

Crosthwaite Photograph SLP-S-15

By George Hruby

www.sanpasqual.org

The SPBSLP discovered two photographs taken in 1897, one of which included a survivor of Mule Hill. The photograph in question was number 85:15705 and labeled "Starvation Hill."

Just a few weeks from his 21st birthday, a young Scottish immigrant named Philip Crosthwaite found himself fighting in the Battle at San Pasqual on December 6, 1846. Crosthwaite was one of the volunteers in Captain Gillespie's group that had met up with General Kearny and the Dragoons prior to the battle.

As soon as the war was won with Mexico, Crosthwaite remained and settled in the area. He lived for some time in Poway (not far from San Pasqual) and later even became the Sheriff of San Diego before finally retiring down in Baja, Mexico in the town that is today called Rosarita Beach.

By 1897, the Battle of San Pasqual was fading into obscurity and San Diego began to take a renewed interest in this historical battle that had occurred in its county just 50 years earlier. Philip Crosthwaite, who was then seventy-two years old, was asked to lead a tour from San Diego to the San Pasqual Battlefield, to show interested San Diegans where the battle had occurred at and to recount the events that had unfolded there. Accompanying the wagons, buggies, and horses carrying people to this event on July 17, 1897, was San Diego photographer Samuel Schiller.

The following newspaper article appeared in reference to this event:

Battle of San Pasqual

Don Felipe Crosthwaite returned from Ensenada last Wednesday. He will go to Escondido today and tomorrow to San Pasqual, where he will meet a committee of Native Sons, and locate the battle site, where General Andres Pico whipped General Kearny December 6, 1846, and the American forces met with a loss of 22 killed.

The committee consists of L. A. Blockman, Samuel Schiller and C. E. Overshiner.

The Native Sons have started a fund, and later will erect a stone monument on the site. Don Felipe Crosthwaite participated in the battle.

San Diego Progress San Diego, South California July 17, 1897

Schiller, the photographer, was named an actual committee member involved in locating this battle site. There is no doubt he took photographs during these two days of sites relevant to this event, especially as an actual participant, and first-hand witness to the event, both showed and explained details and locations to them all while there.

At least two photographs taken by Schiller that weekend were retained by the then “Pioneer Society of San Diego County”. These two photographs were then later turned over to the San Diego Historical Society and sat buried in the archives for the rest of the 20th century until discovered and researched by the SPBSLP in 1996. One of these photographs was of Philip Crosthwaite standing next to some rocks atop Mule Hill.

This is what Thomas Adema, Photo Archivist with the San Diego Historical Society wrote about these two photographs:

“ Concerning photographs 85:15705 (Starvation Hill) and 85:15706 (Battlefield of San Pasqual); I believe the two photographs were most likely taken on the same day. The writing on the back of the photos are the same, as is the mounting board and size of the image. I believe the date to be around July 18, 1897. I base this date on information I found in the biographical files at the San Diego Historical Society Research Archives under Samuel Schiller. I recognize Philip Crosthwaite in the photo 85:15705 and he appears to be an age that would agree with 1897. Crosthwaite was born December 27, 1825 and would have been 72 years old. I have enclosed a copy of the Samuel Schiller note. The Pioneer Society of San Diego County gave the photographs to the San Diego Historical Society. ”

The photograph of Crosthwaite standing next to the two boulders atop Mule Hill became of particular interest to the SPBSLP. The two immediate questions raised were “Where on Mule Hill were these two boulders located?” and “Why did Crosthwaite have his picture taken next to them?” In other words, what was the significance of this location that Crosthwaite was trying to show us or was it just random?



Photographer Sam Schiller (left) with Mule Hill survivor Philip Crosthwaite (right), circa 1897.
Photo courtesy of the San Diego Historical Society archives

The search for these boulders naturally started where it had been assumed most of the fighting at Mule Hill had occurred – at the two rocky outcroppings facing south. However, as it would turn out, they were not there to be found. The two boulders were later located on the northwest corner of Mule Hill at a site now identified as SLP-S-15. Totally covered in vegetation that had to be cleared away, the two boulders were now clearly as prominent today as they were in 1897 when Crosthwaite stood by them. Why did Crosthwaite have his picture taken there? Why next to these two boulders? What was he trying to tell us about this location?



Historian George Hruby standing by Crosthwaite Boulders on Mule Hill. Circa. 1997

For more, see section entitled, “1st Engagement Site – Mule Hill; SLP-S-10.”