found.

Boles made a career change from school teacher to highwayman at the age of 50. Though his polished manners and clean appearance allowed him to travel in



respectable circles, his backwoods abilities and conditioning allowed him to elude pursuers in rough terrain on foot.

During his first robbery, he gave a lady's purse back to her saying that he only wanted the Wells Fargo money. On his 4th robbery he began leaving poems. He held up coaches near Fort Ross, Quincy, Covelo, Yreka, Redding, Weaverville, and Marysville. In early 1882, he held up the stage from Ukiah to Cloverdale, escaping across Clear Lake and through Bartlett Springs on his way to Colusa. Later that year he held up the Lakeport to Cloverdale stage escaping towards Lower Lake.

Lillie McNulty (Mountain Mill House) reports that her parents told her that Boles robbed a stage express box and mail 1/2 mile up the road from the Mountain Mill House. It was a William Fisher stage driven by Wash Gwynn. Tacked on a nearby tree was a note signed "Black Bart".

In 1883, Boles "Black Bart" was finally caught and served 4 years and two months in San Quentin.

In 1888 Bill Spiers was held up at gunpoint near Lovers Leap on the Lawley Toll Road. he told his daughter-in-law that it was Black Bart, but there is no proof. Clarence Myers (another of Spier's drivers) claims that he often met Bart traveling over the St. Helena Toll Road.

Lawrence Buchanen "Buck" English

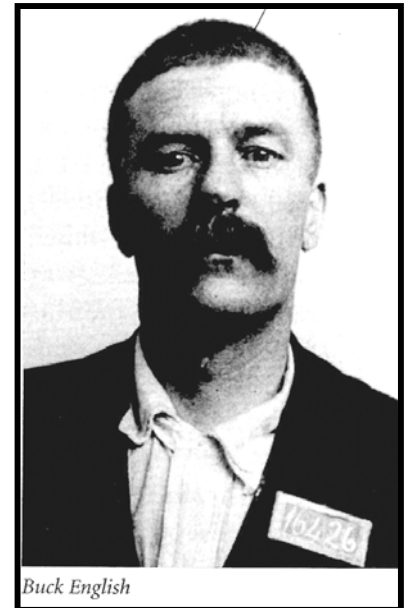
When Lawrence was 12, and the family lived in Solano County. In 1865, downtown Cordelia was the scene of the English/Durbin family shootout. Brother Parry English died, father B.F. English lost an eye, and brother Charlie English was crippled in one arm. Three years later in Napa, brother Dan English was killed and Charlie was shot up again receiving a scared face and the other arm crippled.

At age 13, Lawrence' father made "Buck" swear that he would kill Parry Durbin to avenge the death of Parry English.

In 1870, the family moved to Anderson Springs to avoid more bloodshed. Though rough, Buck would be generous to those in need and reportedly stole a hog to give to a family who had nothing.

From petty thievery, Buck jumped to robbing his first stage in 1875 at age 22. He robbed and mistreated Chinese miners along the road on a regular basis. Due to the anti-Asian sentiment of the time, the law often looked the other way. Brothers Eugene and Charlie engaged in cattle and hog rustling.

After a drunken exhibition of gunplay, Buck was disciplined by Andrew Rocca of the Great Western Mine. The two were soon sworn enemies and soon after cattle began



Buck English

disappearing from the Great Western property. Rocca began recording evidence and soon Buck was arrested on rustling charges and sent to San Quentin. A good attorney got him out in 1 year.

English did some horse rustling and apparently even killed a man during an argument at the Middletown skating rink.

The English gang of brothers robbed a white man near Lower Lake for \$115 which finally brought Charlie to jail at Folsom Prison. In 1885, Charlie disappeared into Mexico and was never heard from again. Eugene escaped to Oregon and served in the militia under the name of Eugene Jones. Buck was caught in Coyote Valley with the help of a Pomo tracker and got 7 years in San Quentin, but was out after 4. He returned to Lake County and went straight for a while becoming a driver for the Anderson Springs/Lakeport Stage Line. He moved to Canada to live with his brother for a while.

