

= Seth Kinman =

Seth Kinman (September 29 , 1815 ? February 24 , 1888) was an early settler of Humboldt County , California , a hunter based in Fort Humboldt , a famous chair maker , and a nationally recognized entertainer . He stood over 6 ft (1 @. @ 83 m) tall and was known for his hunting prowess and his brutality toward bears and Indians . Kinman claimed to have shot a total of over 800 grizzly bears , and , in a single month , over 50 elk . He was also a hotel keeper , barkeeper , and a musician who performed for President Lincoln on a fiddle made from the skull of a mule .

Known for his publicity seeking , Kinman appeared as a stereotypical mountain man dressed in buckskins on the U.S. east coast and selling cartes de visites of himself and his famous chairs . The chairs were made from elkhorns and grizzly bear skins and given to U.S. Presidents . Presidents so honored include James Buchanan , Abraham Lincoln , Andrew Johnson , and Rutherford Hayes . He may have had a special relationship with President Lincoln , appearing in at least two of Lincoln 's funeral corteges , and claiming to have witnessed Lincoln 's assassination .

His autobiography , dictated to a scribe in 1876 , was first published in 2010 and is noted for putting " the entertainment value of a story ahead of the strict facts . " His descriptions of events change with his retelling of them . Contemporary journalists and modern writers were clearly aware of the stories contained in the autobiography , " but each chooses which version to accept . "

= = Early life = =

Seth Kinman 's father , James Kinman , ran a ferry across the West Branch Susquehanna River in central Pennsylvania , in an area then called Uniontown , now called Allenwood in Gregg Township , Union County . James also was a millwright and an inn @-@ keeper , whose forebears were Quakers from Bucks County , Pennsylvania . Seth 's mother , Eleanor Bower Kinman , was of German descent whose family lived in Reading , Pennsylvania . Seth was born in Uniontown in 1815 . While in Pennsylvania , he learned to read and write , " I could form good letters with a pen but I never learned to spell well . " In 1830 his father took the family and migrated to Tazewell County , Illinois .

In his autobiography , Seth stated that his father fought in the Blackhawk War in Illinois in 1832 . He also claimed that his father and Abraham Lincoln fought together in the war , became friends afterward , and that Seth met the future president during Lincoln 's circuit @-@ riding days in Illinois . At about the same time the Kinmans acquired a rifle , known as " Old Cotton Bale , " that Seth kept throughout his life . The rifle had a 4 ft (1 @. @ 2 m) long barrel and " is supposed to have killed Gen 'l Peckenham " at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 . With some skepticism , Anspach relates a long history of the rifle , gleaned from an 1864 local newspaper story on Kinman , of a renegade Kentucky sniper shooting the British general while carrying on a conversation with American General Andrew Jackson .

Seth spent ten years working in his father 's mill in Illinois , sawing lumber and grinding grain . After his father 's death in 1839 he sold the mill and tried farming . He married Anna Maria Sharpless , of Catawissa , Pennsylvania , in 1840 and they had five children together : James (1842) , Carlin , who is sometimes called Calvin (1846) , Austin (1847) , Ellen (1849) , and Roderick (1851) . Anna Maria and two of their sons , James and Austin , died during the winter of 1852 @-@ 53 , while Seth was in California .

By 1848 Kinman was operating the Eagle Hotel in Pekin , Illinois , on the Illinois River . The hotel was known less for its comforts than for Kinman 's rendition of the fiddle tune Arkansas Traveler .

A traveler came off a steamboat one day and went to the Eagle Hotel . There had been a little western " scrimmage " at the " Eagle " the night before , and though things had not been put in order , the proprietor , Seth Kinman , was sitting in front of the door , playing his favorite tune , the " Arkansas Traveler " , with the greatest self @-@ satisfaction .

The stranger , stopping , said to Seth : " Are you the proprietor here ? " Seth , without resting his bow , replied- " Wall , I reckon I be , stranger " . " Do you keep tavern ? " " Of course I do : I keep tavern like h ? I , " said Seth , fiddling away with all his might , " Just pile in : hang your freight on the

floor , and make yourself at home . " " The boys , " continued Seth , " have been having a little fun , but if there is a whole table or plate in the house , I 'll get you some cold hash toward night . " The stranger didn 't like this peculiarly western reception , so took his departure , leaving Kinman still enjoying his violin .

