

*The narrative history of a real American family from the mud of the Seven Years' War to the mud of the Leaning Tower of San Francisco. Newsbytes inform the reader of the world about him at the time while modern addresses often point the location on his GPS.*

## **THIRTY CENTS AN ACRE: A Lafayette Odyssey**

by Ray Peters

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RAY PETERS

# Thirty Cents an Acre

*The Story of Lafayette, from the Battle of Minden to the  
Water-Lots of San Francisco, where the Millennium Tower leans.*



## **ENDORSEMENTS: THIRTY CENTS AN ACRE**

“Just finished reading the latest draft of THIRTY CENTS AN ACRE and found it delightful. Very interesting, educational, and, most of all, definitely not a dry tome of facts and figures. “Since my college days, when I had a history professor who truly made history live, I have hated many of those dry tomes of facts and figures that abound. I realize the authors worked hard on research and wanted to give all the information to generations then and now, but I have always felt they could have done so in a more interesting manner. You have done it and made it live for your readers.

“Thanks for sharing with your wonderful talent!”

--CAROLYN CARSON, CURATOR,  
WESTON HISTORY MUSEUM

“I thought your narrative was very fast-paced and compelling, conversational in a way, and I have no quarrels with your interpretations and broad-based grasp of facts whatsoever. I also enjoyed your geographical references which I felt really helped place the narrative in a concrete place and time. Great stuff.”

--BRENT RUTHERFORD, ELAM BROWN'S  
GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON

“What a fascinating story and presentation you have put together. Great job on the research!”

--TAMI (ALLEN) MULLINS,  
ELAM BROWN’S GREAT-GREAT-  
GREAT-GREAT-GREAT  
STEP-GRANDDAUGHTER

THIRTY CENTS AN ACRE expertly fills in many historical gaps in the life of Elam Brown and brings him vividly to life. You have connected the personal aspects of Brown’s life with the historical details of the time period in a thought-provoking way.”

--MARY McCOSKER, PRESIDENT,  
LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THIRTY CENTS AN ACRE is a compelling, clearly presented and thoroughly researched book. Mr. Peters has found the perfect family to serve as its focus for they appear to have been involved in very many important activities as related to the settlement of the West. I learned a great deal from the manuscript and enjoyed it from the first page to the last, including its detailed bibliography.”

--WILLIAM J. URICCHIO,  
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT  
ASSOCIATE LIBRARIAN (RETIRED)

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dollars. It wasn't a bad deal for an initial investment of a \$200.00 filing fee.

His prayers had been answered. Once again, he envisioned the church he would build. Now flushed with ready cash, he took Hasting's *Guide* from the shelf and listed the items he would need to purchase. On the very next day, Fremont's map in hand, he began canvassing the neighborhood for fellow adventurers, beginning with his good friend Isaac Allen.

*1845, March 4: James K. Polk inaugurated president. His inflammatory campaign dialogue (54-40 or Fight) over the northern boundary of Oregon Country had brought the Royal Navy to full alert.*

Elam dashed off a letter to Thomas to tell him that the farm had been sold and that all the Browns remaining in Missouri would be making preparations to follow him to Oregon Country, which letter would be left at the Weston Post Office to await the next Company headed in that direction. (He fully realized that, since the next Company might very well be his own, it was possible that he would be delivering his own letter.)

*1845, May 15: Peter Burnett is elected Judge of the Oregon Supreme Court.*

There was also the possibility of a third war between England and the United States over the status

of the Oregon Country, which was still occupied jointly by the two countries. In addition, the potential annexation of the Republic of Texas by the United States might very well invite a war with Mexico. Elam allowed that he'd not worry about the political picture, but promised a very nice church.

*1845, July 4: The Congress of the Republic of Texas endorses annexation to the United States.*

In spite of a considerable amount of reluctance by the wives, the husbands were so enthusiastic about going to Oregon that Elam returned to the Post Office to send a second letter to Thomas to inform him that they would likely depart Weston early in the month of May, 1846, in full accordance with Lansford Hastings directions. When he arrived at the Post Office, the Postmaster handed him a very impressive envelope that was near to bursting with officialness.

The envelope shouted **“WASHINGTON, D.C.”** from its return-address area, loudly proclaiming that to even *touch* this all-important, hallowed document might be the cause for a **Penalty of Law**. Or worse.

It screamed **“OFFICIAL BUSINESS,”** should any vestige of doubt remain in the mind of the beholder. Elam guessed what the business might be about, but held the envelope for a long moment before cautiously tearing open the flap. In spite of all that caution, the contents, being a document as impressive as its envelope, floated imperiously to the floor. He

looked down on the paper for a second long moment, but it didn't stir.

