

# history

## The Tale of Miss Mollie Mack A Stormy Week in March, 1907 Alexandra Hall

I live on Miller Hill, on a property that contains the Miller Family Cemetery. One of the few gravestones is inscribed:



Mollie E Mack died on March 23, 1907, at the age of 34. The gravestone has broken off at the base, so while Mollie is buried somewhere in the roughly circular mound that once surrounded an old oak tree, the exact location is unknown. Presumably one day we'll find the base of the gravestone.

But who was Mollie Mack? And what is she doing buried among the Millers? That question set me off on a journey through the pages of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* and the archives at Ancestry.com (with additional online sleuthing help from neighbor Angela Kobel).

Mary Elizabeth Mack ("Mollie") was born on October 13, 1873, in Adams County,

Iowa. She was the daughter of John Alfred Mack and his wife, Serepta Jones. The 1880 census reveals that the family was living in Soquel in dwelling 45. John was a teamster. His wife kept house and looked after Molly, her older brother William Perry, and a younger brother Eddie (James Edward). They had another child who died as an infant, a common occurrence during that period.

Mollie was at school in 1880, but in 1900, at 27, she was still living at home with no occupation listed. The family lived in Santa Clara in the Burnett Township (present-day Coyote, Santa Teresa, and Morgan Hill). John was listed as a farmer. Mollie had a younger sister, Ila Leota.

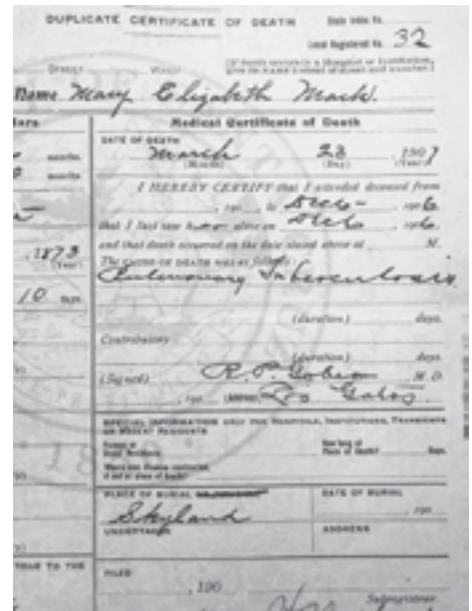
Around this time, land transfers were recorded in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* for J.A. Mack and Mrs. J.A. Mack for various pieces of property, access, and water rights near Skyland. By 1905, Molly is recorded as living with her brother William in the Mack Cottage.

The *Sentinel* records Molly's death: *Mack; at Skyland, March 23. Miss Mollie Mack,*

*daughter of J.A and Serapta Mack, sister of Perry and Ila Mack, a native of Iowa, aged 34 years, 6 months and 10 days. Funeral services by Rev. A.F. DeCamp.*

At this time, the Rev. DeCamp was serving at Wrights Station church and also filling in at the new Skyland Church. (Observant readers will notice the lack of brother Eddie (James Edward). I believe he had sadly died in 1903 of kidney disease at the age of 23.)

Her death certificate states that Mollie died of tuberculosis. This may have afflicted her for many years, leaving her unable to marry or work. Indeed, the purchasing of



property by her parents and coming to live on the mountains may have been a last-ditch attempt to improve her condition.

But why is she buried on the mountain and not in Los Gatos where her family was living?

Just a day or so after the notice of Mollie's death in the *Sentinel*, we find a piece in their regular column, "Dispatches from Skyland." It starts by describing the evening meeting of the Social and Improvement Society of the Santa Cruz Mountains on March 29.

The article also includes descriptions of local landslides, news that Mrs. West was taking charge of the Bell Telephone station in return for a percentage on messages, a discussion about sulphur springs being kept as a state reserve, and a resolution approving "that fire is more destructive than water."

The customary piano solo was given by Ms. Edgecome and a duet closed the proceedings by Ms. Lawrence and Ms. Cairns. It also noted that Mr. Walker wishes to be exonerated from the charge of having eaten all the cake at the February social.

The landslides had created several local problems.

