

MEMOIRS

of

MARY LOUISE

RYAN

WORDEN

1856 - 1944

## PROLOGUE

Patiently day after day, month after month, for the last eight years of her life, a fragile little woman sat in a sunny bedroom and wrote the story of her life. With a good many old letters, notes taken at various times and a wonderful memory, she covered the sequence of events in her 87 years without a gap in time or lapse in accuracy.

To me, my mother, (Mary Louise Ryan Worden, 1856-1944, daughter of James Talbot Ryan, 1822-1875) was like a well - a deep cool well, its surface calm even in storms of adversity. For many years I did not realize how much material she had stored in her mind; how sound was her knowledge of what went on around her; how deeply she cherished the life she had led.

She was very pretty in her youth, full of the joy of living, and she had a courageous heart. In her old age she was a dainty aristocrat, admired and loved by family and friends. She begins her story with childhood days in Eureka. What a paradise that must have been for the Ryan children!

Helen Talbot Worden Bethell, 1875-1948

Footnote: These memoirs of Mary Louise Ryan Worden, daughter of James Talbot Ryan, are given to the Humboldt Room of the Humboldt County Library in Eureka by Talbot James Bethell, great great grandson of James Talbot Ryan.

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Chapter I  
Adventure--My Father's Trip to California.

I was born September 15, 1856, in Eureka California, a town which my father, James Talbot Ryan, had founded and where he inaugurated the lumber business. I remember that we had a very comfortable house and a large garden and orchard. The house had a formal parlor furnished with mahogany upholstered in red velvet. A pleasant large dining room, with its generous fireplace, was both living and dining room. Two Indians, John and Mary, served us--Mary in the house, and John taking care of the orchard, the horses and the two cows, Brindel and Bossy. We loved to play in the orchard, where my sister and I each had an apple tree of her own to climb. We loved to sit under the currant bushes and eat the berries off the stems.

The great woods bordered the orchard, and we all enjoyed going there to pick salmon berries, blackberries and huckleberries that grow in abundance. The log school house was used as a church on Sundays; Parson Jones conducting the services, which everybody attended. Mrs. Raymond played the organ, and my mother's beautiful voice was heard in the choir. Eureka's first minister, the Reverend Mr. Eddy, died when I was a small child, and I remember going to his home--with everybody else--to the funeral. Occasionally we had a visit from a Catholic priest who held services for us.

In his "History of California and Biographical Record of the Coast Counties," Professor J. M. Guinn devotes two pages to the Founder of Eureka, The Honorable James Talbot Ryan, beginning his article with a quotation from John T. Young's brief sketch of Eureka, "I feel impelled to pay a tribute of friendship to that energetic, enterprising, public-spirited, liberal-minded, open-handed pioneer, James T. Ryan--"Jim Ryan"--a man to whom the early residents of Humboldt County generally, and of Eureka especially, are more indebted than to any other man."

My father was born in Tipperary, Ireland, October 8. 1822. His father, Joseph Ryan, was a tutor in a noble family and married a daughter of that family, Mary Talbot--a descendant of James Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, and kinswoman of the Duke of Norfolk through her mother Katherine Howard, daughter of Pierce Howard. During the Napoleonic wars the Talbots left France, going from Normandy to England and Ireland.

There was objection on the part of the parents to their daughter marrying outside of the nobility. Joseph Ryan was of high character--a very pious man--and a daughter was not persuaded to give him up. In time the family became reconciled to the marriage and pleasant relations were established.

Eight sons and daughters were born to the Joseph Ryans. After the death of his wife--legacies from her family enabling him to do so--Joseph Ryan brought his children to America when James was twelve years old, living for a time in New Brunswick, before moving to Boston, where he opened a dry goods store. His son Pierce Howard learned the dry goods business in that store, and in later years established one of the first, if not the first, dry goods store in Eureka--the outcome of which is The White House in that city, owned by his son, George Ryan. Pierce Howard Ryan Jr., older son of that family, became District Attorney of Humboldt County and a leading lawyer of Eureka.

