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The DeForce Sisters

by Maurice Hill

A separate chapter is due the DeForce sisters, two of Lodi's most unusual women. Years ahead of their time, Gertie DeForce Cluff and her sister, Laura DeForce Gordon carved out careers ordinarily followed exclusively by men. Their early belief in the so-called liberation of women was not only an idea entertained but was put into definite action. Each of these extraordinary and intelligent ladies has left to Lodi's heritage an added claim to fame. Each made a contribution without which Lodi would be poorer today. Their early adventures into a so-called man's world has not its equal in Lodi's history. Their names and accomplishments will never be forgotten as long as there is a Lodi.

Gertie DeForce was born in Pennsylvania the daughter of Abram and Catherine Allen DeForce. The family name came from De La Force, an ancient Huguenot appellation of French-German extraction. She was said to be one of a family of nine children. Unfortunately, very little has been recorded about her background.

Maurice Hill interviewed her two grandnieces, the late Mrs. Norma Posey and the late Mrs. Mildred Wilson. Neither could tell much about Mrs. Cluff. Mrs. Posey recalls her great aunt as a small wiry woman of great energy. She mentions that as Gertie DeForce she married George Cluff and that they had several children. She claimed that Mrs. Cluff was the support of the family. She was extremely indulgent with her children, never refusing them anything. She would say to them when they asked for certain things, "Yes, you can have it as soon as I have the time or the money to get it." Norma Posey didn't recall

ever seeing a photograph of Gertie Cluff. She came to Lodi in 1875.

Very little, indeed is known of the personal life of Mrs. Cluff. It is known that her mother passed away December 27, 1883 and her father in 1884.

However, much can be learned about this talented lady by a study of her publications and from the reviews of other editors of her era as well as a few reminiscences of old-timers.

Gertie DeForce Cluff has the distinction of being Lodi's first newspaper publisher. A woman to boot!

On July 20, 1878, "The Valley Review" made its debut in Lodi. From the San Joaquin County directory of 1878 is the following:

"The Valley Review is the title of a handsomely printed weekly published at Lodi, San Joaquin County. Mrs. Gertie DeForce Cluff, editor and proprietor. It is devoted to the agricultural and general local interest of the town and the Northern portion of the county. It evinces good literary taste and spritely journalistic talent."

The Valley Review was a folio nineteen inches in length, thirteen inches wide with five columns to a page. There was seldom local news on the front page, the space being devoted to items from other papers, articles of travel, etc. Only two of the eight-page paper was devoted to local affairs. There was considerable advertising by Lodi merchants on most of the pages. Sometimes advertisements were inserted sideways.

Gertie DeForce Cluff got a patent on a device she invented which she called Cluff's Garment Fastener.

"For fastening gent's sox to drawers, drawers to suspenders, shirt or inside seam of pants, looping up shirt sleeves, fastening cuffs, holding neckware to shirt bosom, etc. Also for ladies, misses or infants' toilet. Ladies and children's hose supporters, fastening direct to corset and skirt. Manufactured in seven sizes: small ones for ladies and children's clothes, second size for clothespins, drying grapes, fastening horse blankets, decorating show windows, pavilions. Large size



An advertising card of the Cluff Factory.

of spring steel for lightening guy ropes and clotheslines.

In one of the issues of The Valley Review, Mrs. Cluff complained about a condition which existed on the corner of Sacramento and Pine streets between the hotel and the railroad station. In rainy weather this area was flooded with water and a plank-bridging had to be placed over the spot in order for ladies to cross. As Mrs. Cluff put it, "The frogs looked up and blushed everytime the ladies crossed over the spot."

The late Mr. Ollie Smith described Mrs. Cluff as a short, smart, energetic woman who was "full of pep." Maurice's aunt, the late Daisy M. Pleas concurred with Mr. Smith's description adding that she was a plain looking person.

