

CHAPTER 3

SAMUEL

Samuel Bell (1798-1883) and Mary (Polly) Codner (b 1804)

Samuel Bell, the second son of William and Mary Gilmore Bell, was born in Ireland in 1798, a few months before his family sailed for America. He was undoubtedly named after his maternal grandfather, Samuel Gilmore, the patriarch of the family with whom he, his parents, and his older brother Thomas came to the “New World”. When Samuel was about sixteen his parents moved to Mentz to be near his grandparents and other extended family on the Gilmore side. He married Mary (Polly) Codner from a nearby farm in 1822 and, over the next twenty-four years, they had at least nine children: Lucy (1823-1891), Mary/Maria (1824-1858), Julia <b ___ -1854), William <b 1829>, Caroline <b 1833>, Margaret <b 1836-1890), Henry C. (b 1840), Harriet (Hattie) H. (b 1841), and Charles (b 1842). Other sources indicate they actually had eleven children, but any additional names remain unknown.

Samuel and Polly farmed for most of those years in a low valley across from the home of Dr. Alanson White (one of two local physicians) and the Montezuma Rural Cemetery, also called “Prospect Hill”. The farm was three-fourths of a mile south of the hamlet of Montezuma and a mile west of Mentz Church on what is now McDonald Road. By the late twentieth century, the house and outbuildings were gone and the nearest acreage had been converted into a campground.

Like his older brother Thomas, Samuel was deeply involved in politics at an early age. He, in fact, was cited in a newspaper report a year before Thomas, when he and their uncle (or cousin), John Gilmore, served as delegates to a Republican Convention in Auburn on October 25, 1825. This was the short-lived Party of John Quincy Adams, not the later Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln. Samuel and younger brother, William Bell, Jr., went on to participate in several local and regional political conventions, mostly for the Whig Party, and Samuel was elected to the 1846-1847 term in the New York State Assembly. He also represented Montezuma as one of the vice-presidents of the annual Cayuga County Fair and Cattle Show in the 1840s. An October 1841 *Journal and Advertiser* report shows that the Bells’ daughter, “Maria”, took third place in a knitting contest (stockings) at the Fair, receiving a diploma, and her older sister, Lucy, won a first-place prize of \$3.00 for needlework (basket of flowers).

According to the 1850 Census, Samuel’s real estate was valued at a whopping \$15,000. If that’s true, his net worth was more than twice that of his next most affluent brother, John. Later in that decade, he even bought a house on Morocco Street in the hamlet of Montezuma for their son, Henry, while he and Polly remained on the farm with the younger children. News accounts and family documents, however, suggest that Samuel and Polly endured some significant financial challenges. His father’s will, for instance, written in 1859, said, “My son Samuel Bell having been advanced by me his full share of my real & personal estate during my life, I give bequeath & devise to him Ten Dollars ---

- in full of any claims or demands upon my estate of any description whatever.” By contrast, Samuel’s brothers inherited amounts ranging from \$1,300 to \$1,600. (*William Bell, Will and Testament, February 16, 1859, Cayuga County Records Retention Office, Auburn, NY; Box 44, p-332, Recorded November 30, 1863*). Then, in 1869, Samuel and Polly defaulted on an eight-year old mortgage and lost property in a foreclosure sale. Whether the foreclosure included the original farm or not is difficult to discern. The legal notice mentions that it was originally part of the Town of Brutus and then the Town of Montezuma and bordered “the old Erie Canal” and “the turnpike road.” (*Auburn Daily Democrat, February 26, 1869*)

The foreclosure is puzzling, in part, because Samuel and Polly had moved to Sacramento, California with Hattie and Charles shortly after the death of William Bell, Sr. more than five years earlier. The four of them were still living together in 1880, sharing a house at 127 “J” Street in Sacramento with a Bavarian immigrant named William Haberman. Neither Hattie nor Charles had married. Samuel (then 82) was involved in a mercantile business that year while Polly “kept house,” Hattie taught school and Charles worked as a druggist. Polly had developed rheumatism. According to the Bell Family Bible, Samuel died September 15, 1883, at the age of 85.

Charles spent some time in the military during the Civil War, and may be the Charles Bell who served in Company C of California’s 4th Regiment of Infantry (“*Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867*”, Brigadier-Gen. Richard H. Orton, 1890). A “Special Census” from 1890 indicates only that he served during the Civil War (*Churchill, NV 1890 (Veteran's) Special Schedule; ftp://ftp.us-census.org/pub/usgenweb/census/nv/churchill/1890/*). An 1889 Auburn newspaper mentioned, in a column on Montezuma events, that Charles had gone to California 26 years earlier and was now, “...the head of the Nickel plate mining company of Nevada and is on the road to fortune” (*Auburn Weekly News and Democrat, December 26, 1889*). Other records reveal that he was the Superintendent of the company and, in fact, had discovered the mining site with his brother and another man.

