

**SAN DIEGO CITY FATHER
WILLIAM AUGUSTUS BEGOLE**



◊ **STORY OF A WORKHORSE PIONEER** ◊

SAN DIEGO CITY FATHER WILLIAM AUGUSTUS BEGOLE

◇ STORY OF A WORKHORSE PIONEER ◇



LAEL MONTGOMERY



Lael Montgomery

• 2017 •

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This story about William Augustus Begole's nineteenth-century life is dedicated to my husband, Jonathan Vick, a volunteer champion of back country roads, parks, walking trails and other amenities in our town, and to generations of community-makers whose contributions have escaped written history. Thank you all for your enduring gifts to our world. Thank you, Jon, for your steadfast dedication to every community to which you belong and most especially for your encouragement of this and so many other projects of mine and others.



< THE 2016 RESTORATION OF CITY FATHER BEGOLE'S "LITTLE SLOGAN" >



In the San Diego Union on July 13, 1876, was the following report of the city's American Independence Day celebration: "At 5 o'clock (on the morning of July 4, 1876) the Silver Cornet band announced the dawn of the centennial Fourth by a medley of National airs from the cupola of the Horton House, while the sharp voiced little gun which **City Father Begole** has recently had made, boomed away briskly with a National salute. Everybody was soon stirring and for the next two hours there was a carnival of noise—cannon, small arms and every description of firecracker and Chinese bomb."¹

Known as "Little Slogan," San Diego's party cannon was ordered in 1876 by City Trustee President William Augustus Begole. Begole said in a San Diego Union article in 1892 that it was purchased "entirely by Republicans."² For years, between parades and city celebrations, the cannon sat on its caisson in Horton Plaza. Sometime after this



*"Little Slogan" on its caisson
in Horton Plaza, around 1930*

photograph was taken, around 1930, the cannon disappeared. After spending much of the 20th century as a yard ornament at the Zink family's residence in San Diego, the long-lost cannon was recovered in 2013 by Save Our Heritage Organisation. The cannon was restored in 2016 to its former glory by SOHO, underwritten by the author and other members of the Begole Family.





*San Diego City Father William Augustus Begole
(1826–1901)*



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*“ ... life is sad
if you haven't lived it
for a dream ... ”*

—CHILEAN LULLABY



PREFACE



How I Discovered that San Diego City Father William Augustus Begole Is a First Cousin and Came to Write His Story

While reading Richard Pourade’s multivolume *History of San Diego* several years ago, I was stunned and intrigued to see that a member of a celebrated 1875 San Diego posse shared my mother’s rare Huguenot surname “Begole.”³ My maternal grandparents, Michigander transplants to Boston, where I grew up, had never mentioned a San Diego pioneer in the family. This tidbit haunted my imagination until I joined Ancestry, GenealogyBank, Fold 3, and a bunch of other genealogical sources and started riffling through family records, census records, local histories, and (at last!) historical newspapers in an effort to learn this fellow’s place in my mother’s family tree and, as it turns out, California history.

Surprisingly, except for Pourade’s brief mention, William Augustus Begole has been ignored by formal histories despite his prominence in business, civic, and fraternal affairs in Northern and Southern California during the second half of the nineteenth century. W. A.’s extensive activities as a miner, investor, businessman, and civic leader in Little York Township (Red Dog, You Bet, Chalk Bluff) in Nevada County, California, and later in the new city of San Diego, are revealed through primary sources: historical newspapers, city government rosters, court records, election records, and organization rosters.

Five years and hundreds of documents later (there are more than 500 citations on GenealogyBank alone), I understand how William Augustus Begole (1826–1901) fits into my family history and how his life story fits into the history of California. From the factual records, we can

piece together activities, events, and turning points in W. A. Begole's life. Unfortunately, his diary, which he bequeathed to San Diego Lodge No. 35 in 1901, disappeared from the Lodge archives in the 1920s. No other personal communications except his last will and testament have survived. We might imagine a bit about his character from a scattering of W. A.'s experiences, actions, and alliances. But his own thoughts and feelings, and the impressions he made on his contemporaries, we will never know.