= = Life in California = =

Kinman claimed to have migrated to California in 1849 during the great Gold Rush and worked as a gold miner in Pierson B. Reading 's party on the Trinity River near present day Douglas City . He then returned to Illinois for two years . In 1852 he travelled to California and explored the Humboldt Bay area , near present day Eureka , California . Humboldt Bay had been recently rediscovered by gold miners seeking a faster and cheaper route to transport supplies . An early settlement in the area was also named Uniontown , but is now known as Arcata . During this period , miners and their suppliers were often flush with gold , but had little to spend it on .

On Christmas , 1852 Kinman was hired to perform on fiddle at the then exorbitant amount of \$ 50 , despite his lack of musical training . As described by a fellow ' 49er :

Seth Kinman , the noted hunter and antler chair @-@ maker , and myself were tendered fifty dollars each to preside as the orchestra for a Christmas ball at Uniontown in 1852 . Kinman 's repertoire consisted mainly of an alternation of the " Arkansaw Traveler " and " Hell on the Wabash " and mine was little more varied or pretentious . He responded . My conscience has not yet reached that level of elasticity .

Over the winter of 1852 @-@ 53 he lived in what is now Ferndale in the cabin of Stephen Shaw . His wife and two of their children died that winter , and he may have gone back to Illinois to bring back his mother and three remaining children by 1854 . In 1853 he started working as a hunter , feeding U.S. troops in Fort Humboldt . While at Fort Humboldt he met future president Ulysses S. Grant , and future General George Crook . According to tradition , about this time , he brought the first herd of cattle to Humboldt County .

Some events and their timing are unclear during this early period . Sources disagree on whether he brought his family to California from Illinois in 1852 or 1854 . Carranco dates Seth 's first return to Illinois starting in 1850 , with his return to California in August 1852 , his arrival in Humboldt County in February 1853 , another return to Illinois in September 1853 , and a trip back to California starting in May 1854 with his mother , two children , and a herd of cattle . Thus , in the course of the six years 1849 @-@ 1854 , he is believed to have crossed the Great Plains , Rocky Mountains , and the Sierra Nevada Mountains five times , travelling mostly on foot .

Kinman lived in several places in the county , including houses near Fern Cottage and a dairy farm on Bear River Ridge . He bought 80 acres (320 @,@ 000 m2) of farm or ranch land 1 mi (1 @.@ 6 km) east of the future Table Bluff Lighthouse in October 1858 , and about 10 mi (16 km) south of Fort Humboldt . This was the first purchase of land in the Humboldt Land District , which was established by an Act of Congress in March 1858 . He later built a hotel and bar on the site .

Kinman made his name first as a hunter , especially as a hunter of grizzly bears . California was noted for its large population of grizzlies . Seth 's son Carlin claimed that they once saw 40 grizzlies at one time . But by 1868 , the last grizzly in Humboldt County had been killed . While Kinman was on his way to deliver one of the presidential chairs , he met Methodist bishop and writer Oscar Penn Fitzgerald on a California steamboat . Fitzgerald recorded his impressions in the sketch The Ethics of Grizzly Hunting . He presented Kinman as a drunkard who cruelly abused Indians and grizzly bears .

His countenance was expressive of a mixture of brutality , cunning , and good humor . He was a thorough animal . Wild frontier life had not sublimated this old sinner in the way pictured by writers who romance about such things at a distance .

Kinman 's eyes made a special impression on Fitzgerald . Decades later he compared Kinman 's eyes to those of the California bandit Tiburcio Vásquez , " His eyes were nature 's special label of one of her malignest creations . Only in two other human beings have I ever seen such eyes as those It was the eye of a wild beast , the baleful glitter you have seen in the eyes of snakes ,

panthers , catamounts , or other creatures of the reptile or feline kind . "

During a gale on the night of January 5 ? 6 , 1860 , Kinman was alerted by distress signals from the Northerner which had been breached by a submerged rock . Kinman tethered himself to the shore and waded into the surf to rescue passengers . In all , 70 people were saved by various means and 38 people perished . He was hailed as a hero and awarded a Bible and free life @-@ time passage on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company 's ships .

= = = Relations with Native Americans = = =

Native Americans in northern California suffered greatly at the hands of European @-@ Americans in the last half of the 19th century , and their population decline is often characterized as genocide . The Wiyot people , who lived around Humboldt Bay , were particularly hard hit . Their population declined from about 1 @, @ 500 @-@ 2 @, @ 000 in 1850 to about 200 in 1860 .