James Talbot became a contractor, and in the late forties built a home for Colonel Winchester on the Charles River in Boston, which was said to be the finest house in Massachusetts at that time. In 1847 he married, in Boston, Honora Connelly, who was born January 14, 1826, in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, and they settled in Brighton, Massachusetts.

Being naturally adventurous, he was seized, in 1849, by a desire to join in the "Gold Rush" to California; consequently, he bade farewell to his wife and little son and embarked on the "Crescent City"--for Colon, on the Isthmus of Panama. He carried with him a book on the Spanish language and some text books for which he had sent to England, and which were later burned in the San Francisco fire of 1851. Among the passengers was Mrs. John C. Fremont--going to join her husband, General Fremont, in California. At Colon, canoes were provided to take the passengers up the Chagres River, which they left to mount mules for the completion of their journey to Panama at the Pacific end of the Isthmus. The steamships California and Oregon failed to meet them there, because their crews had deserted in San Francisco to go to the gold mines. In Panama gold-seekers were continually increasing with fresh arrivals from the east, and when, in Easter week, the rainy season with its attendant cholera set in, some of the more adventurous spirits clubbed together and purchased three

large bingos--decked over and rigged. One, finally, got as far north as Acapulco, Mexico. One reached Relago, and the third some other point on the Mexican coast, out of everything but pluck.

Among some of the Argonauts remaining in Panama a subscription was taken up to purchase a large surf boat which had been carried across the Isthmus on the shoulders of natives in relays--one hundred being employed for the purpose. Mr. Ryan was one of the purchasers. The new owners were to cruise at sea in the hope of intercepting any passing whaling ship, offering to charter it--at a fabulous price--to take them to the land of gold--and, out of Panama.

Finally, the copper-fastened English clipper brig "The Two Friends" arrived, laden with coal for the English steamers that sailed along the Central and South American coasts. The clipper was chartered by Scranton, Freemer and Smith for \$27,000 to take the delayed passengers to San Francisco. Those having through tickets sold them at a discount and paid two hundred and fifty dollars apiece for passage on the celebrated brig. Scranton, Freemer and Smith received a good return on their investment. The voyage was a long one for the one hundred and seventy-nine passengers, as the ship was becalmed off the coast California for six weeks.

In fitting out for the voyage at Panama, the only casks obtainable for water were whale-oil casks, and these only half cleansed. Water was taken on at the island of Loboya, and they sailed north about May first, amid enthusiastic brandishing of Bowie knives and pistols--because of the extraordinary number of passengers.

They encountered rain squalls, but fair winds drove the brig to Acapulco in thirty-three days. Remaining there two days they replenished water and provisions.

With an old-fashioned brig, light in ballast and badly found in sails and running rigging, a Captain with a banjo which he played in good "Spirits", it is not surprising that it took one hundred thirty-three days to sail from Acapulco to San Francisco. However, this includes the six weeks when they were becalmed.

Navigation was not left entirely to the Captain. Many of the passengers being Southerners and every man provided

with a pistol, the group--fortified by a chart of the coast--decided, by a large majority, that it was unwise to remain long out of sight of land. After a hard struggle they anchored in the harbor off Cape Son Lucas where they landed and enjoyed a barbecue of sheep and goats.

They remained there for a week--replenishing their stores from San Jose, about seventy-five miles up the Gulf of California.

Adding more sand ballast, they sailed again with wind dead ahead. After some weeks, their provisions having become exhausted, they ate all the Government Commissary stores on board as freight, which was intended for the surveying party under Major McKinstry, U.S.A., who was engaged in running the line between Upper and Lower California.

Still becalmed and these provisions having given out--as well as the water supply exhausted--they had only raw rice and beans for rations. With an ingenious contrivance devised by Mr. Ryan (who was one of the passengers) salt water, hauled up in buckets over the side of the ship, was distilled and condensed in a tin cracker box--furnishing one gallon of fresh water an hour.