The Family Puzzle



William Augustus Begole is my first cousin, four times removed. His father was the brother of my third great-grandfather, the generation born after the American Revolution and who served in the War of 1812. W. A. is also cousin to a cluster of other nineteenth-century Begoles⁴ who were intrepid, colorful, and notable settlers of the American West. He is also first cousin (also four times removed) to Robert “Bob” Begole for whom the Begole Archeological Center in Borrego Springs, California, is named. We cousins across four generations all descend from two Begole brothers who settled the Genesee Valley in New York around 1815 after serving in the War of 1812. Our common ancestors are their parents—people who settled in Maryland before the American Revolution and immigrated before 1810 to Upstate New York.

I know this now from family tracking and following hunches, mostly in the Federal Census, beginning in 1790 in Maryland—following not just my research subject but all members of all the Begole families in the area (called “cluster research”), and comparing this information with data gleaned from histories of the settlement of small towns in Upstate New York. My cousin by marriage, genealogist Ellen Gerwitz of Rochester, New York, skillfully led me on this rambling adventure, teaching me much about how to find, assemble, triangulate, and interpret information in census records. William Augustus Begole did not appear by name in any of these New York records. I was not entirely sure that we had assigned him to the right set of parents until

I compared sibling information from census records with death and cemetery records, and probate records in New York and in San Diego. Bingo! William Augustus Begole's 1895 will named his brothers and sisters and their children.

The California Puzzle:
W. A. Begole's Trail ~ Gold Country and San Diego



Cracking the California puzzle was tedious but much more straightforward. I could assemble a timeline from historical newspapers and other documents. GenealogyBank has more than 500 newspaper articles citing W. A. Begole and several hundred more citing other Begoles who were also roaming around the American West between 1840 and 1900. The Nevada County Historical Society and the San Diego History Center have a scattering of newspaper citations on microfiche and in court records from the 1850s that cite W. A. Begole. Historical property records in Nevada and San Diego Counties track his land purchases and sales from the 1850s. Additional government documents, such as precinct and election records, and bits of information from the archives of private, civic, and fraternal organizations helped complete the picture. By working back and forth across all these, I was able to piece together W. A.'s story and identify how W. A. and the others fit into the family story and into the larger nineteenth century histories of Nevada County and San Diego.

This is what I learned.

< PROMINENT IN PRIMARY HISTORICAL SOURCES FOR FIFTY > YEARS AND IN SAN DIEGO'S FOUNDATIONAL INSTITUTIONS



William Augustus Begole figures prominently in business, civic, and fraternal affairs for the fifty years after his arrival in California (in Nevada County in 1849/50 and in San Diego in 1869) until his death in September, 1901. Newspapers, election records, organization rosters, and legal and civic records reveal that W. A. Begole was a leader among the pioneer miners in Little York Township, a Justice of the Peace, owner-builder of the ditches from the Yuba River that enabled hydraulic mining, a delegate to American and Republican conventions, and a founding director of the fire department and the Mount Carmel Masonic Lodge.

In San Diego, W. A. served as one of five elected city trustees for five years, was trustee president for a year and a half, and a city alderman for two. He was also: an early investor in the San Diego-Yuma Turnpike; a San Diego Reading Room Association Trustee and member of the Board of Managers; Vice President of the Citizens Railroad Committee, Vice President of the Grant-Wilson Club; Chairman of the Republican County Committee and many times a convention delegate; and a Republican Club officer and member of the Finance Committee as well as a dedicated party leader and booster of Republican candidates, initiatives, and projects.

He was further a San Diego Library Trustee, a first and second Vice President of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, a recording secretary of the San Diego Society of Natural History, and a Pacific Railroad investor. He was appointed many times an election judge and inspector for Ward 3 and to the County Grand Juror pool. He was elected in 1888 as one of the fifteen freemen who drafted the new San Diego City Charter, and in 1889, he was one of nine aldermen elected with Mayor Douglas Gunn to implement the new charter. As an alderman, he was appointed to draft the new tax levy, served on committees on Water and Fire, Public Buildings and Lighting, and Police and

Health and Morals and was appointed to the Board of Equalization. During the struggle in the late 1890s between municipal and private ownership of water infrastructure and service, W. A. Begole was rallied out of retirement to be a vice president of the Municipal Ownership Club.

A dedicated long-term member, six-term master, and high priest, W. A. Begole served San Diego Masonic Lodge No. 35, Royal Arch Masons No. 61, and San Diego Commandery No. 25 Knights Templar in innumerable ways and also presided over the Masonic Building Association for many years.