Kinman 's brutality was noted by James R. Duff , a fellow ' 49er , who described him as " an avowed enemy of the red man , ... (who) shot an Indian on sight . " Carranco states that " Seth always took an Indian along on a hunt - partly to carry the game , but primarily to serve as bear bait , " and concludes " sometimes he regarded them (Indians) as human beings ... other times , only as predatory animals to shoot at . " Kinman himself claimed to be an official Indian agent , though there is little evidence that he actually served in the position . He collected " Indian artifacts " including scalps , which he claimed to have taken himself .

Kinman was involved with the Wiyot people who lived on Table Bluff , near his farm . The Wiyot continue to live on Table Bluff on a small rancheria or reservation . The key event in Wiyot history was the February 25 ? 26 , 1860 Wiyot Massacre on Indian Island , when over one hundred Wiyot were murdered in their sleep . At the same time there were massacres of the Wiyot at other sites , possibly including Table Bluff . Kinman has not been specifically identified as one of the murderers . Nevertheless , in May 1860 he was elected to represent Bear River at a county @-@ wide meeting ostensibly called to discuss ways to protect white settlers from the Indians . In 1864 he scouted for Captain William Hull 's California Volunteers , which according to Kinman , " slaughtered and captured Indians , and at one time they took as many as 160 captives to Fort Humboldt . "

= = = Life as an entertainer = = =

While delivering an elkhorn chair to President Buchanan in 1857 , Kinman said , " I awoke one fine morning and found myself famous . " He made use of this fame starting in the summer of 1861 , together with ventriloquist and magician J. G. Kenyon , by opening an exhibit , first in Eureka and then in San Francisco in August of that same year . Kinman displayed his " curiosities " including an elkhorn chair , mounted grizzly bears , several fiddles , and scalps , and gave a lecture .

How they shouted and yelled when I related some of my old ' bar ' stories and hair @-@ breadth escapes , and played on that fiddle made out of the skull bones . That got them ! I would wind up on the " Arkansas Traveler " and their enthusiasm wound up to the highest pitch . Before I fetched my ' bar ' , I would horrify them by telling them how the ' bar ' tore Indian children to pieces , and how I finally trapped the ' bar ' with a young dead Indian . Then the ' bar ' was led out by a chain , and he would dance before he unbuttoned himself and out stepped a man . Then I had to explain about the ' bar ' skin . Then I told the audience how I sawed off those Indian scalps the ladies looked horrified and aghast . Then I would tell about the Indian way of life . I would finish up by describing my elkhorn chair and how I had constructed it .

They then toured gold mining camps and the San Francisco Bay area as entertainers . Later he opened a traveling ? museums of curiosities ? in Eureka , San Francisco , Sacramento and Los Angeles .

During his trip to the East Coast in 1864 @-@ 1866 , Kinman exhibited his curiosities including his chairs , primarily in Pennsylvania and Illinois . He took a ten @-@ year @-@ old Native American boy , named Burtch or Burtchfield , with him on this trip , but Burtch died in December , 1864 . Kinman said that he took the boy on the trip because he had killed both of Burtch 's parents .

Kinman may have also displayed his chairs at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 . As late as 1885 , Kinman opened a museum in Los Angeles with his sons Carlin and Roderick .

= = Presidential chairs = =

Kinman first used the large number of elkhorns shed near his farm every year to create a fence . With the help of George Hill , about 1856 he created his first elkhorn chair , which he traded to Dr. Josiah Simpson of Fort Humboldt for a telescope . The construction of an elkhorn chair included using matching horns to make the front legs and arms of the chair . These horns interlocked with another matching pair , which formed the rear legs and the back of the chair . An elk @-@ hide seat was added , along with actual elk feet as the feet of the chair , and the horns were connected beneath the seat .

Inspired by the 1856 election of James Buchanan , a fellow Pennsylvanian , to the presidency , Kinman built his first presidential elkhorn chair and brought it to Washington .

I kill deer and elk meat up in Humboldt County . My range is from Bear Valley into Oregon . This winter I killed considerable meat so I thought I would take it easy and set about to make this cheer with a view of sending it on to Washington for Old Buck . After I got it finished , though , the boys up in our parts thought it enough to travel on ; so I thought I would try and go on with it to Washington myself , leaving my mother and four children behind , and started with nothing but my rifle and powder horn . Nobody has yet sot in this cheer , and never shall till after the President .

He arranged free passage on the ship Golden Age to Panama , then to New York , and finally to Washington . With some help from Peter Donahue and O.M. Wozencraft , on May 26 , 1857 , after an introduction from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs James W. Denver , Kinman presented the chair to Buchanan . The President was so pleased by the present that he bought Kinman a rifle and two pistols in return .