They put themselves on the short allowance of a handful each of raw rice or beans, and a pint of water a day, every man taking his turn at grinding the coffee mill used for the beans and rice-- which were found so hard to chew that the poor victims were compelled to put their elbows on the ship's rail, supporting their tired jaws in the palms of their hands to aid mastication.

The situation becoming desperate, a force was landed in small boats at St. Bartholomew and Margherita Islands to dig for water--but unsuccessfully.

An old Spanish chart pointed out Aqua Dulce (sweet water) at a slight Indentation on the coast.

Mr. Ryan was always in the first boat, and landing here, the boat was "Pitch-paled" and everybody got a ducking--for which they were compensated by abundant fresh water for drinking and bathing. It was indeed a luxury after being on scant allowance for six weeks.

The passengers who decided to leave the brig and be taken to the coast of Lower California were Mr. Ryan, William H. Piper, P. J. Hickey, Hugh C. Murray (later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of California), Mr. Abbey of Boston, Captain Dixon, and a few others. Among those who remained on board was William Wood of Alabama, two of the Sloss brothers, John Scranton, Mr. Root of Boston, and an English Jew and his wife--the last named, the only woman on board.

The venturesome group, after landing and walking three days, arrived at a Mexican ranch where young beef and tortillas revived them. After convincing the Mexicans that they were not filibusters, the horses--which, upon the approach of the Argonauts, had been driven to a valley beyond the mountains--were brought back, and some of them hired by the Americans to take them to San Diego, accompanied by Mexicans who returned the horses to the ranch.

It was at this place, owing to a dispute over twenty-five cents, that W. H. Piper was slightly stabbed and nearly lassoed, but avoided the rope by jumping off his horse and running around it.

The party had a pleasant ride of two hundred miles to San Diego, and when they came in sight of the American flag floating over Major McKinstry's camp there, they ran their horses at full speed to reach the camp--and were they happy! At the camp they drank the first coffee they had tasted in three months. They camped by the old hide houses for three weeks; awaiting, daily, the arrival of a steamer from Panama.

At last the "Oregon", Captain Person in command, arrived, crowded with passengers. Besides themselves, there was a large crowd of overland emigrants awaiting her.

Ryan, Murray and another man were appointed a committee to confer with the Captain and passengers. The latter consented at once to their going on board. The Captain offered to take them, if they would sleep on deck (all the rooms and berths being occupied), take chances of getting anything to eat, pay forty dollars apiece, and shovel and hoist coal out of an English ship anchored alongside the Oregon--to all of which conditions (except the last) they acceded.

So they sailed from San Diego, and it was the spring of 1850 before Mr. Ryan reached San Francisco. There were many ships in the harbor, but the only dock was at Commercial Street.

As Ryan and Murray were walking up the street, after disembarking, Mr. Ryan was espied by a friend--James R. Duff--who had known him in St. John, New Brunswick, and who persuaded him to stay in San Francisco, instead of going as he had intended to Vallejo or Benicia and thence to the mines. Mr. Duff invited him to his commodious tent, with the result that a partnership was formed for construction of buildings--Ryan drawing the plans. Mr. Duff had tried mining for a brief while and was glad to give it up and return to San Francisco.

Lumber came around Cape Horn and from Australia and ready-cut houses were brought from Chile. The only sawmill in the vicinity was in Marin County, at Corte Madera.

## CHAPTER II

### Eureka!

In 1850 there was great excitement over gold found in the gravel pits of the Trinity River in northern California, to which region supplies had to be carried from San Francisco up the Sacramento River, and thence overland to Trinity County. It was thought by some enterprising man that if an outlet of the Trinity River could be reached on the coast, supplies could be shipped by sea, and the gold brought to San Francisco more directly.

A group of men organized to put this plan into effect. Some of the leaders were Sam Brannan, W. D. Howard (who sent W. Poett to represent him), James T. Ryan (my father), Henry Teschemacher, Durewaye of the Alta California, Frank Johnson and Ted Williams.