He knew that it was the government's response to his claim to land, filed so many years before.

*The wait had been so long that he had already sold the land he had filed the claim for. What would happen now? What if the claim was now denied? It was unthinkable.*

Why had the process taken so long? Well, of course, there would be a reasonable explanation. *There always was.* The government would have had to await a survey, in order to provide the location of the claim in order to describe it, wouldn't they?

*Well. They had sent out a government surveyor Jesse Applegate, his name was. Way back in 1840.*

*Five years before.*

Of course, they would then have to make an **"OFFICIAL"** review of the survey, wouldn't they? Before he could even *file* for the claim. The review took another two years.

Finally, in 1842, they sent word that all was well. At last, he filed the claim.

*That was three years before.*

In 1843, he thought the world was ending when Sarah died. He forgot all about claims and governments and such for a long, long time. Until he decided he had to move, to get away from the land that had caused all the trouble in the first place.

The **"OFFICIAL UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT"** made no mention of her death, and was probably unaware of it. As if it mattered, anyway, in the grand scheme of things. But two years

had gone since 1843, and two years can be a long, long time. Elam was near his wits' end.

He so desperately wanted to leave the Platte, as far away as possible from this awful place that he had taken Sarah to die. But he couldn't simply go: first, he needed to sell the land to get the money to start over again, someplace else. Someplace far from here, *someplace that didn't have miasma, someplace that didn't cause death by ague.*

That was when he decided to go farther west, to Oregon Country. Thomas left "*to scout out a good location for them,*" he had said. And he was right. *Look what had happened right here in the Platte. Because they hadn't moved soon enough from Illinois, the river bottom land, the best soil in the whole wide world, had already been taken before they arrived.* So they filed a claim for land in the hills. Oh, the soil was pretty good in the hills, too. *But not the best in the whole wide world.*

When your hand is dealt, you gotta be quick or you'll lose. Certainly, he was good at losing, so he told Thomas, then a grown man at twenty, to go ahead to Oregon. *Elam had done the same thing himself after his father died.* He'd never forget that long walk to St. Louis.

Warren, now nineteen, would be next. Then Margeline. Already sixteen, she'd probably get married before long. Little Lawrence, only twelve, would probably stick around to help his father for a while, thank goodness.

*The family was being chiseled away, bit by bit. The current patriarch, the one that wanted most to be gone, was out of luck.*

He had rotten luck all his life, starting with that miserable logging job on the Gasconade. Then the share-cropping: where he did *all* the work for half the income. The moving about in Illinois, always looking on the lookout for something better. The need to scratch in the dirt for lead to make enough money to buy hay for the horses so they could plough the dry dirt and hope that the rains would come. And the rains didn't.

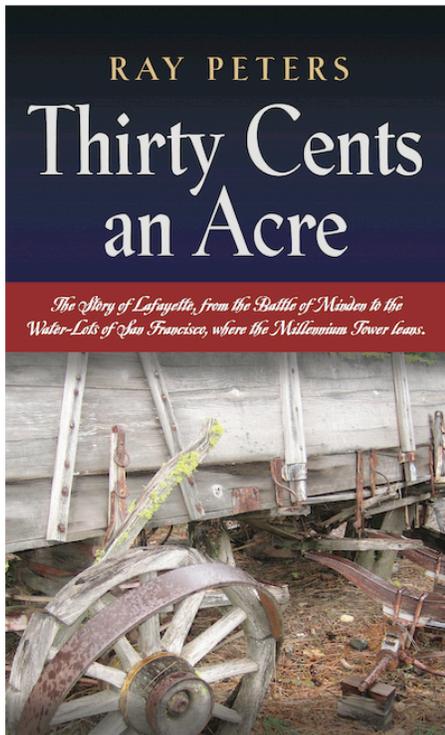
Then the farm on the Platte. The farm he forced on Sarah that *didn't* have the best dirt in the whole wide world.

*But it did have the miasma.*

*And the miasma took her away.*

*1845, October 30: First Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillspie of the United States Marines meets with President James K. Polk. Entry in the President's diary reads: "I held a confidential conversation with Lt. Gillespie of the Marine Corps, about 8:o'clock p.m. on the subject of a secret mission on which he was about to go to California. His secret (emphasis added) instructions and the letter to Mr. Larkin, U.S. Consul at Monterey, in the Department of State, will explain the object of his mission."*

*Gillespie sailed from New York City to Vera Cruz in the brig Petersburg, spending part of the 24 days of stormy passage memorizing the dispatches to*



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