

HISTORIC PHOTO: "Porter's Garage & Fords Blacksmith Shop, corner of Gold Street."



Henry Ford
By Peter Urschel

The Ford family migrated to America in 1847. Henry's mother, Thomasina, died shortly after their arrival and it fell upon the two eldest sons, Henry and William, to help with the family (seven children in all) and to carve out a farm in land that was largely a wilderness, in Michigan.

However, Henry set out for the gold fields of California in 1851. Back in Michigan the older brother, William, continued to work the family farm, eventually buying a portion of it from his father. In 1861, William married and began raising a family. On July 30, 1863, a son was born his parents named Henry. It was this Henry who later became the founder of the Ford Motor Company.

The Henry Ford in California arrived early to the Foresthill Divide and lived for nearly 40 years in the mining town of Bath, just southeast of Foresthill. During this time he enjoyed modest success as a gold miner and with his wife, Kate, raised a family of seven children, surviving two who died.

In 1894 two of his sons, William and George, purchased and operated for many years a blacksmith shop on the northwest corner of Main and Gold Streets in Foresthill, where the old

service station now stands [this story was written in 1993]. A few months later, another son, Albert, purchased the house (still standing today) just to the west of the blacksmith shop, and here Henry and his wife lived out the remainder of their lives, filled with memories and surrounded by their children and numerous old friends.

Among Henry's children, William and George lived out their lives in Foresthill working in the blacksmithing business. William did go to Michigan for a year to work in one of his cousin's auto plants until poor health brought him back to Foresthill.

Albert Ford became a successful merchant in Auburn in partnership with his brother-in-law, A.C. Bequette, wed to Albert's sister, Alice. Of Henry's other children, daughters, Mary and Rebecca married and made their homes beyond Placer County. Another daughter, Henrietta, seems to have disappeared from history.

Local newspapers do report that on at least one occasion in the 1920's the Fords of Foresthill were visited by their celebrated cousin from Michigan, bringing together these two branches of the Ford family of Ireland that had chosen different paths so many years before.

On May 11, 1901, an obituary appeared in Auburn's Placer Herald. Following is an excerpt from it:

"Henry Ford, one of the most prominent citizens of Forest Hill, died at his home on May 4th after a long and painful illness, caused by enlargement of the heart.

He was born in County Cork, Ireland in 1834. His family came to Detroit, Michigan in 1847. At 20 years of age young Henry came to California, spending a short time in Grass Valley, then removing to Iowa Hill. In 1857, he married Miss Kate O'Leary of San Francisco and in 1858 they became residents of Bath, where they lived until 1894, then to Forest Hill.

The funeral, which took place Monday at 2 p.m. was one of the largest ever witnessed at the Hill, giving strong evidence of the esteem and respect in which he was held by his neighbors. Floral offerings were many and beautiful and he was laid to rest beside his two children in the Catholic Cemetery, thus fulfilling his most earnest desire expressed before he died. . . .

Henry Ford was a man of most excellent parts. Honest and fearless in doing the right, he was likewise liberal and warm-hearted at all times. He was a devoted husband and an indulgent father and his many good deeds are a lasting memory to his name."