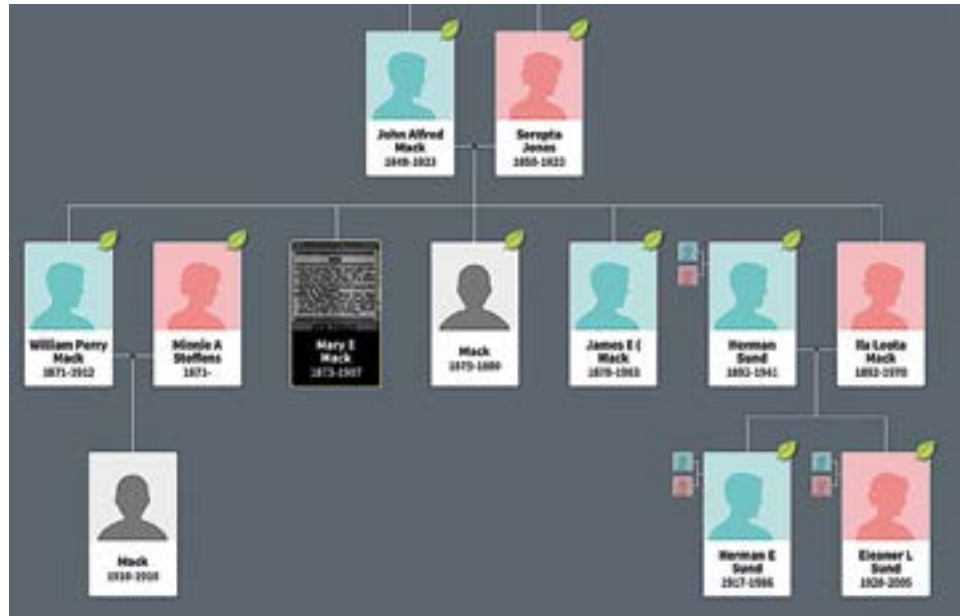
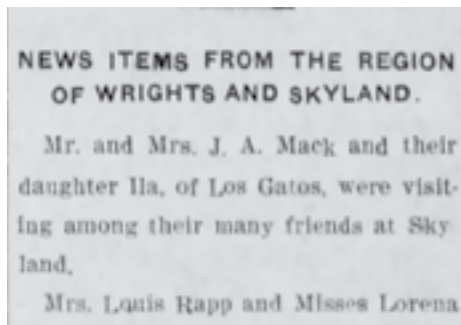
"A narrow-gauge train ran in and out of Wrights on Wednesday and Thursday, but on Thursday night a slide occurred just below the station so that the train can not come quite all the way. The broad-gauge train is still standing on the track below Aldercroft being unable to advance or retreat. Fortunately the grocers had good stocks on hand when traffic was interrupted so the only thing we have missed has been fresh meat. This has made the demand for eggs and chickens very brisk. At the time of Miss Mack's death it was impossible to reach Los Gatos by team so it became necessary

Name	Relationship	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Age at Death	Place of Birth
Mack, John Alfred	Head	10 17 1847	11 01 1907	60	Iowa
— Serepta	Wife	10 17 1847	11 01 1907	60	Iowa
— Mollie E.	Daughter	10 13 1873	03 23 1907	34	Iowa
— Ila L.	Daughter	10 13 1873	07 07 1907	34	Iowa

to construct a coffin at home. As this was almost covered with flowers and smilax there was no harshness in its aspect. Anyway, it was only the worn-out body that lay there as the patient spirit had found a joyful release.”  
 ~ F.E. Beecher, *Wrights, CA March 30, 1907*

Poor Mollie had been stranded in death by the spring landslides. As the Miller Family Cemetery was the nearest appropriate burial place to where she lived, rather than let her decompose while waiting for a ride down the hill, she was buried at the Miller's, in a home-made coffin, covered in greenbriar and flowers.

Molly's death did not stop the Mack family from remaining in the area. The *Sentinel* notes a number of visits by John and Serepta through at least 1910, rentals of their cottages, and of their daughter attending Sunday school.



As a postscript, I hope one day to find a photo of Mollie. I believe her brother William Perry was originally a photographer. In the 1890s, he was recorded to live in Los Gatos, Santa Cruz, San Jose, and Santa Clara. He married a young German immigrant, Minnie Steffens. The 1910 Census reported that they had a child, but it was no longer living. William Perry Mack died in 1912. He was buried in Oak Hill Memorial Park in San Jose, the same cemetery as John and Serepta, who

died in 1923. Sadly, the parents outlived all but one of their children.

Ila Leota married Herman Sund, the son of Swiss immigrants. They had several children. I am tracing their line in hopes of identifying living relatives who may have William's photos. If I find one, I'll share it.

**The Miller Family Cemetery is on private land with no public access.**

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