

From: Anne Finnie

The following letter, reproduced from the Bancroft Library, is a statement in Louis Sloss' handwriting, dated August 10, 1886, about three years after he bought the San Rafael property adjacent to the Gerstles. The Alaska Commercial Co. of which he was one of the founders and first President, is simply mentioned by him as follows: "We got into our present business in 1867."

The small Franconian village of Unterreisenheim where Louis Sloss was born ^{was} is situated on the banks of the Main River on the road between Wurzburg and Schweinfurt in the middle of farm fields and vineyards. The population of 580 consisted almost entirely of peasants, farmers and vineyard owners.

His parents, Laura and Lazarus were lower class working people, who like all the Jewish villagers of their day had no civil liberties. They were not allowed to live where they chose and were required to pay special taxes and yearly protection money.

His father Lazarus had only the rudiments of secular learning and the Torah. He died when Louis was four. His mother died when he was ten and by age 12 he was self-supporting, apprenticed to a general store.

At age 21 he came to America because in his words, "he had nothing

to lose in coming." After a year in Louisville he went to Maxwell, Kentucky to look up an older brother, Abraham. "Louis, he said, I don't know what I'm going to do with you. There is nothing for you here in my business and I don't really know where you should go. By now this country is all filled up." Louis stayed there a few years in merchandizing. The slave state of Kentucky was not what he had hoped to find in the new world. "Either the town got too small for me", he said, "or I got too big for it." ^{He was then 26 years of age.} It was the autumn of '49. People everywhere

were talking about the success of the Marshall discoveries in California.

Louis secured himself a place on the Turner and Allen Pioneer Train at a cost of \$200, all provisions included. It was due to leave in March from St. Jo, Missouri, (one of the leading outfitting places for the central overland route.) Before travelling 20 days, cholera broke out all along the emigration line. (The wagons were overladed and the preparations inadequate. One of the passengers, Louis discovered, was the son of a family whose homestead he had visited in Mackville, Kentucky, - Dr. Richard Hayes McDonald.) He and Louis and a Mr. Swift decided to leave the Wagon Train and pack to California. They took six horses, ~~two~~ three for riding and three for packing. (One was a white French pony belonging to McDonald, named "White Cloud".) The hardships they encountered are

well documented in history. Louis did not know how to swim and in crossing the South Platte had to hold on to one of the horses. They passed through many Indian villages and witnessed their modes of living.

On reaching Donner Lake they were perhaps the first to ~~WIXXREEX~~ examine the place where the Donner family had suffered that awful winter. They left the summit of the mountain and came down into Nevada City on the 18th of July 1849.