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JOHN LYMAN BEECHER, SR.  
by Louise Beecher Sanford

John Lyman Beecher, the fifth child, and only son of Charles Morris Beecher and Lydia Sage Beecher, was born on May the 6th, 1828, in New Marlborough, Massachusetts. His ancestors came to America from Kent, England, with a group of four men, who settled the New Haven Colony in 1638 — in Connecticut.

His mother died when he was three years old, so he had to depend upon the uncertain care of his father and older sisters. When he was about sixteen years old he went to live with a German farmer up in Maine, where he remained until he became of age. We know very little of his life during this period, but it was undoubtedly hard, with but little schooling, and a lot of hard work. However, no one can recall of his complaining of the experience but, on the contrary, he gave credit to his employer for teaching him habits of industry and thrift that lasted through his life.

When he became of age, it was the time of the discovery of gold in California, and, realizing the limitations of opportunity in New England, he took his scanty savings and bought passage to California in a sailing vessel, which was three months coming "Around the Horn" to California.

Writers of that period tell much of the hardships of those early voyages, overloaded as they were with passengers bound for the gold fields, and with poor fare, and the vessels had to meet with much rough weather. Disease was common on board, and the Pioneer Beecher, to avoid contagion, would take his blankets at night and sleep on the deck of the ship.

Arriving in San Francisco in the early part of 1851, he realized at once, with yankee thrift, that this port of high prices was no place for him to linger, so left at once for Stockton and the Mother Lode mines, in the vicinity of Sonora.

Mining, however, did not appeal to him, so, having accumulated about a thousand dollars, after several months of hard toil, he decided to look for other opportunities. Raised, as he had been, working the soil, he had a natural ambition to become a land owner, and with that thought in mind he returned to Stockton, which, at that time, was but a small village of tents and frame cabins, located at the head of navigable waters. It had a population of perhaps two thousand people. Its only excuse for existence then was that it was a point of departure for the Southern Mines.

There were many opportunities for John Beecher to work for wages, which were high, as labor was very

scarce, but he believed that in this new land there was some better road to independence.

The level valley lands lying east of Stockton were thickly dotted with large oak trees, and there was a ready market for stove wood. In order to study the country and soil conditions, he spent some time in chopping wood for sale.

Land was very cheap, but at that time the eastern farmer could see little possibility in raising a crop in a country with but two seasons, wet and dry. The land was not fenced and the only use made of it was for grazing cattle and horses.

John Beecher bought a section of 640 acres, south of what at that time was called the Mokelumne Hill Road, now the Linden Road, at the price of \$2.50 per acre.

After building a cabin on this land, he returned East, to Connecticut, and married Hulda Marie Alling in 1853. He had known her before coming to California the first time. Hulda Marie had been teaching school in New Haven, Connecticut, before her marriage.

Returning to California by way of Panama, the Pioneer bought more land from Charles Weber, six miles east of Stockton, where the present home now stands, which was built in 1860 after a fire destroyed the cabin he had built earlier.

Our old deeds all bear the Spanish name of the Weber Grant, which was "Rancho el Campo De los Franceses." This purchase was the beginning, as it were, of his real farm operations. In later years, as he could afford it, he added additional purchases until at one time he was farming 1,800 acres.

In the vicinity of the Ranch but little farming had been done prior to this time, cattle raising being the principal industry. With the exception of a few small lots for corrals little fencing had been done, and John Beecher was called a "Yankee Hog" because he was one of the first to fence his entire ranch. This was done because, from observation in Sacramento County, he believed that grain farming would be profitable, and he did not care to have his neighbors' cattle running at large over his fields.

The first few years proved that he was right, and, although farm implements were crude, and the work was slow, the rich soil repaid his faith with bountiful crops.

After the grain was harvested and threshed, it was loaded into a high wheeled freight wagon, and, with a team of eight or ten horses hauled to Knight's Ferry, a village in the foot hills, about thirty miles east of the Ranch, where one of the first flour mills in the state had been built.

Here the wheat was ground into flour, which Beecher freighted still further east, to the mining camps of the Mother Lode, where he was able to sell the flour at high prices.

Early California historians state that flour sold at \$1.00 per pound, and the same price for a dozen eggs or a pound of butter. On his return trip he would pick up freight that was available, stopping again at the flour mill for the bran and middlings, which remained after the flour was ground.

While wheat at that time was the principal crop, John Beecher was by no means a one crop farmer.

Horses, beef cattle, hogs, and dairy cows, besides poultry and eggs — all had their place, and the care of them kept the Pioneer and his growing family busy. The idea of an eight hour day had not been heard of then.

Later he was one of the first to try the combined harvester. The first ones were very crude, heavy affairs, and required thirty animals to draw them.

With the increase in grain growing, there naturally developed the business of storing and marketing this crop. However, the farmers became dissatisfied with the methods of the grain dealers and warehousemen, and formed a company of their own called the Farmer's Co-operative Union. This company was one of the first co-operatives in the state and was very successful. John Beecher was one of the directors and a charter member, and after the death of the first president he was elected to that office. He was also a director of the San Joaquin County Fair board for many years, and took an active part in civic affairs.

There were four children in the family, three sons and a daughter. Charles Ashley Beecher was the youngest in the family and was born on the Ranch in 1870, where he lived until he died in 1942, and where his daughter still lives.

John Lyman Beecher died at the Ranch in 1899 during his seventy-second year, and his wife followed him three years later.

Notes:

1. This sketch was condensed from the book "The Pioneer Beecher — His Life, His Times, and His Ranch" written by Charles Ashley Beecher for his family in 1936.
2. Mrs. Louise Beecher Sanford, grand-daughter of John Lyman Beecher, still lives east of Stockton in the lovely old family home built in 1860.