As a child, Maurice Hill often noticed the large glass-covered shadow-box picture frame containing a flower cross made of feathers which hung on the wall in my parent's bedroom.

After many years, when the glass became broken, the frame and contents were consigned to the attic. It wasn't until he started research work on the history of Lodi that he asked his aunt about this relic. To his surprise she informed him that Gertie DeForce Cluff made the feather cross and brought it to Hill's Jewelry store where she presented it to his father. Mr. Hill made the shadow-box frame and lined it with white material and then secured the feather cross inside. His interest was immediately aroused and he restored this historic treasure to the best of his ability, allowing for some loss of feathers and damage by moths, the result was more pleasing than he had anticipated. The restored work of Mrs. Cluff and his father now hangs again in the Hill residence.

The first Cluff home in Lodi was next door to the first Hill jewelry store and residence on the S.E. corner of Pine and School streets. Later, the Cluffs built their home on the N.W. corner of Church and Lockeford streets.

The Valley Review was a success and evidently Mrs. Cluff became so enthused that she started a daily paper titled, "The Daily Review." This was indeed a short-lived publication, for in the second issue dated December 19, 1878, Mrs. Cluff had a sudden and surprising announcement. "We had to issue a daily paper for...well, never

This Receipt entitles the holder to a chance in the Silver Tea Set and Sewing Machine.

No. 628 Lodi, May 10 1880.
Received from Mrs. Sarah Ivory
Two Dollars and Fifty Cents, for one year's subscription from date to THE VALLEY REVIEW, a weekly newspaper published at Lodi, Cal.

GERTIE DE FORCE CLUFF, Editor and Proprietor.

To be sent to

Lodi -

Per G. F. Cluff

This Receipt entitles the holder to a chance in the Silver Tea Set and Sewing Machine.

No. 456 Lodi, Aug 1 1880.
Received from Mrs. G. M. Doll
Two Dollars and Fifty Cents, for one year's subscription from date to THE VALLEY REVIEW, a weekly newspaper published at Lodi, Cal.

GERTIE DE FORCE CLUFF, Editor and Proprietor.

To be sent to

C. O. Ivory, Lodi

Per Mrs. Cluff

First Receipt to Sarah Ivory; signed by George F. Cluff, husband and business manager.

Second Receipt to Mrs. G.M. Doll, Stockton; paid for by C.O. Ivory and signed by Mrs. Gertie Cluff.

mind how long, but after fishing around all day for a bit of gossip or morsel of news that would be new to the general reader, we have concluded, with this issue, to abandon or suspend for the present at least.

Lodi's first daily paper was a two-column folio about eight inches in length by five in width.

I am reproducing from "The Daily Review" the "Local Catechisms of 1878."

Who is Lodi's wealthiest merchant? Charley Rich. Who is the highest merchant? George Hill. Who is the most popular to meet? Butcher Smith. Is railroad agent Kopp or his dog the fattest? His setter of course. Who boasts a name of feminine gender? Jimmy Ella-son. Who is the best male cook in town? Jake Baker. Who is the most prodigal? Host Spencer.

Years ago in the 1950's, Ollie Smith,

son of W.D. Smith, Lodi's first meat market proprietor, told me that "The Valley Review" was located upstairs in the chambers building on Sacramento Street. He claimed to be the "printer's devil" who rolled the type on an old fashioned press. However, the paper announced on August 20, 1881 that the Review printing office had been moved to the front rooms of the building occupied by Cluff & Smith.

By October 1, 1881 the paper reported that Mr. Cluff was having a two-story home erected on his place near the Congregational church. And by October 22nd the family had moved into their new residence.

In December of 1881 it was reported that the "Valley Review" was constructing a printing office next to the Harvey Smith building on Main Street. It was to be known as the New Review Building. The location or headquarters

of "The Valley Review" is given as Main Street. In the early days, Sacramento Street was spoken of in this manner.