A fine Schooner, "The General Morgan", had been brought around the Horn by Captain John Brannan, brother of Sam Brannan, and was chartered for \$7,500 to make the trip in search of the mouth of the Trinity River. They did not know that the Trinity flows north into the Klamath.

When off the mouth of the Eel River the schooner anchored, and several of the adventurers left the ship in a whaleboat to prospect the shore. They were successfully put through the breakers, and entered the river.

The white men made known by signs to the Indians that they were men of good heart and meant no harm. The Indians made known to them that there was a large body of water on the other side of Table Bluff, and helped them to port their boat into "Humboldt Bay". It had been agreed that if the explorers did not return to the ship within a certain time, she would proceed to Trinidad. A storm arose, the time was up, and she sailed north. While the exploring party was asleep on the beach the young bucks of the tribe wanted to kill them, but Chief Coon Skin forbade their carrying out their evil intentions. The only indignity suffered was the removal of the buttons from their coats.

Having found no traces of mining in the Eel River, they gave up the plan to ship supplies to the miners in Trinity County. The adventurers went in their boat to the northern end of the bay, and friendly Indians guided them to Trinidad, where they re-embarked on the "General Morgan" and sailed back to San Francisco.

Among those who made the adventure in the whaleboat were Sam Brannan, James T. Ryan, Henry Wetherbee and Mr. Rowell. Mr. Ryan never forgot the mercy of Coon Skin, and for years afterward proved his gratitude to the Chief in many acts of kindness to him and his tribe.

Deeply impressed by the great forests that reached almost to the water's edge, Mr. Ryan determined to pay another visit to Humboldt Bay, so not long afterwards he made the trip on the tugboat "Eclipse", accompanied by a small group of men, of which John T. Young was a member. These men explored the bay and at a desirable location Mr. Ryan drove a stake into the ground, exclaiming "Eureka"! a site for a fine city. With crude implements--two pieces of wood and a vial--Mr. Ryan surveyed a town site and made a map which is still kept in the land office of Eureka. The name, Eureka, was proposed by Mr. Poett, suggested by my father's shout.

Returning to San Francisco, Mr. Ryan made plans to go back to Humboldt Bay and begin the conversion of those great forests into lumber for San Francisco's buildings and piles for its docks.

In 1851 my father sent Frank Duff to Boston to escort Mrs. Ryan, their three year old son, Joe, and Mrs. Ryan's sister, Miss Margaret Connelly, to California. They crossed the Isthmus mule-back, all save little Joe, who was carried on a native's back seated in a rustic chair.

The travelers from Boston made connection at Panama with a steamer bound for San Francisco. Among the many passengers was Lafayette Maynard, who became one of San Francisco's distinguished citizens. The day after their arrival, the Captain of the ship that brought them invited Mrs. Ryan and her sister to luncheon aboard ship. Walking to the steamer they were intercepted by Mr. Ryan, who tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent them from seeing the gruesome sight of two men being hanged from the loft of a building on Battery Street. "What kind of a town have we come to, where they hang men in the street?" the ladies exclaimed. Mr. Ryan and Mr. James R. Duff were members of the first Vigilantes in 1851.

In what was called "Happy Valley" (the residence section near what is now Mission and Third streets) a house had been erected for the family--the first lathed and

plastered house in that vicinity. My aunt Margaret Connelly later married James R. Duff, my father's partner.

The family remained in San Francisco while Mr. Ryan was making his experiment with the lumber business on Humboldt Bay and in September, 1852, a second son (James F.) was born.

The firm of Ryan and Duff purchased the steamer Santa Clara, a small well-built government boat which had come around Cape Horn and become the property of Von Schmidt, a noted engineer. He divested her of her masts and fitted her out for passenger traffic between San Francisco and Sacramento. The venture not proving a success, the boat was sold at auction, Ryan & Duff bidding her in for \$12,000--selling real estate to pay for her. She was to be taken to Eureka, to start the lumber business for her owners. Men to run the mill, provisions and machinery were put aboard. Castings for machinery were made at Hinckley's, on First Street, the only foundry at that time in the city. The price was twenty cents each, against three cents later. The millwright was paid an extra high price; ordinary workers \$150 per month.

