

"BILLY" PRIDHAM

California Pioneer and Express Veteran

During the gold rush there arrived in California, by way of the Isthmus of Panama, a young New Yorker, at that time known as "Billy" Pridham, and later to be affectionately called "Uncle Billy" Pridham. Soon after arriving here he went to work for an uncle in Stockton, but the "gold bug" having stung him, he could not long resist the lure of the precious metal, which was not coming in to him fast enough at his uncle's place of business, so he staked a claim on the Bear River, above Auburn, which he worked for more than a year, with a fair degree of success.

Next we find him in Sacramento, where in 1858, he became a messenger for the Wells Fargo Express Company. In this capacity he carried to San Francisco on the river steamers, great amounts of gold, which was brought to Sacramento on the numerous gold field stage lines that centered in that city. He carried as high as \$1,000,000 worth of gold dust on a single trip.

With the establishment of the Pony Express, he enlisted as a courier and rode out of Austin, Nevada, for a year, covering a route of 60 miles, once every day, between that place and Smith Creek station. The trail was a rough one and a change of horses was made every ten miles. It was a wild country and Indians were frequently troublesome. "Billy" once made the run in six hours.

When the Pony Express went out of business in 1861, he became the Agent for the Wells Fargo at Austin, but his health failing, he quit and returned to California, spending some time at Paso Robles recuperating. In 1868, he resumed work for the express company, this time as cashier in the company's San Francisco office. From there he was sent to Los Angeles to straighten out the affairs of the office. In due time, and with the establishment of new lines out of Los Angeles, he was appointed agent there and was successively promoted to assistant superintendent and superintendent of the Los Angeles division. He retired in 1908, and was the only man in the employ of the Wells Fargo who was

presented with a medal for 50 years of continuous service.

William Pridham was born in New York City, in 1837, and died at Alameda, California., November 14, 1923, at the age of 87 years.