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## ***Early Days in Yosemite* by Galen Clark (originally titled "A Plea for Yosemite")**

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### Introduction

This booklet reproduces an article "A Plea for Yosemite" that was originally written around 1907 by Galen Clark, Yosemite Park's first Guardian. It describes early tourism in Yosemite and changes in management Clark felt was needed for Yosemite Valley.

### Bibliographical Information

Galen Clark (1814-1910) *Early Days in Yosemite Valley* (Los Angeles: The Docter Press, 1964). Introduction by Richard F. and Shirley Docter. ix, 10p. 19 cm. Paper cover. From copy 38 of 70 in the UCI Library. Originally published as "A Plea for Yosemite" in *Yosemite Nature Notes* (February 1927) from a manuscript by Galen Clark written c. 1907. A sometimes-defensive editorial note was written by Carl P. Russel after Clark's reprinted article in *Yosemite Nature Notes* article on p. 15.

Note: an early account of Yosemite, "A Trip to the Yosemite Falls" was printed in the *Mariposa Democrat*, August 5, 1856. It was reprinted as the same title as this book, "Early Days in Yosemite," in *California Historical Society Quarterly* 1(3):271-285 (Jan. 1922).

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—Dan Anderson, [www.yosemite.ca.us](http://www.yosemite.ca.us)

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## **Early Days In Yosemite Valley**



By Galen Clark

THE DOCTER PRESS: LOS ANGELES: 1964

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### INTRODUCTION

Across from the Wawona Hotel on the flood banks of the south fork of the Merced there is a golf course which once was meadowland; it was here that Galen Clark homesteaded in 1856. Clark had camped here in August, 1855 as a member of Hutchings' second Yosemite tour, and he returned the following year to set up a wayside station strategically located for overnight stops along the new trail into the valley.

As an innkeeper Clark was remembered and described by many early Yosemite visitors. He has been called hospitable, a solid New Englander, well informed, thoughtful, interesting, and slovenly. But perhaps John Muir gave the description a rugged pioneer would appreciate most when he eulogized Clark as "... the best mountaineer I ever met, and the kindest and most amiable of all my mountain friends."

In 1866 Clark was appointed to be the first Guardian of the new Yosemite Grant, and he served in this post a total of twenty years. Yosemite historians agree unanimously that he was a dedicated and hardworking Guardian, but Shirley Sargent, who probably knows more about Galen Clark than any other person, goes a step farther. In a letter to us she advances the theory that "... he was instrumental in persuading Congress and others of the necessity of establishing the Grant. Unlike Muir, he was quiet, modest, and worked behind the scenes, but was far more important to Yosemite's early development than was Muir." His lifelong work, and in 1904 we find him corresponding with John Muir to plead for help in the control of lumbering near Yosemite Valley. Clark died in 1910 at the age of 96 and is buried in the Yosemite Pioneer Cemetery.

The article presented here was probably written in 1907 and is from Clark's manuscript in the Yosemite Museum bearing the original title, "A Plea for Yosemite." We have taken the liberty of using a title more descriptive of the content. This piece was printed previously in the February, 1927, issue of *Yosemite Nature Notes*.

We are indebted to our friend, Miss Shirley Sargent, for her helpful comments on the life of Galen Clark and for her understanding of Yosemite history in general. Thanks are also due Miss Ruth Glass, formerly of the Yosemite Museum, for her help and kindness to us.

Richard and Shirley Docter  
Canoga Park, California

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Yosemite valley is generally well known is in the center of the State of California north and south, and nearly midway between the western base and summit of the Sierra Nevada range of mountains.

It was first discovered and made known to the public by Major James D. Savage and Captain John Boling who with a strong detachment of mounted troops from what was known as the Mariposa Battalion of Volunteers went with friendly Indian guides to the valley in March 1851, to capture and take the resident tribe of Indians out and put them on the Fresno Indian Reservation. The first improved trail for saddle animals to Yosemite was made by a livery stable firm in Mariposa known as the Mann Brothers in 1856 from Mariposa by way of the south fork of the Merced River crossing the stream at a point now known as Wawona, and in 185 the regular tourist travel to Yosemite may be said to have commenced, though a few persons had gone there in each of the five previous years. All parties at that time went with camping outfits.

The first house in Yosemite was built in the fall of the year 1856 and was opened up the next spring as a saloon for the entertainment of that class of visitors who loved whiskey and the sport of gambling. The next year it was fitted up and used as a restaurant. The first good building for a hotel was built in 1859 and is now a part of the Sentinel Hotel premises known as the Cedar Cottage. Most of the early visitors to Yosemite were Californians and did not amount to one thousand in any one season until the completion of the Union and Central Pacific Railroads. Soon after that important event the number increased to many thousands annually. All the necessary supplies for Hotel and other purposes were taken into the valley by pack mule trains from Coulterville and Mariposa, a distance of 50 miles, until the completion of the wagon roads into Yosemite in 1874.

The main grand features and great variety of Yosemite scenery was early and widely made known throughout the civilized world by pen and Press, public speech, Artist's Paint Brush, Camera and Kodack. But no painting or photograph gives its vivid thrilling life expression.

