

# Henry Pinkney Angell

1826 – 1897

I would like to start this afternoon's presentation with one of my favorite quotes.

*“The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”*

From the commencement address Yale University 1962

Given by John Fitzgerald Kennedy

As education coordinator at our Museum, it's one of my responsibilities to help guide the presentation of our local history. In order to fulfill my obligation I often have to scrutinize existing historical information for its accuracy. Stories regarding events, people and even artifacts often require thoughtful investigation. It's not my intention to challenge or

rewrite long-standing histories just for the sake of it but on occasion, when new evidence presents itself, I am faced with that “discomfort of thought.”

Henry Pinkney Angell, Angels Camp’s namesake turned into one of those challenges. With many contradictory versions of his life in print or cast into bronze plaques, he was definitely worth researching. Even though Henry passed on 118 years ago, most of the accounts of his life were written in the last 75 years or so by people doing the best they could with limited resources. With the amount of information available today on the internet, I felt it was worth pursuing the possibility of new evidence even though no contemporary biographical accounts of Henry Angell’s life have been discovered.

My interest in making sense of the Angell story was heightened when I met a visitor to the Museum earlier this year named Lorna Flynn. Ms. Flynn is a librarian at Wooster College in Wooster, Ohio and has family ties to Angels Camp. She is a descendant of the Love family but has done considerable research on Henry Angell. She was extremely interested in helping me set the record straight and promised to send me her findings as soon as she returned home.

Ms. Flynn was true to her word and I owe her a lot for setting me on course for this project. The first important piece of evidence she provided was an excerpt from the extensive genealogical record of the Angell family published in 1872 by

Avery F. Angell, entitled “Genealogy of the Descendants of Thomas Angell, Who Settled in Providence 1636.”

Henry it turns out, was the youngest son of Charles Angell (1780-1828) and Susan Westcott (1786-1880) both natives of Rhode Island. Charles Angell farmed in Smithfield, R.I. and died when his youngest son, Henry was only two. Henry’s older siblings in order of birth were Albert (1805), Lydia (1808), Abby (1811), Emiline (1814), Charles (1816), Mercy (1819), and John (1823). After writing to the Rhode Island Historical Society regarding information on Henry, they were kind enough to send me photo-copy pages from an original handwritten account book, once owned by Henry’s Uncle Oliver. Oliver Angell noted the birth and death dates of Henry’s father Charles but also listed his children, Albert, Lydia, Abby, Emiline, Charles, John and Henry. There is no mention of Mercy as she had died in 1824.

The extensive family record written by Avery Angell and published in 1872 also recorded that “Henry P. went to California in 1849, and engaged in mining.” That intriguing bit of information fits into the new story but there is strong evidence supporting Henry being in California as early as 1847 as you will see later in this presentation.

One of the persistent and popular stories that cries out to be addressed is the tale that there were two Angell brothers here in California, Henry and George. In all my research I found no evidence for George’s existence in any contemporary census

records, voting records, business records or newspaper stories. The 19<sup>th</sup> century genealogies mentioned earlier, have no record of a brother George. One source for this brother's story that deserves mention is an account given by a claimed descendant of the Angell family named George Angels of Portland Oregon. Mr. Angel's testimony was featured in an anonymous article in the January 1987 issue of "Las Calaveras" entitled, "Founder of Angels Camp Left Only a Faint Track." In the article Mr. Angels, drawing from his family history, states that the Angell brother's parents were born in England when actually, they were natives of Rhode Island. The informant's family history continues with the story that the brothers came to California as soldiers and served under Fremont in the Mexican American War. You will see later that there is no evidence to support this either. Family histories have an undeniable value but there are always questions when it comes to memories and oral traditions.

Maureen Elliott of the Calaveras Genealogy Society was kind enough to share two emails from local historian Salvatore Manna addressed to Calaveras County Archivist Shannon Van Zant, dated April 20 and 25, 2010. In the correspondence Mr. Manna relates how his research into the Angell family identified Henry as the last member but there is no mention of a brother George. Mr. Manna also agreed with the opinion of well-known author Edna Buckbee that George was a mistake and it was always just Henry. Recounting that every mention of Henry and George is in the context of their being in Fremont's Battalion in

the Mexican War, Mr. Manna suggested that if a muster roll of the battalion was found it might settle the question. I will follow up on that suggestion shortly.