William Augustus Begole was also a tinsmith; he built the tin roofs on the Florence Hotel and the National and Commercial Banks as well as on a number of private homes in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Listing his occupation as “capitalist” in the 1890 US Census, he invested in gold mines in Julian, Pine Valley, and the Temecula areas, and to some extent also in real estate, the railroad, and some public works projects.





**CROSSED THE PLAINS
WITH DONNER PARTY**

**W. A. Begole, a Pioneer of the Golden
West, Passes Away in
San Diego.**

SAN DIEGO, Sept. 2.—W. A. Begole, one of the oldest residents of San Diego and a pioneer of California, died last evening of neuralgia of the heart. He came to this coast in 1849 as a member of the Donner party. He spent several years in the central part of the State and came to San Diego thirty-three years ago. He was for years the leading hardware merchant and plumber of the city, but retired almost a decade ago.

Mr. Begole was prominent in Masonic circles and was master of San Diego Lodge No. 35 from 1871 to 1875 and again in 1885. He left no family and no relatives except a brother, ex-Governor Begole of Michigan.

The funeral to-morrow forenoon will be in charge of the Masons and will call together the largest gathering of the order that has been seen in San Diego in years.

W. A. Begole's obituary in the *San Francisco Call*⁵ refers incorrectly to the year 1849 for the Donner tragedy. The Donner-Reed prairie crossing ended at Donner Lake near Truckee in 1846. Because the origin of this conflicting information is unknown, we are left to wonder whether W. A. travelled in 1846 with the Donner family and the date in the newspaper was an editorial error, or whether he travelled in 1849 and the Donner detail was maybe "misremembered" by W. A. himself or by someone else. Another biographical detail that is misreported in some sources is W. A.'s relationship to Michigan Governor Josiah William Begole. They were first cousins, not brothers.



CHAPTER ONE

Nevada County to San Diego in 1869

WILLIAM AUGUSTUS BEGOLE arrived in San Diego from San Francisco on the sidewheel steamer *S.S. Senator* on September 24, 1869.⁶ Known to historians as Black Friday, the day the US Gold Market collapsed, it was also the first day that the freight and passenger steamer the *S.S. Senator* would sail past its usual landing at Culverwell's Wharf in Old Town to tie up at Horton's Wharf. Just finished, the new wharf was closer to the new firms on Fifth Street in Alonzo E. Horton's "New Town" and closer to the future of San Diego than its past. The promise of gold and growth likely drew tinsmith, hardware dealer, miner, and "capitalist" W. A. Begole to the dry, dusty, sparsely populated outpost of San Diego in the 1870s.



*The S.S. Senator at Horton's Wharf
at the base of Fifth Street, circa 1869*

When W. A. Begole sailed into San Diego in September of 1869, it was probably not his first visit. The month before, for \$350 in gold coin, he had purchased a double lot on Fifth Street.⁷ The fact that the seller was not New Town developer A. E. Horton but was Ole N. Lee shows that lots in the new subdivision known as "Horton's Addition" were already turning over and that the '70s land boom was underway.

W. A. located his tin shop on the southern half of this property at 529 Fifth Street, between Market and Island. Six months later, in March of 1870, Begole speculated again in New Town real estate and purchased directly from A. E. Horton a lot on Sixth Street,⁹ paying \$1,000 in gold coin. The Sixth Street lot was adjacent to the corner lot at J Street but not the premium corner position. Nevertheless, W. A. paid 300% more than he'd paid just six months previously for the double lot on Fifth Street.



At the ceremony for the driving of the last spike at Promontory Summit, Utah, May 10, 1869.⁸ Rumors of an RR link to San Diego excited the land boom years, 1867–1873

In 1869, W. A. Begole was forty-three years old. Before his move to San Diego, he had been settled in Nevada County gold country for about twenty years. We cannot know for certain his rationale for choosing San Diego for his home in 1869. However, events and circumstances around that time point to opportunities pulling him south, particularly the discovery of gold in the Wynola hills near Julian,¹⁰ Horton's enterprising and widespread promotion of his vision for a "New Town" San Diego,¹¹ and frothy talk of rail service to link the natural port to the new trans-continental railroad and the rest of country.