There are two nickel-cobalt mines in the Table Mountain district that were of sufficient importance to induce a number of attempts at exploitation ...The deposits were situated in the vicinity of the old camp of Bolivia about 3 miles up Cottonwood Canyon on the east slope of the Stillwater Range.

The Nickel Mine at Camp Bolivia was discovered in 1880 by John Mason, Charles Bell, and his brother, William. The Lovelock or Cobalt mine, about 1 mile west, was located at the same time by George Lovelock, Sr., The mines were prospected for a number of years . . . following their discovery, and the first ore is said to have been shipped to Swansea, Wales, from the Lovelock mine by W. S. Keyes.

In the late eighties the company erected a sulfuric acid leaching plant at the mine at a cost of \$50,000, but this venture was unsuccessful owing to the fact that the Italian chemist who designed the plant was unfamiliar with the metallurgy of nickel-cobalt ores. Later, a 5-ton-capacity water-jacketed furnace was erected at the Nickel mine, but it blew up a short time after it was placed in operation.

A number of copper prospects occur on Treasure Box Hill at the head of Bell Mare Canyon south of Cottonwood Canyon. Deposits are reached on horseback up Cottonwood Canyon past the Nickel properties. From Boyer ranch the distance is about 15 miles. The principal properties were located in the early [eighteen] sixties by Alva Boyer, C. S. Kellogg, Jacob Stranager, and Patrick Reid.

In about 1900, a group from Colorado erected a small smelting furnace on the Azurite-Nevada Queen group of claims, which is still intact, but, judging from the condition of the smelter, no ore was reduced."
(Vanderburg, *Reconnaissance of Mining Districts in Churchill County, Nevada*)

There was formerly a road up the canyon to the mines, but it has been completely washed out, and the mines at present can be reached only on foot through a steep-walled canyon.

According to Lincoln, nickel and cobalt deposits were discovered by George Lovelock and Charles Bell about 1882. Production was chiefly from the Lovelock Mine until 1886. About 200 tons of ore was shipped to England for reduction, 90 tons during 1885. The Mine reopened during 1898 and an attempt was made to smelt, but there was little or no production. There was less work on the Nickel Mine - one car of ore was shipped to Camden, New Jersey. It was reopened in 1904 and an attempt was made to leach ore with sulphuric (sic) acid. A small smelter was built, but there was only 50 tones of production (matte.) Idle since 1907. (University of Nevada, *Nickel Deposits In Cottonwood Canyon*)

(*Reconnaissance of Mining Districts in Churchill County, Nevada (1940); William O. Vanderburg, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines; cited by <http://www.them-or-us.com/sites/main.html>*)

As his mining operation was taking off in 1884, Charles also managed to court and wed an immigrant from England, whose first name was Elizabeth. Though Elizabeth, nine or ten years younger than Charles, was in her early thirties at the time of their marriage, they never had children. By 1900 they had moved back to San Francisco, where they lived in a building with three other couples and a single man at 986 Post Street. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, they moved in with a nephew, also named Charles Bell, and his wife, Leah, across the bay in the city of Oakland. The elder Charles was listed as a miner in the 1900 Census and as a mining superintendent in the next one. The younger Charles, whose parentage is unclear, was a furniture store salesman.

The mining documents cited above also provide a clue as to what became of Charles' older brother, William. He had married a woman back in Cayuga County with the wonderfully Dickensian name, "Rachel Twist," and they had a daughter, Elvira, who in turn married Frank Shay, the son of Peter Shay. William and Rachel also bought property in Mentz in 1854, but, apart from the foregoing and fleeting historical reference in the 1940 Bureau of Mines report, no further information on either William or Rachel has been located.

An 1892 visit to Montezuma by Samuel and Polly Bell's daughter, Hattie, elicited this note from the village's newspaper gossip: "Miss Harriet Bell, daughter of the late Samuel Bell, a former resident of this village, who died several years ago at San Francisco, Cal., is visiting friends and relatives at her former home after an absence of twenty years." (*Auburn Argus*, September 30, 1892) She, her parents and her brother Charles had moved to California in the 1860s, almost thirty years earlier, so the reference to a twenty year absence might (or might not) mean that Hattie had returned for a visit at least once in the early 1870s. In 1892, she would have been around 50 years old and, as the article indicates, still unmarried.

Information on the other children of Samuel and Polly varies. Their eldest, Lucy, married a man named Baldwin and moved to Iowa, where she died in 1891. Mary (or Maria) married Elija W. Tallmadge sometime prior to 1850, but died in 1858 at age 33 and was buried in the Mentz Church Cemetery near her grandmother, Mary Gilmore Bell. Her widower, Elija, almost certainly was related to John J. Tallmadge of Montezuma who became a mayor of Milwaukee and a (losing) Democratic candidate for Governor of Wisconsin in 1870.