Following a stint at the Oregon State Penitentiary for robbery, Buck returned to Lake County in the late 1890's. In 1895, he held up a Spier Stage driven by Allen Palmer on the Mt. St. Helena Road near the Lake County line. Six passengers (4 S.F. businessmen, 1 Chinese man, and a young boy) were robbed of \$1,000. Both robbers wore masks, overalls, old shoes, black slouch hats, and dark gray dusters.

English and his accomplice had old colt revolvers and collected the goodies from the passengers quickly and with skill. They swore and cursed at everyone, especially a Chinese man who was knocked down, badly beaten, and had his legal papers taken. During the holdup, a freight wagon came by driven by Byrd Hunt. Buck said "How are you Byrd" as it passed. Buck and his accomplice took off in the direction of Oat Hill on foot. By the time they reached Berryessa Valley their feet had given out and they boarded a stage to Napa. English was recognized by a farmer who had known him years before. The farmer told the stage driver who called the Sheriff. A posse headed out to intercept the stage. They found English sitting beside the stage driver holding a shotgun. English used the shotgun to blow the sheriff's gun out of his hands. Return fire wounded Buck, but English held the shotgun to the stage driver's head and commanded him to drive fast. Another shot tore through Buck who slumped on the seat as the stage tore down the hill. Buck's accomplice gave up without a struggle. Buck survived, attempted to break out of the Napa jail, and ended up in San Quentin on a life sentence. Buck served 17 years and was released in 1912 at age 60. He died in 1915 and is buried in Colma.

Lawley Toll Road

In 1866, a government permit was given to John Lawley, Henry Boggs, and William Patterson to build a toll road over St. Helena. Lawley was a local businessman, and had established the second warehouse in Napa in 1854, dealing mainly in wheat. He later became trustee in the first Napa bank. He bought 26,000 acres of the Berryessa Valley land grant for \$4/acre and soon turned the area into a major grain producing region. In 1861, he owned the Phoenix quicksilver mine. He partnered as a trustee in the Napa Valley railroad which eventually managed to lay

tracks to Calistoga. Aware of the potential of a rail head in Calistoga, he applied for a permit to build a toll road between Calistoga and Lake County.

At a cost of \$15,300, the toll road was completed in 1868 (the very same year the railroad was completed to Calistoga).

The exorbitant toll rates forced many people to take the Oat Hill Mine Road, a free county road built in 1893. before working on the Toll Road.

The toll house (known as the Toll House Inn) was located on a flat just north of the crest of Mount St. Helena. It was built around 1873 by William Montgomery (a sea captain). Sold to Lawley in 1880, burned down in 1883. Lawley's daughter Mary Frances "Mollie" married Daniel Patten (Owner of the Aetna Mine). In 1881, they moved in with John Lawley at the toll house and helped run the toll road and inn. The Pattens owned much of the old Silverado town site and in 1884, the Silverado Hotel (from the then mining ghost town of Silverado) was moved to the site and renamed Mt. St. Helena Inn.

In 1906, John Lawley died leaving Millie to run the Inn. It served as the Toll House until the toll road closed in 1924. Abandon in 1942, the Mt. St. Helena Inn was finally vandalized to death by 1950.

Mountain Mill House (stage stop)

Built in 1881, the Mountain Mill House served as a stage stop for Bill Spier's line and was home to Lillie McNulty (who's father Felix helped build the Lawley Toll Road). Lillie was named after the Lillie family who operated a mill on St. Helena Creek next door.

During the toll road days, Lillie McNulty and Mollie Patten would accuse each other of "stealing" guests. They reportedly could out curse most anyone. Spud Hawkins tells a story about a hungry stage driver enjoying a home-cooked meal at Mountain Mill House. After desert, he turns to Lillie and says "By God Lillie, that was good pie. If you didn't have them snaggy teeth, I'd kiss you!" To which Lillie replied, "You can kiss my ass!"