The years 1868 and 1869 were boom years for San Diego. Plans for a new railroad were helping to fuel the interest. In May, 1868 General Thomas Sedgwick, surveyor and agent for John C. Fremont's Memphis, El Paso, and Pacific Railroad project published his report that named San Diego as the terminus for a planned transcontinental line. Soon both Old Town and New Town, or Horton's Addition as it was sometimes called, were booming. The prospect of the railroad brought hundreds of new settlers. By early 1870 New San Diego had a population of 2,301, with 915 residential and 69 business buildings.¹²

In addition to the "pull" of opportunity in San Diego was the "push" of cascading catastrophes in the 1860s with his mining enterprises in Little York Township—increasing consolidation in Nevada County of unprofitable small-scale mines by a few large, well-funded hydraulic operators combined with a series of man-made and natural disasters to make recovery there unpalatable. W. A.'s Little York stamp mill was destroyed by fire in 1861, as was the entire town of Red Dog, including his tin shop and theater. The fires were followed by record-setting floods that destroyed most of the town of Red Dog as well as the water works that enabled hydraulic mining in the area.

Like so many members of his generation, William Augustus Begole was no stranger to new beginnings or the pioneer life. He had grown up in the frontier of Upstate New York, and as a young man, had crossed the country from his birthplace in the Genesee Valley sometime in the late 1840s. His obituary says he "crossed the prairie with the Donner Party in 1849."¹³ But, exactly when W. A. Begole travelled to California is uncertain because the Donner and Reed families left Independence, Missouri not in 1849 but in early May of 1846 with the much larger Russell-Boggs wagon train—63 wagons and 288 persons. Was W. A. Begole part of this group? Stewart¹⁴ and others have written that the census of the Russell-Boggs wagon train was dynamic and that there is no reliable record of people who joined the train or dropped away. (Neither do we find confirmation of his arrival in California records, which were, of course, few and sketchy before statehood. There

are no traces of W. A. Begole in California before 1850. Still, it is possible that this twenty-year-old single man travelled west with this group in 1846 around the start of the Mexican-American War and three years before the discovery of gold at Sutter Creek.)

Harvard historian Bernard DeVoto makes the point in his book, *The Year of Decision 1846*,¹⁵ that 1846 was an especially significant turning point in America's destiny during which the notion of "manifest destiny" — the nation stretching from sea to sea — was realized through the United States' acquisition of Texas by annexation; of the Mexican territories of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico by conquest; and of Oregon by treaty with the British. Thousands of people loaded their belongings into wagons and trekked west.

Generational sociologists William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584–2069*, call the generation born in the years between 1822 and 1842 the "Gilded Generation."¹⁶ The young adulthoods of this cohort were frenetic years according to Strauss and Howe. They quote Mark Twain: "two-hundred thousand young men — not simpering, dainty, kid-gloved weaklings but stalwart, muscular dauntless young braves, brimful of push and energy — caught the California sudden-riches disease." The opportunity beckoning from the new frontier was likely good enough reason to "pull" a twenty-year-old toward the American West, especially a twenty-year-old like William Augustus Begole who may also have been "pushed" by family circumstances to pursue a new life on his own several thousand miles from home.

CHAPTER TWO



1826: Beginnings—Genesee County, New York

WILLIAM AUGUSTUS BEGOLE was born in the wilderness of Mount Morris, Genesee County, New York, in October, 1826 to Benjamin and Margaret Schull Begole. He was next to the youngest of six children born across sixteen years. He had two sisters, Elizabeth and Nancy, ten and eight years older, and three brothers, Joseph six years and Joshua two years older. Benjamin was five years younger. We see in this brood many of the family's favorite names: William, Augustus, Benjamin, Joshua, Elizabeth, and Nancy.

The oft-repeated family story is that the Begoles were descendants of French Huguenots who immigrated to Virginia before 1700 to avoid France's persecution of Protestants. Public records show William Augustus' grandfather, William Rivers Begole, was living in Frederick County, Maryland by the time of the American Revolution where he owned some land, engaged in farming, and served as a corporal in the patriot militia.¹⁷ According to the Federal Censuses of 1790 and 1800, there were no slaves in the William Begole (Begold) household.¹⁸

Around 1805, William Rivers Begole moved his wife and six of their grown children, including William Augustus' father, Benjamin Franklin Begole, from Hagerstown to the fertile Genesee Valley. They were following their eldest son, Thomas Jefferson Begole (1776–1854), to his post as land agent at the Hermitage in Groveland, New York, for the Maryland Company owned by the abundantly landed and rich Fitzhugh and Carroll families. These Maryland neighbors had purchased thousands of acres in Western New York with another well-heeled and

also slaveholding Marylander, Nathaniel Rochester. Though one of these adult Begole siblings kept moving west to Illinois, five of them married and raised their families in the Genesee Valley.¹⁹