In 1882 the paper carried the information that George Cluff, Mrs. Cluff's husband, was acting as business manager.

The subscription price for the weekly for one year was \$2.50 — six months, \$1.50. It was headed with this caption: "We help those who help us!" By 1883 this paper claimed the largest circulation of any weekly in San Joaquin County.

George Cluff was credited with being the editor of the local news column. Also in 1883 Mrs. Cluff states that "We hope we shall not be accused of exaggeration when we say we have received 1883 calendars."

The Valley Review advertised that it did more job printing than any County office in the state.

Incidentally, in 1883 Lodi had three newspapers: The Valley Review, the Lodi Sentinel and the Maverick.

The Valley Review, issue dated February 28, 1883, contained the following clever bit of advertising evidently the product of Mrs. Cluff's creative brain:

"Valley news a specialty—
All the people want it.
Latest important news—
Lively local items—
Every selection entertaining.

Yet it is only \$2.50 a year.
Review of the county's progress—
Enterprises, entertainments, etc.—
Very best local paper
In San Joaquin County
Extensive circulation
With the farmers."

When news items were scarce, space fillers such as poems, jokes and reprints from other papers were used.

Following is an example of Mrs. Cluff's poetry which was written for the Stockton Leader:

WINTER IN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

By Gertie DeForce Cluff

The winter days have shorter grown,
And through the valley wide
The steps of Morn are tripping on
The heels of eventide.
Above us, in the morning sun,
Diablo's feathery crest,
Now uniformed in ermine robes
Stands sentinel in the west.
The Sierra Nevada's snow-crowned head,
Our eastern vision fills,
While scarves of fog are mantling
The shoulders of the hills.
Mokelumne, that once clearly ran
O'er shifting sands of gold,
Now, from the mountain's shafted sides
In murky billows roll.
Neath tangled hedge rows, tawny brown,
The meek-eyed rabbits hide.
The quail's shrill whistle to his mate
Is heard on every side.
The mistletoe, from oaken boughs,

Hangs thick in chapparal,
And veils of moss from tree to tree
Are waving in the dell.
Myriad of birds fill the air,
Or sing in orchard bowers.
Their sweet songs are a prophecy
Of coming fruits and flowers.
The sun that shone but for an hour,
With clouds is overcast,
And flitting shadows run a race
Upon the tender grass.
No lightning flash or thunder peal
Gives warning of the rain;
But sudden clouds pour out their flood
O'er all the darkened plain.
The night wind blowing, bleak and cold,
Above the budding sod,
All, all proclaim the power
and omnipotence of God.

The above stanzas were written in 1875 previous to the advent of The Valley Review.

In 1884 Mrs. Cluff comments, "The Review contains a larger number of items and more original local matter than any country paper in the state."

Mrs. Cluff was never backward in coming forward with praise for her paper. Her "pen" could become caustic at times in down-grading her competitive editors and publishers as well as ridiculing and criticizing when she felt so inclined. Editors in those early days spoke their minds freely without fear of the possibility of being sued for libel. Some of Mrs. Cluff's remarks today would no doubt bring about more



Looking North on School Street from Pine Street, 1905. Van Buskirk building is on the right.



Sacramento Street with Ruhstaller's Saloon on the left and Hotel Lodi on the right.

than the lifting of eyebrows.

As an example of early editorial license, Mrs. Cluff refers to one publication as "The Swill Tub." She adds, "The Swill Tub says a skillet means a warming pan. Everybody knows what a swill tub means." In the same year of 1884 she writes: "That story in a Stockton paper about a Lodi newspaper office being robbed of \$40.00 is quite thin. The idea of a Lodi editor having \$40.00!"

In 1884 The Valley Review gave a reprint from a newspaper — name omitted: "Gertie DeForce Cluff, editor of The Valley Review paid our office a friendly visit one day last week. The Review has been a success. This success, coupled with the fact that, in addition to her editorial and business duties, Mrs. Cluff has had the care of a family on her hands, speaks volumes for woman's ability to compete with her fellow man in all the ordinary walks of life. This noble woman has but recently suffered the loss of a father, mother and brother. In this affliction she has won our sincere sympathy."