As troubling as it's been at times to scrutinize this story, I have relied on documentation as close to the time for information on Henry. Even though there never was a brother George, that doesn't discount the possibility of other family members showing up in California.

In the 1856 "Miners and Business Men's Directory," published by Heckendorn and Wilson, there is a James M. Angell listed as a resident of Columbia, Tuolumne County originally from Rhode Island, working there as a carpenter. Is James related to our Henry? It seems quite possible as the U.S. Census of 1860 lists a James Angell, age 34 as a household member with Henry P. Angell age 30. I feel that these ages should be reversed since we know Henry was born 1826, and would have been 34 in 1860. The 1870 and 1880 U.S. Censuses list an Andrew Angell age 49 (in 1880) from Rhode Island, living in Placer County. Is Andrew another relative, perhaps a cousin? Maybe something will turn up to tie him to Henry but I've yet to research it. One of the strangest twists to this story is an 1896 account of our Henry P. Angell having sons.

Originally from the *San Francisco Call*, this obituary was published in the Nov. 21, 1896 edition of the *Calaveras Prospect*.

## *“Young Angel Dead”*

*In the death notices which appeared in the daily papers as occurring in the City and County Hospital appears that of Charles C. Angel, aged 34 years. The man was the son of the well-known miner, after whom Angels Camp is named, and who at one time could count his wealth far up in the thousands. But his wealth slipped through his fingers and when he died he was a poor man. His sons fared no better, and this one who died a ward of the city, was interred yesterday at the expense of a few of his personal friends.*

If Henry read the local papers, he must have been shocked to read about his own demise. There is no record of a son or sons anywhere else, so I'm a little wary of this account. There was an older brother named Charles, but in 1896 he would have been in his 80's.

The next pursuit in the Angell story was to find evidence of Henry's military service in the Mexican American War. After reading Salvatore Manna's emails, I felt I was on the right track but wanted to make sure I had the facts straight. Luckily, military service is well documented in contemporary muster rolls and paymaster records, many of which are available for research today. I began by searching for a history of the First Regiment of New York Volunteers, commonly called the Stevenson's Regiment since stories exist having Henry or Henry and George as members.

In 1882, Francis D. Clark published, “1846 – 1882, The First Regiment of New York Volunteers Commanded by Col. Jonathan E. Stevenson in the Mexican War.” In this volume are the names of all of the members of the regiment during its term of service in upper and lower California 1847 – 1848. This book is available online at [babel.hathitrust.org](http://babel.hathitrust.org). I found no record of any Angell (with two L’s) or Angel (with one L) on the rolls of the First New York.

Next in my search was to find any lists of John C. Fremont’s California Battalion members, hoping they might provide evidence of any Angell’s service. I really love the internet when it comes through for you. On [rootsweb.ancestry.com](http://rootsweb.ancestry.com) I found the original pay roster for the Battalion. Noted as “Roster of Fremont’s California Battalion, Mexican War 1846” (original roster of nine companies of volunteers which operated against Mexican forces in California at the time of the occupation of the country by the United States, 1846 – 1847.) Major Pierson B. Reading, paymaster. I combed the handwritten pages but alas, no Angel was listed, spelled with one L or two. Before I dismissed any notion of Henry’s service I wanted to make sure so I contacted Fremont historian Bob Graham for his advice. Bob checked the “Rosters of California Volunteers in the Service of the United States 1846 – 47.” Collated with forward by (Col.) Fred B. Rogers in the annual publication of the Society of Pioneers, San Francisco 1950. Bob reported that he found no record of an Angell.

It appears that this military service story for Henry was added as a romantic embellishment at some point in time or might have been an assumption on the part of earlier biographers. The Carson Robinson Expedition of which Henry was likely a member, was made up of mostly Stevenson's soldiers on furlough granted by their commanding officers. This freed them from duty so they could dig for gold. It's well documented that many Mexican War vets were in the forefront of the early Gold Rush discoveries.

What we do know is that Henry Pinkney Angell was here in California before the Gold Rush started and thanks to Lorna Flynn we have some good first person sources to support that. William Kennedy Casement states in his book *Autobiography and Reminiscence of William Kennedy Casement*:

*“Mr. Angel I knew in Monterey before the gold discovery. The town of Angel's Camp derives its name from him.”*

With the outbreak of the Mexican American War, William Kennedy Casement joined Company F of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Artillery in New York and sailed to California on the sloop Lexington. James H. Carson was the Quartermaster and Commissary Sergeant of the Company.

