

THE SIGNAL ON THE MOUNTAIN

Maud Howard, daughter of Mary Downen
Euvelle Howard, husband of Maud Howard

Pre-Script: If you have ever hiked to the top of Mt. Konocti, you have passed the homestead of Mary Downen. She homesteaded on Mt. Konocti in 1903 at the age of 59. She lived alone there most of the time. Her daughter, Maud Howard, and son-in-law, Euvelle Howard, helped her stake out her claim and build the house. Every sunny afternoon, Maud and Euvelle, who lived in Lakeport, would wait for a signal from Mary who lived on the mountain. The time is summer, 1905.

Scene:

Maud is working in the kitchen. Euvelle enters from working outside

Euvelle: Have you seen it yet?

Maud: Not yet, it isn't 2:00 yet!

Euvelle: It always worries me, your mother living up there all by herself.

Maud: Ever since my father died, mother wanted to be in a secluded place. Uncle Sam Mountain turns out to be the perfect place for her!

Euvelle: Still, there's no water ... took a long time to haul all those boards up there to build the place. Had to practically build the road first!

Maud: I know, it was a hard ride that first time you took her up there.

Euvelle: Hard is exactly right! Why, we took the horses and buggy up a very poor makeshift of a road as far as we could. Then I unhitched the horses and your mother rode on top while I cut through the brush. We zigzagged up the old grade to the grove of big live oak trees. I thought for sure your mother would have gotten dizzy.

Maud: She always did whenever we went over mountain roads.

Euvelle: Well, I'll tell you, when she looked down and saw Clear Lake and Big Valley below, she declared that she had never seen anything so beautiful. Heck, we must have been up 2,500 feet!

Maud: Really? That's pretty high!

Euvelle: When she saw the big oak trees she thought that the soil would grow almost anything and this was the place she wanted!

Maud: That's not what the Land Office thought! They said the land was rocky and worthless. They wouldn't even order a survey unless we paid them \$600 first!

Euvelle: It's a good thing we had the money to help. But the worst of it is that there's no water up there and everyone knew it! That's why no one else ever staked out a claim on Uncle Sam Mountain.

Maud: That first year was pretty rough - having to haul up every drop of water for her.

Euvelle: I'll say! Luckily we made a system to collect the rainwater that first winter. We collected it off the roof into barrels and tanks. I was pretty excited when George Forbes agreed to dig a well near the cabin!

Maud: Remind me again, why did he stop?

Euvelle: He got down 58 feet and found the soil to be quite moist. But then he heard rumblings and was afraid of an eruption. He refused to go any deeper.

Maud: At least you used the hole for a cistern.

Euvelle: You're right! Mother needed a lot of water for her garden and fruit trees.

Maud: Did you hear about the radish that was forgotten in the garden all summer?

Euvelle: Didn't it weigh 5 pounds when they pulled it out in the fall!

Maud: That's one enormous radish! (They both laugh) What time is it getting to be?

Euvelle: I'd say it was close to 2:00 and it's a beautiful sunny day outside.

Maud: I'm so glad that mother thought of this idea - using a mirror to make a flash on the side of the mountain. In fact, when she signals us, she now has not only us signaling her back, but a lot of her friends too!!

Euvelle: Remember the time she didn't signal and I had to go up there to check on her?

Maud: Yes, that was the time she was out in the garden and lost track of time. Wait, isn't that her now? Let me grab my mirror!!

(They both look as if they are looking out the window and freeze in that position).

Post Script: Mary Downen lived on Uncle Sam Mountain, now Mt. Konocti, for the rest of her life. Eventually her family joined her on the mountain. Mary died in 1928. Euvelle, is buried 200 yards away from the cabin, his epitaph chiseled onto a boulder. Check it out for yourself when you hike to the top of Mt. Konocti!