On July 15, 1884 there appeared in The Valley Review this summation of the paper's activity and progress to date: "With this issue the Review steps into volume seven. Six years ago we started the Review as a business venture, comparatively unknown, with few friends and less money. However, we have worked along all these years earnestly and conscientiously devoting our time to the interest of the people of the valley and advertising patrons till a grand success has been achieved, the present prosperity of the Review plainly tells. Thanking our many friends for their words of encouragement and patronage, we promise the forthcoming volume to be all its predecessors have been. We shall, in the future, be independent in politics, and the best live local newspaper in this county."

In the Valley Review of August, 20, 1884 was an item concerning William H. Marshall, former publisher of the Lodi Maverick: "Lodi was stirred to its depths Sunday, and Mr. William Marshall of The Stockton Weekly Maverick (the paper formerly of Lodi) was the

first cause of the excitement. To be plain in the matter, "He has gone and done it" being married to Miss Lilla Gove at the house of the bride's parents on the aforesaid morning, and started off for Stockton on the noon train. A large number of Lodi's inhabitants were at the station to see the happy couple off. We acknowledge the receipt of a package of cake with the compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall. We wish them all success in life."

Strange to relate, after the article in The Valley Review on July 15th in which Mrs. Cluff promises "The forthcoming volume to be all its predecessors have been," Mrs. Cluff abruptly makes the announcement on August 20, 1884 that "this is the last issue of The Valley Review with Gertie DeForce Cluff as editor and publisher." With the next issue, Volume 7, No. 7, the paper began under the new proprietors and publishers, Cheyney and Walcott.

The Valley Review again changed hands, Cheyney and Walcott turning over the Review to Messrs. Bloomer and Moore beginning with the issue

of April 22, 1885.

By September 24, 1885 Gertie DeForce Cluff had bought back material from the suspended Valley Review. There is mention of the fact that in the first six months, the paper was published in Lodi in the office of Al H. Berdine. At this time she obtained a press of her own and the entire publishing was done at her office.

It appears that the Cluffs owned a ranch near Burson, and the Lodi Sentinel announced that Mrs. Cluff had left a sample of early rose potatoes which were raised on their land. Incidentally, it had also been reported that Gertie Cluff would soon start a real estate office at Burson.

Evidently, this venture didn't produce the desired results and Mrs. Cluff was soon back in Lodi and ready for a new venture.

On September 24, 1885, The Lodi Cyclone, published by Gertie Cluff, made its initial appearance. This issue notes that Albert Woods of Lodi was the first subscriber and that Robert Rowe of Stockton became the first advertising patron with S. Marceau of

Clements sending in the first job work.

The only issues of this paper that this writer has seen were at the State Library in Sacramento. This newspaper was quite similar in format to The Valley Review. Frank B. Cluff, a son of Mr. and Mrs. George Cluff, became manager of The Lodi Cyclone at the tender age of eighteen.

In 1886, a Lodi newspaper editor writes: "The Cyclone, in a comical apology of its political attitude, tries to explain where it stands. We should think modesty would forbid our fair competitor straddling all the fences that subdivide the cattle pastures of politics. She rides the Democracy, the prohibition issue and the anti-Chinese non-partisan hobby in true broncharo fashion and at the same time does not blush to essay riding the Republican party in bold side-saddle fashion. It is supposed that such feats are enjoyed by the fair equestrienne as she calls attention to the exhibition which she seemingly is afraid will escape the notice of the public."

The Lodi Cyclone responded to this rally by picturing an old nag and below it printed the following: "Is this the

horse, Brother Ellis, that you rode to the door of the Assembly Chamber a few years ago? Oh, ah, being too "young" he was turned into the party pasture, hence his present appearance.