The Bells' third daughter, Julia, was one of five young men and women from Cayuga County to matriculate at the State Normal School at Albany in 1847 (*Daily Advertiser*, April 23, 1847). She later married Erie "Tibbits" (E.T.) Ward <b 1822>, who worked, appropriately enough, on the Erie Canal. *The Cayuga Chief* noted their wedding in its edition of Thursday, April 26, 1849, referring to the groom as "Erie S. Ward" and the bride as "Miss Julia E. Bell, dau. of Samuel Bell, Esq." The wedding was held on April 18 "near Montezuma," with Rev. Aaron Cross officiating. They then remained in the Town of Mentz, where "Tibbits" was a merchant and they shared a house in 1850 with Julia's cousin, William Wright (age 19) who worked as a clerk (cf. Chapter 7), and a man named John Ross (age 41). However, like her sister Maria, Julia died just a few years after her marriage (and four years prior to Maria's death). The *Auburn Daily Advertiser* of Tuesday, April 4, 1854, carried this notice: "WARD, Mrs. Julia E. Wife of E.T. Ward. dau. of Samuel Bell of Montezuma. d. Salem, Marion Co. Ill, Mar. 7th of Chill Fever (no age)." "Chill Fever" was a common term for malarial or intermittent fever characterized by paroxysms. There's no indication as to whether she left any children.

After Julia's death, Erie returned to Montezuma and married her younger sister, Margaret (Maggie) Bell. They, in turn, moved to the village of Dunkirk on Lake Erie in Chautauqua County, where they shared a house with an older woman named Julia Stanley and her 19 year old son, Charles. Erie was employed there as a railroad freight clerk and had total assets in 1860 of just \$1,000. A news clipping from Montezuma datelined February 23, 1890, said, "Mrs. Maggie Bell Ward, widow of the late Erie T. Ward, and daughter of the late Samuel Bell, former residents of this village, died recently at her late home at Dunkirk, N.Y. She leaves a son and a daughter, and many friends to cherish her memory. Her age was 52 years" (*Auburn Bulletin*, February 25, 1890).

Caroline Bell's story has been among the most difficult to track. According to at least one source, now forgotten, her married name was Young. If that's true, she might have

been the Caroline Young who was widowed and living in the Town of Locke in 1880 or she might have been the wife of Gilbert A. Young in Venice, New York. Caroline and Gilbert Young – whoever they were – are buried in the East Venice Cemetery. Another possibility is that Caroline was the mother of Lucy A. Young, who was born in 1848.

Caroline's brother, Henry Clay Bell, was a farmer in early adulthood (circa 1859) while living in the house his parents owned on Morocco Street in the hamlet of Montezuma. He moved to Michigan in the next year or two and, in 1861, married Marietta A. Van Slyke (b 1841, NY), the second of five children of farmers Peter and Rachael Van Slyke of Napoleon Township in Michigan's Jackson County (*1860 Census*). Nine years later, Marietta was still the only Van Slyke child (by then ranging from 18 to 32 years) to have married or left home, but her mother, Rachael, appears to have died and an older son, James, had returned to help Peter run the farm (*1870 Census*). Marietta and Henry remained in Michigan long enough to give birth to four children there: Mary <b 1862>, Ida <b 1864>, Neva (b June 1871), and a son named Harris C. <b 1873>. By 1880, however, the family had moved down to Auburn, Indiana, where Henry was employed as a master mechanic for a railroad and the family resided at 140 Jackson Street.

They moved again within a couple of years, this time to Detroit, where Henry somehow was killed (*Cf. "Boston Transcript" by PBW, a Gilmore descendent*). The 1884 Detroit City Directory shows a Henry C. Bell living at 488 Lafayette Avenue, whereas the 1885 edition lists "Mrs. Marietta A. Bell (wid Henry)" at 202 Fifth Street. She moved around quite a bit over the next decade, living at 336 Porter in 1886, 268 Third Street in 1887, and then 280 Third Street in 1888-1890. Her daughter, Neva, is listed in the 1890 Census as a clerk, boarding at the same address. By 1898, they were renting a home at 82 Elizabeth Park near Detroit's Grand Circus Park. Neva was still working as a clerk at that point, and the 1900 Census adds that her employer was the Michigan Central Railroad. Marietta's other three children were still living at that point, but their whereabouts are unknown, and neither the City Directory nor Census indicate that she had an occupation.

Neva married Edward D. Sowden within the next decade, after which they bought a home and invited Marietta to live with them. Edward had been a bookkeeper, then a mail carrier before becoming a secretary for a mining company – which may have mined salt from below Lake Huron and the neighborhoods of southwest Detroit. Neva was working as a bookkeeper for the same company in 1920, so it's possible that she and Edward had been co-workers before they married. Perhaps the most interesting thing about Sowden is that his mother, the daughter of a Scottish father and an Irish mother, was born "at-sea" in 1837, no doubt while her parents were on their way to America.



**Main Street – Montezuma, New York circa 1910 (note automobile)
Photo Courtesy of Montezuma Fire Department Collection**