I have seen persons of a sensitive refined emotional temperament stand with tearful eyes spell-bound and dumb with awe as they get their first view of Yosemite from Inspiration Point, overwhelmed in the sudden presence of the unspeakable stupendous grandeur of such part of the scenery as can be seen from that favorable position.

But almost every tourist who has visited Yosemite in the past few years during California's warmest. and dry season of the year has left with one unpleasant experience. Dust!

The floor or top soil of the valley over which the Stage Roads are made is composed of fine disintegrated granite sand. The great amount of traffic over the roads by heavy freight wagons required to bring in the necessary supplies, the great number of stage coaches required to accom[modate] the multitude of daily tourists, campers' wagons, and private carriages have cut deeply into the soft sandy soil and pulverized it until the roadbed has become a deep channel of volatile earth dust, which rises great clouds, enveloping stage coaches and Passengers, obscuring vision, penetrating ears, eyes, nose and mouth if not kept closely shut, and covering the whole body with a dusty pall so that as the stages arrive at the Hotel they appear to be loaded with human images carved in brown stone. Since the completion of the Yosemite Valley Railroad up the Merced River to El Portal near the Western boundary of the Yosemite National Park, the U. S. Government is having some fine improvement work done on the road leading up into Yosemite Valley and if ample means are appropriated by Congress the good work will be continued on up to the hotel, Public camps and around the valley on the interesting carriage drives. It is hoped that the California delegation in Congress may be successful in getting liberal appropriations for continuing not only this Road work but all other important work for the protection and preservation of the scenic beauty of Yosemite.

A great change has taken place in Yosemite Valley since it was taken from the control of the native Indians who formerly lived there. In the early years when first visited by white people three fourths of the valley was open ground, meadows grasses waist high, and flowering plants. On the dryer parts were scattering forest trees, pines, cedars and oaks, too widely separate to be called groves, clear of underbrush leaving clear open extensive vision up and down and across the valley from wall to wall on either side.

The Indians had kept the valley clear of thickets. and young trees and brushwood shrubbery so that they could not be waylaid, ambushed or surprised by enemies from outside and to not afford biding places for Bears or other predatory animals, and also to have clear ground for gathering acorns which constituted one of their main articles of food. At the present time there is not more than one fourth of the floor of the valley clear open ground as there was fifty years ago. Nearly all the open ground between the large scattering trees is now covered with a dense growth of young trees which. also extend out over hundreds of acres of the driest portion of the meadow land. Every pine tree on the floor of the valley less than seventy-five feet high has grown from the seed within the past fifty years. During recent years considerable work has been done in clearing up the young growth of trees and brushwood to afford better views of the distant scenery and to be better able to control fires which accidentally get started in the dry summer season. In many favorable localities where this work of thinning out and trimming up the young growth has been done, it makes very desirable charming clean shady groves for camping parties. There are still hundreds of acres where this reclaiming work needs to be continued to make the greater portion of the valley accessible to visitors, and to break up the bidden retreats of the Bears which have now taken up their permanent residence in Yosemite. This present season an female Bear with two cubs has had a free pass throughout the valley and had given ferocious chase to every Photo Artist who has attempted to get a picture of the group. As this work of clearing up and reclaiming a large portion of Yosemite valley is one of great importance and National interest it should be done in accordance with plans submitted by the best Artistic Landscape Engineers after a careful survey and study of the whole field, so as to show all the scenery, local and surrounding to the best advantage from the carriage road, private walks and local resting places in charming shady groves. Much of this work can be done at very little dead expense. All the larger growth to be cleared away can be cut into firewood and readily sold to residents at the cost of cutting.

Another matter of paramount importance in the care and preservation of Yosemite Valley is the protection of the banks of the Merced River as it runs its winding crooked course through the length of the valley. In the Spring season of the year when the flood waters, from the melting snow on the surrounding heights pours over the great falls and fills the river channel to overflowing its banks in many places, the strong current impinging against the gravelly substratum cuts it away and undermines the top surface sod, leaving it a loose death trap for every man or beast that goes near its edge until it breaks down of its own weight. Several feet in width of the River Banks are thus cutaway annually. During the past thirty years the River Channel in many places has been changed sidewise three times its original width, leaving a wide barren waste of sand and gravel on the opposite side, thus destroying its scenic beauty.

It may be interesting to the Public to know the cause of there being in recent years so much more activity in the river currents cutting away the river banks than during the earlier known history of Yosemite. When the El Capitan Iron Bridge was built in 1879 it was located across the narrow channel of the river between the two points of what remains of an old glacial terminal moraine. The river channel at this place was filled with large boulders which greatly obstructed the free outflow of the flood waters in the spring, causing

extensive overflows of the low meadowland above, greatly interfering with travel, especially to Yosemite Falls and Mirror Lake. In order to remedy this matter the large boulders in the river channel at the Bridge were blasted and the fragments leveled down so as to give a free outflow of the flood waters. This increased the force of the river currents which now commenced its greater eroding work on the river banks and as the winding turns become more abrupt the destructive force annually increases. Some thorough system of protection should be promptly used to save the river banks from further damage.

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Presented to friends of Richard and  
Shirley Docter in commemoration of the  
one-hundredth anniversary of  
Yosemite National Park

[Graphic of printing press in red.]

Seventy copies were printed on  
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