It was common practice in those days for contemporary editors to poke fun at one another.

On October 1, 1887 the Lodi Sentinel gives forth the information that W.L. Howell & Co. had purchased the Lodi Cyclone from Gertie DeForce Cluff.

The only further data Maurice could glean regarding this paper was that the office was destroyed by fire in 1887, and presumably this concluded the brief span of time in which The Lodi Cyclone was published.

The Lodi Cyclone was quite similar in format to The Lodi Valley Review.

On August 16, 1888, The Valley Review was revived by Frank B. Cluff, son of Gertie DeForce Cluff. It was like its predecessor, a folio issued weekly. It is recorded in 1892 that Gertie Cluff was the associate editor and Laura DeForce Gordon was "Traveling Correspondent."

A short item appeared in the Valley Review of March 17, 1894 which, from



Pine Street, looking west from the railroad tracks; Saturday afternoon, 1890.

the style and humorous trend of the writing, probably came from the pen of Gertie Cluff. Her paper was filled with spicy items tinged with humor, while her columns were often adorned with illustrations.

"And in the meantime, *The Review* goes on its merry way, rejoicingly, furnishing people of the Mokelumne Valley with a newspaper at \$2.00 a year payable invariably in advance in either corn, currency, chickens, postage stamps, butter, eggs or anything else we can eat, wear or use for fuel.

Frank Cluff was 21 years of age in 1888 and eight years later he was printing the *Esparto Press* in Yolo County.

After Mrs. Cluff's departure from the publishing and editorial field, little is known about her.

On January 9, 1909 *The Herald*, a Lodi newspaper appeared with a front page news item headed with the following in large capitals: "Mrs. Cluff is dead — Revered Woman is Taken by Death — Was Mother of Loving Qualities, and Distinguished Writer of Merit — Authoress of Marked Ability Wins Rest — Known Throughout State of California.

One of the sweetest souls of Lodi, and, incidentally, one of the brightest women that ever graced this state with

the halo of womanhood, motherhood and grace of pure humanity has passed from life.

With the passing of Mrs. Cluff something more than ordinary eulogies of death must be said, for she was something more than the ordinary mother and wife.

Educated and refined, Mrs. Cluff was a deep student of literature, and was an authoress of no mean merit. Her marked ability during a recent contest of the Sacramento Union stamped her a woman of unusual ability.

Strangely, there wasn't a single statistic given in this brief write-up. And, when Mr. Hill looked for illuminating facts in *The Lodi Sentinel* of the same date, it was to discover that the *Lodi Sentinels* from January to June of 1909 were not there.

The careers of Gertrude (always Gertie) DeForce Cluff and her sister, Laura DeForce Gordon ran in parallel lines in a number of respects; both were gifted, intelligent women; both were publishers; both were extremely interested in politics and worked for the cause of women's suffrage; both were outspoken and fearless in defense of their convictions and both received praise on the one hand for their

superior abilities while having to contend on the other side with the ridicule and abuse heaped on women who dared to enter and compete with men in a so-called man's world. Mrs. Gordon's activities collared the United States while those of Mrs. Cluff were confined to a smaller sphere.

To Mrs. Gertie DeForce Cluff goes much credit and honor in pioneering the first venture into the local newspaper activity, her name and accomplishments secure in the history of Lodi.



The history of Laura DeForce Gordon will be continued in future issues of the Lodi Historian.

The Valley Review ▶
February 13, 1884



Early Lodi transportation on dirt streets.



▲ Main Street, looking north from Pine Street; before 1910. Keagle Bros. Grocery is on the corner, Joe Hinode Company next, and Cary Bros. Water Tank on the left.



◀ Taking a break while loading Lodi's famous watermelons.



Pine and Sacramento Streets. Hotel on the left and bank across the street with horse-drawn dray of Lodi Fruit in between.

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