In Luella Dickerson's book, *Reminiscences of a Trip Across the Plains in 1846 and Early Days in California*, Henry Angell is mentioned as a guest at a ball given by Thomas Larkin in Monterey before the gold discovery. It appears our Henry was



keeping company with prominent people as Thomas Oliver Larkin was a wealthy merchant and the first and only U.S. Consul to Mexican California. Luella also mentions Henry as the namesake for Angels Camp and Angels Creek.

Hubert Howe Bancroft's *California Pioneer Register and Index*, lists Henry Angell at Sutter's Fort in February of 1848 and possibly as one of Weber's prospectors in July of the same year (noting Carson as the source of that information). By May of 1848, the news of the discovery on the American River had reached Monterey and no one was spared from the epidemic of gold fever. Henry likely joining a group of 91 adventurers, all with ambitious plans to explore and claim their own virgin ground according to James H. Carson's *Recollections of the California Mines* published in the Stockton Edition 1852, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Fortune finally smiled on the Carson-Robinson Expedition when they reached the tributaries of the Stanislaus River. Sometime thereafter Henry might have joined Charles Weber's army of prospectors as stated above, but by July of 1848, Henry found himself successfully working the placer deposits at the confluence of Dry Creek and the creek that would bear his name. Henry wasted no time investing his newfound wealth into something more rewarding. Opening up a tent store near Angels Creek, he established himself as the first merchant of the new camp, selling necessities to his once fellow miners. Angel's trading post was still going strong by mid-December 1848 and

continued into 1849, now part of the growing camp known as Angels.

James H. Carson mentions in his *Recollections of the California Mines*, that “Angel also discovered Angel’s Creek, at which he wintered in 1848.” Sometime in 1849 Henry sold his store to J.C. Scribner as recorded in T. H. Hittell’s *History of California Vol. III*.

Soon thereafter Henry apparently returned home to Rhode Island. Thanks again to Lorna Flynn for this piece of information which as far as I know is absent from any of the accounts of Henry’s life. On September 6, 1849, Henry Pinkney Angell applied for and was issued a Seaman’s Protection Certificate in the Customs District of Newport, Rhode Island, recorded as U.S. Nativity Certificate #37.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and into the 19th century, it was not uncommon for British ships to visit ports or board vessels on the high seas for the purpose of impressing foreign seaman into service in the Royal Navy. To counter this, Congress passed an "Act for the Relief and Protection of American Seamen" in 1796. Under the Act, customs collectors were to maintain a record of all United States citizens serving on United States ships that came within their jurisdiction. Each seaman, once registered with the customs collector, was given a Seaman's Protection Certificate. These documents recorded the citizenship of the individual and included their age, height, complexion, place of birth and occasionally hair and eye color. Apparently the problem of

impressing still existed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as no doubt Henry carried his certificate with him on his return voyage as proof of his nativity. From a copy of the record of Henry's certificate provided courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration we learn that he was five foot, eleven and a quarter inches tall and had a light complexion.

With this new perspective on Henry's life as a seaman I was encouraged to take my research in a new direction. After contacting the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park Research Center, I learned from Reference Librarian Gina Bardi, that most ship's records of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century focused on their captain, cargo and passengers with little information recorded on crew members. Hopefully more details will be found about this intriguing part of our Henry's life. His return to home must have been brief if we are to believe Avery Angell's genealogy passage having him off to the gold fields in 1849. What we do know for sure is that Henry was back in California by 1852 as he is listed in the California State Census as a miner in Calaveras County.

Another enticing clue from Ms. Flynn was a reference to a letter waiting for a Henry R. Angell in the Sacramento Post Office. In the *Sacramento Daily Union*, Vol. 6, Number 794, dated Oct. 10, 1853 there is a column called the Gentleman's List which named people whose letters were waiting for them in the Post Office. Whether or not this was our Henry, it got me thinking about the possibility of letters, going or coming during his life. I

mentioned earlier about contacting the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence for any records regarding a certain native son. Unfortunately, nothing was found in their collections specifically relating to Henry P. Angell but they did have information about his mother and of course his uncle's notebook mentioned earlier. My dream of stacks of letters would for the time being remain just that.