James T. Ryan was in charge of the steamer, as captain and pilot. Frank S. Duff acted as first mate, and John Vance, later a successful lumber merchant, served in the double capacity of second mate and sailing master. Men to work on the mill, not sailors, formed the crew.

A few of these men in later years owned mills of their own and became very wealthy. Before sailing, it was discovered that the compass had been stolen, but finding an old compass aboard, without a glass, Mr. Ryan ordered a pane of glass removed from a cabin window. Having read that glass can be successfully cut with shears under water, he put this knowledge into effect and fitted the compass with a glass.

The Santa Clara steamed out of San Francisco harbor February 22nd, 1851, and made the voyage to Humboldt Bay in two and one half days. Crossing the dangerous bar successfully, she steamed up the bay, and on a spring tide was run up on ways prepared for her in the bank. A temporary mill was erected alongside, the power of one of the engines of the steamer being used to cut the lumber. One of the engines was later sold to the Spring Valley Water Company. In six weeks the mill was cutting lumber at

the rate of 100,000 feet every twenty-four hours. Three vessels were chartered to carry lumber and piles to San Francisco: the brig "John Clifford", Capt. Leming; the bark "Cornwallis", Capt. Davie; and the "Home". About the end of June, the Clifford and the Cornwallis, heavily laden with lumber, were wrecked crossing the treacherous bar. Mr. Diff, who had chartered the vessels, awaited their arrival in San Francisco Bay, with no way of hearing that they had all been lost on Humboldt Bar, and was filled with anxiety watching and waiting. The crews were saved.

On the 4th of July, the "Home" sailed to her doom on the bar, having on board the crews from the other two vessels. After this very serious loss, and when lumber was selling at a fabulous price, Ryan & Duff engaged the services of a pilot, Captain Henry Buhne, who had been a mate on the "Laura Virginia" when she entered the Bay in 1850. For awhile the pilot used a whale boat to guide ships over the bar, but that did not meet the requirements. There were long delays awaiting a smooth bar, and it was decided to secure a tug. The "Mary Ann" was purchased in 1852, and for years she successfully piloted ships over the bar. She had come around the Horn rigged as a schooner commanded by Captain Sabin, and assigned to W. S. Clark, a prominent capitalist of San Francisco. Negotiations for purchase at \$35,000 were made through the French Bank of Argente Co. Lots were sold for \$12,000, balance borrowed at heavy interest, 3 percent a month.

Captain Buhne was sent to San Francisco to bring the tug to Humboldt Bay. She was fitted for service in any sea on the bar. Two costly hawsers, five or six inches in diameter, were purchases for the strenuous work ahead. On the trip up were Mr. and Mrs. Ryan, their son Joe and infant son James, Mrs. J. R. Duff, the engineer's wife, and Mme. Paris, whose services were engaged to teach Mrs. Ryan to play the guitar, so that she could accompany herself when she sang. At that time there were no pianos in Eureka. In a bag tied around her waist under her dress, Mrs. Duff carried the gold dust to pay wages of the mill men. San Francisco bar was too rough for the tug to cross, and she anchored off Sausalito for two days and then steamed safely to Eureka in two and a half days. A house had been built, ready to receive the family. Flanders and Vance had built a good mill, lumber was in demand at \$75 to \$80 a thousand, and the tug insured the safe passage of ships over the bar. A house for Captain Buhne was built on the bluff bordering

the bar, so that he could learn the condition of the bar and sight ships awaiting entrance.