In 1861 he advertised that he had made a chair that he would present to Napoleon III . Later , because of French involvement in Mexico , he abandoned the idea . Kinman took two chairs on his 1864 trip to the East Coast for use in exhibitions .

Kinman 's presentation of an elkhorn chair to President Abraham Lincoln at 10 a.m. on Saturday , November 26 , 1864 was recorded by artist Alfred Waud , the only known picture of Lincoln accepting a gift . The drawing shows Lincoln examining Kinman 's rifle , which he called " Ol ' Cottonblossum . " Kinman also presented a fiddle made from the skull and a rib of his favorite mule and played the instrument .

Much to the amusement of Lincoln and other spectators , he played ' Essence of Old Virginia ' and ' John Brown ' on the bones of the mule . Lincoln said that if he could play the fiddle he would ask him for it , but since he could not , the fiddle would be better off in Mr. Kinman 's hands .

Within three weeks , Lincoln stated that he would prefer to eat Kinman 's chair , antlers and all , than to appoint a certain office @-@ seeker .

The following April , Kinman marched in President Lincoln 's funeral cortege in Washington .

Kinman was allegedly in Ford 's Theater the night of the assassination and witnessed the murder . He escorted Lincoln 's body on its way to burial as far as Columbus , Ohio . On April 26 , 1865 , the New York Times described Kinman in the funeral cortege in New York City : " Much attention was attracted to Mr. Kinman , who walked in a full hunting suit of buckskin and fur , rifle on shoulder . Mr. Kinman , it will be remembered , presented to Mr. Lincoln some time ago a chair made of California elk @-@ horn , and continuing his acquaintance with him , it is said , enjoyed quite a long conversation with him the very day before the murder . "

During his stays on the East Coast , many cartes de visites photographs of Kinman and his chairs were taken by Mathew Brady . Kinman claimed to have paid Brady \$ 2 @,@ 100 in one three @-@ month period for photos at 8 cents apiece , which calculates to an unlikely amount of over 26 @,@ 000 photographs . Kinman sold these photographs , among other places , in the U.S. Capitol . He also toured the country , performing in his buckskins as a frontier story teller and fiddle player .

Kinman 's tour de force in presidential chairs was presented to President Andrew Johnson on September 8 , 1865 .

This was intended to surpass all his previous efforts , and was made from two grizzly bears captured by Seth . The four legs and claws were those of a huge grizzly and the back and sides ornamented with immense claws . The seat was soft and exceedingly comfortable , but the great feature of the chair was that , by touching a cord , the head of the monster grizzly bear with jaws extended , would dart out in front from under the seat , snapping and gnashing its teeth as natural as life .

Johnson kept the chair in his White House library , the Yellow Oval Room .

On September 18 , 1876 , Kinman presented an elkhorn chair to Governor Rutherford Hayes of Ohio , who was soon to become the President of the United States . The chair is now displayed in the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center in Fremont , Ohio . He later gave a chair constructed of bearskin and other bear body parts to Hayes 's vice @-@ president William A. Wheeler .

= = Legacy = =

In 1876 , Kinman dictated his memoirs , but they were not published until 2010 . He also kept an extensive scrapbook of newspaper articles . About 1930 , a one @-@ time neighbor of Kinman , George Richmond , copied the memoirs and the scrapbook by hand . The original manuscript and scrapbook were then sent to a potential publisher or agent , and lost after his death . The published version is from Richmond 's copy . Richmond also recalled many of Kinman 's stories and collected others from Kinman 's family and friends , then retold these stories in a book now published as I 'm a Gonna Tell Ya a Yarn .

In his later years , Kinman lived in Table Bluff , California with his family , where he owned a hotel and bar . In 1886 , Kinman was preparing to send chairs to President Grover Cleveland and former presidential candidate General Winfield Scott Hancock . He died in 1888 after accidentally shooting himself in the leg . He was interred at Table Bluff Cemetery in Loleta , California , in his buckskin clothing .

Mrs. R.F. Herrick bought Kinman 's traveling museum collection of 186 items , including at least two of his famous chairs , and displayed them in San Francisco in 1893 . She then took the collection to Chicago to display them at the 1893 World 's Columbian Exposition , where she reportedly sold the individual items . The Clarke Historical Museum in Eureka displays a suit of his buckskins , complete with beaded moccasins , as well as a wooden chest he owned . The Ferndale Museum displays several Kinman items , including another of his buckskin suits .

= = Gallery = =