

## **Cornelius Prather**

Life of Cornelius Prather, An early Settler of Anderson Valley, California

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Cornelius Prather, son of John Lloyd and Mary (Johnson) Prather, was born at, or near North Veron, Jennings County, Indiana, on April 5th 1826. He resided at his birthplace till sixteen years of age. In 1842, he with his parents, moved to Scott County, Indiana. They resided there till 1845 moving then to Keokuk, Iowa, for one year. In 1846 they moved to Libertyville, Jefferson County, Iowa, where on January 1st, 1851, he married Evaline D. Ford, a native of Ohio, born October 16th, 1826.

In 1855, he, with his wife and two children, James Hiram prather, and Alice Alivra Prather, moved to Union City, Iowa, where he resided till the spring of 1862. Three daughters were born to the family while living in Union City, Martha Ann Prather, Emma Levenia Prather, and Cynthia Jane Prather. Cornelius Prather was a member of the Masonic Lodge, well up in the degrees of the order. By trade he was a wagon maker, carpenter, blacksmith, bricklayer, in fact was a "jack of all trades"

Off to California, in spring of 1862. On May 5, 1862, he with his wife, Evaline D. Prather, his son, James Hiram Prather, age 11 years, Alice Alvira Prather, age 9 years and Emma Leavenia Prather, age 4 years, left Union City Iowa, on a trip across the plains, in company with an emigrant train, all bound for California. Included in the emigrant train were the William Hamilton Family, His wife Mary (Prather) Hamilton, thier son Ewdin Perry Hamilton age 3 years, the Frank Hamilton Family, the Jones family, the Bliss family, the Skeen family and others. Ten wagons at the start. Mary (Prather) Hamilton related to Cornelius, through his grandfather William Prather, and his brother Lloyd Benton Prather, who was her grandfather, having spawned the line producing Mary Prather, who became a Hamilton by marrying William Hamilton in Union City, Iowa.

Cornelius Prather kept the Wagon Train trip diary. He had two teams of oxen of three yokes on a wagon, when he started; some of which, were sold on the trip; which was a tedious journey of five months, as shown by the narrative in the diary, Somewhere near Sacramento, California, Cornelius left the last of the wagon train, others had stopped off at differant places on the way. Cornelius landed in Healdsburg, on September 30, 1862, where he stayed on month, before moving on to Anderson Valley; when reaching there, the only money he had left but on dollar and six-bits; a part of this amount, he had to send back to Healdsburg for medicine, as all three of the children had come down with the measles. Soon after arriving at the home of his brother William Prather, who had come to the valley, in 1855. William Prather was now married and had one daugther, Hattie, about one year old. After stopping there for some days, he had the good luck to move into a house owned by Cyrus Clark, on a ranch or claim, of about a section of land. Cyrus Clark and a man with him, by the man of Bullock, were woodsmen, and worked on the coast. The house was situated not far from what is now the Navarro River. Cornelius Prather lived there for four years, rent free. He worked at whatever jobs he could find. A son John Lloyd

Prather, was born February 11, 1863, and a daughter Nancy Elizabeth Prather, was born on May, 18, 1865. The first saw mill operated by Clark and Bullock and in Anderson Valley, was located on this ranch.

About 1864 or 1865 Cornelius Prather bought a claim of 160 acres from the land of Clark and Bullock, situated on the county road leading from Boonville to Christine; upon this land he built a small house, and later made additions to it. He cleared ground and set out an orchard of fruit trees, of which, most of them there were grown from seeds which he planted in a nursery. When the peach trees were bearing, he found a ready market on the coast section for the fine fruits. He took a homestead on the land, and was granted a patent on February 5th, 1876.

A school district was formed August 22nd, 1865 named Indian Creek, as Cornelius Prather was mainly instrumental in forming the district, the school house was built on his land, near the county road; and remained there until the year 1894, when a new school house was built nearer Indian Creek on land of A.G. Ruddock.

Cornelius Prather was elected Justice of the Peace, September 3rd, 1879, and he was re-elected each consecutive election until November 4th, 1890 when a successor was elected. During the years 1887-1888, having saved enough money, he built a new six room house, situated a little nearer the county road.

On June 18, 1888, the post office of Philo was established, and having been instituted and named by him, Cornelius Prather became the first postmaster appointed. He also took a very active part in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church organization of Philo, and the erection of the church building on land, to which he gave a trust deed, conditionally. The building was dedicated on July 19, 1892.

In 1862, William's brother, Cornelius Prather arrived with his family, settling in the area known today as Philo. Cornelius gave land for the first school in this district, which stood on the west side of the road in Philo. He also deeded land for the Methodist Church, which is still in use (2004). In June 1888 he succeeded in getting the first post office in the valley established. He named the post office Philo in honor of a special friend of his in Iowa and he became the postmaster.

Since his arrival on Anderson Valley about November 1, 1862, he was always one of the most foremost, most useful, and best citizens. always a leader in any undertaking calculated to further or promote the best interests of the community. Having enjoyed the best health through his very active and industrious life, his last year was detined to be one of intense physical pain and suffering, due to a malignant cancer in his throat. Especially trying was such illness, but through it all he was a very patient sufferer until death came as a relief on December 26, 1900 at 10:20pm at the age of 74 years, 8 months, 21 days. Had he lived until New Year's day, 1901, it would have been Cornelius and Evaline's Golden anniversary.

The funeral service was held in the Philo Methodist Episcopal Church, and interment in the family plot in Greenmound Cemetary, near Boonville, California. The immense concourse of people which attended the funeral gave evidence of the high esteem in which he was held.