Trees were being felled five or six miles up Ryan's Slough, and it was necessary to have oxen to haul the logs to the mill. It was learned that Judge Haight and his partner had a drove of 150 to 200 cattle grazing back of Oakland. Mr. Ryan negotiated for their purchase for \$12,500. It was necessary to have someone to drive then up to Humboldt County, so they consulted W. I. Reed, who had a ranch on Eel River, and he arranged to have them driven up. The owners would not permit the oxen to be selected, the purchaser had to take the entire drove. Arriving at Mr. Reed's ranch, Mr. Ryan's men selected the oxen and left the cows and calves in payment for their transit.

Business was speeding. Around the Horn came the "Arispe", a steamer which seemed desirable for transportation of passengers between San Francisco and Eureka. She was purchased by Ryan & Duff, and on her first trip up was in command of Captain Tomlinson. On her return trip she carried, in addition to some passengers, a schooner load of lumber on deck and shingles in the hold. As the accommodations for passengers were restricted below, a cabin for the main deck was ordered built. On her second trip, under another captain, she was lost, off Pt. Arena. The captain who brought her from the east was a passenger on the first trip, and he was requested on his return to Philadelphia to insure the steamer. Communication was slow, and it was some months later that the owners learned there was no insurance. Half the purchase price had been paid-- notes had to be met--and then the bottom dropped out of the lumber market. The charges of the tug for towing were \$3.00 a thousand feet. To help out the other mill owners in the depression, the price was reduced to \$2.00. Cost and freight could not be covered. A combination of all the mills on the bay was formed, with Mr. Ryan, president, and, unfortunately, the tug was included. The combination failed--as there was no market for lumber then.

About this time, three of my father's sisters followed him to California and became residents of Eureka in early days. They were women of refinement and dignity. The eldest married Dr. Jonathan Clark, the leading physician of Eureka for many years. The second sister, Mrs. Dawson, enjoyed possession of the first piano in Eureka. The youngest sister remained unmarried. In later years--after the death of her brother, Pierce Howard--Miss Josephine Ryan, who had

made her home with her sister, Mrs. Clark, took over the management of his dry Foods store, until his son George could assume management of it. My aunt Josephine was famed, in the family, for her beautiful needlework, and her nieces wore lovely specimens of her embroidery and braiding on their dresses. She worked for several years on a beautiful tapestry. It represented lords and ladies mounted on fine steeds ready to start on a fox hunt. Handsomely framed, it hangs in the home of her nephew, William S. Clark, in Eureka.

Mr. Clark was, at one time, mayor of Eureka and was vice-president of one of the city's banks. His five hundred acres of fertile land on Table Bluff were leased to dairymen. There could be seen cows knee-deep in clover. On this high bluff the U. S. Government built a powerful radio station in recent years.

Two other sisters of my father, and their families, went to British Columbia to live. Under the British flag deference and tribute are always paid to the nobility and because it was known that my cousin Mrs. Keast, who lived in Victoria, was a direct descendant of the Earl of Shrewsbury and kinswoman of the Duke of Norfolk, all the distinguished English people who visited that beautiful city called upon her. When the Duke of Connaught--Queen Victoria's youngest son--paid a visit there, as a young man, Mrs. Keast's was the only private house he entered. Before leaving England he was requested to call upon her as a "family courtesy."

In January, 1857, a wedding ceremony was performed in our home uniting my mother's sister, Julia, to William I. Reed. The bride was a beautiful young woman, with fine features, fair complexion and a wealth of brown hair. One of the officers' wives from Fort Humboldt commented on her beautiful, dazzlingly white neck. The groom had a cattle ranch south of Eureka and was Sheriff of Humboldt County. He made Eureka his home. I was four months old when they were married and was, always, a favorite with them.

A colorful figure in Eureka was Seth Kinman, a famous hunter and trapper in the 50's in Humboldt County. Whenever he came to Eureka, work was sent around that he was in town with his "fiddle" and the people gathered together for quadrilles and lancers--Kinman calling "Alleman left" and "Swing your partners". He made armchairs of bear and elk horns from animals shot by himself, and presented them to

more than one President of the United States. They were first exhibited at a museum on Market Street, over a market opposite Second Street.