For the next 45 years of his life, Henry would pursue his California dream with mixed results. It appears he often flirted with success but never quite achieved it. *The Sacramento Daily Union* of June 4, 1855 recorded:

*“The Great Cave – Messrs. Angel & Magee, the liberal and enterprising proprietors of the great natural curiosity, and of the “Cave House,” have made extensive preparations for the reception of guests. Parties from various parts of the State visit them daily. The road thither is in very good condition.”*

Apparently Henry's plans took a turn as it is recorded in the Calaveras County Book of Records that he and Widdon McGee sold their interest in the Cave House Hotel to a Joseph Smith for \$4,000.00 on May 23, a week and a half before the ad ran in the *Sacramento Daily Union*. This turn of events might have been brought on by a mechanic's lien filed in the County on Sept. 12, 1854 for \$1,527.93 against Angel and McGee by William Dennis & Co. for the expense of lumber and improvements to the cave (*Las Calaveras* 1987: 27).

As late as 1890, 64 year old Henry apparently still maintained some status in the community as he was appointed Election Board Supervisor by the Calaveras County Supervisors. Successful or not, he would return many times throughout his life to where he started here, working as a humble miner.

With the dearth of information on Henry, every clue deserves investigation. In a conversation with our director Kim Arth, the question came up about the authenticity of the only known photo of Mr. Angell. There is a copy print of the image in the Calaveras County Archives with a stamped back mark identifying it as from the V. Covert Martin collection. Asa Van Covert Martin was a commercial photographer who was active in the Stockton area in the 1920s. He apparently is best known for recording architectural history in California. The Henry Angell print in the archives also had some handwritten notes on the back about Henry but nothing revealing or anything about the history of the photo. Archivist Shannon Van Zant thought that the original photograph might be in the National Archives or the University of the Pacific Collections.

I did find some of Mr. Martin's work online in the Library of Congress but no photo of Henry Angell. An inquiry to L.O.C. got a quick response from Marilyn Ibach who informed me that they did not have the image I was interested in but suggested that I contact U.O.P. since they have more of Mr. Martin's work in their Holt-Atherton Special Collections. Special Collections Librarian Nicole Grady found the Angell image and kindly

responded by sending me a scan of its reverse side. Unfortunately U.O.P.'s print is not the original either and is marked copy 1. On the back however there is some interesting information. There is a stamped mark that reads: Credit and return to V. Covert Martin Collection, Stuart Library of Western Americana, University of the Pacific Stockton Calif. 95204. Below the stamp on a neatly typed label, is a brief account of Henry's life including his place of birth, a mention of his trading post and his death in 1897 in the County Hospital. No actual information about the photograph. There are also handwritten notes on the back, one quoting Bancroft's list of pioneers putting Henry at Sutter's Fort in February of 1848. The more interesting of the handwritten notes was apparently copied from the Calaveras County death records. It reads: Register of Deaths, Calaveras County, Book B, pg. A, March 17, 1897, Angel, Henry P.- white, age 72 (he was actually 71), single, nativity Rhode Island – heart failure, physician J.A. Holland. Without hard evidence to support it, the identity of the man in the photograph could remain a mystery but considering the work of Mr. Martin as a historian, it's more than likely our Henry.

After a long hard life, Henry Pinkney Angell left this world a pauper with nothing but his name. His obituary in the Calaveras Prospect of March 20, 1897 sums up his late life and departure starting with the title:

*“Death of a Forty-Niner”*,

*“He is Buried by the Citizens in the People's Cemetery.”*

*As will be seen in the death notices on another page, Henry P. Angel died at the County Hospital last Wednesday. The deceased came to California in 1849 and during the past thirty years lived in the vicinity of Fourth Crossing, where he mined in partnership with the late Henry O'Dell. They were not very successful but by hard work managed to make enough to live on while in health. O'Dell was taken sick and had to be removed to the Hospital, but when he died Angels with that abiding spirit of true friendship sold all his meager worldly possessions and appropriated the proceeds to defraying the expense of a decent burial for his old-time friend and partner. He was not long to follow and on the above day joined his friend in the other world. Mr. Angel was highly respected by all who knew him and had not a known enemy in the world. Through the efforts of Steward Burgess a subscription was raised and the remains were interred in a proper manner in the People's Cemetery on Saturday.*

So there you have it, even though his luck was fleeting, Henry certainly embodied the optimism and humble nobility of the 49er. Hopefully his claim to fame will always be with us as long as we remember the man a little more and the myth a little less. I'm hopeful that more information about Henry's life will be discovered as his story is far from over.

Thank You !

by Jim Miller