W. A. Begole's father, Benjamin Franklin Begole (1786–1869), was born in Hagerstown three years after the American Revolution ended. His younger brother, another William Augustus Begole (1788–1862, and for whom the subject of this biography was named), was born two years later. Theirs was the generation that served in the War of 1812. Benjamin Begole and his brother William both served in Colonel Philetus Swift's Regiment of New York.²⁰ After the war, these two brothers both married and located in the village of Mount Morris, New York. Their parents and three other siblings settled and re-settled in nearby frontier outposts of Groveland, Dansville, Wayland, Avon, and Geneseo. Benjamin Franklin Begole married Margaret Shull, most likely a daughter of one of two Schull brothers who emigrated from Maryland to Dansville, New York. Benjamin's brother and W. A.'s uncle William Augustus married Eleanor Bowles, daughter of another relocated Maryland neighbor, Thomas Augustus Bowles. (Both these families were apparently crazy for the name Augustus.) Thomas Augustus Bowles had moved his family also from Hagerstown, Maryland to Wayland, New York in the early 1800s.²³

This bare-bones genealogical history suggests that William Augustus Begole grew up in an extended and tightly knit family of at least sixteen children of the two Begole brothers in the sparsely populated wilds of Mount Morris, in Upstate New York, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The two families all played, worked, and attended the one-room school together and depended upon one another.

< THESE TWO BEGOLE BROTHERS, THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN >



*Benjamin Franklin Begole (1786–1869)
and Margaret Schull Begole (1794–1840)*²²

◊ Six children ◊



Elizabeth (Betsey) (1816–1836) killed in a buggy accident in Mount Morris

Nancy (1818–1892) married Nathan Bills, remained in Mount Morris, NY

Joseph (1820–1876) stayed in Mount Morris, NY

Joshua (1824–1907) emigrated to Burlingame, KS

William Augustus (1826–1901) emigrated to Red Dog and San Diego, CA

Benjamin Bradley (1831–1876) emigrated to Chicago, IL

*William Augustus Begole (1788–1862)
and Eleanor Bowles Begole (1794–1871)*

◊ Ten children ◊



Josiah William (1815–1896) emigrated to Flint, MI, and became Governor of Michigan

Frederick Augustus (1817–1896) emigrated to Flint, MI

Thomas Benjamin Begole (1819–1915) emigrated to Flint, MI

Sarah Eleanor (1821–1915) married Hezekiah Brinkerhoff and emigrated to Ypsilanti, MI

Cornelia Jane (1823–1902) married Hiram Mills, emigrated to Detroit, MI

Myron H. (1825–1863) emigrated to Cedar, IA; killed in the Civil War

Philo M. Begole (1828–1896) emigrated to Cedar, IA, and then to Flint/Vienna, MI²³

George William (1830–1831) stayed in Mount Morris, NY

Julia Begole (1832–1892) married Malcolm McLachlen, emigrated to Kansas City, MO

William Franklin (1836–1912) emigrated to Belleville, MI



Mount Morris during William's childhood was still a true frontier settlement. Purchased from the Seneca Indians by a white trader in the late 1790s and later by Robert Morris, financier of the American Revolution for whom the town is named, parcels from The Morris Reserve were sold to settlers. The Town of Mount Morris was separated from the town of Leicester in 1813.²⁴ W. A.'s father Benjamin Begole and his Uncle William Begole, after serving in the War of 1812,

purchased a track of wild timberland ... about two miles from the site of the present village of Mount Morris, and in the midst of the forest erected a log cabin, the customary dwelling of the early settlers. There were neither railways or canals traversing the country at that time; and Rochester, the nearest marketing and milling point, thirty-six miles distant, was accessible by teams only, three days being consumed in making the round trip. For many years after [their] settlement deer, bears, wolves, and other wild animals roamed the forests and were often a terror to the inhabitants.²⁵

By 1813 Mount Morris had four frame and 22 log houses. Small stores, artisans' shops and grist and lumber mills were established in the early 1800s as Mount Morris developed into a self-supporting community. Early industries included wool carding, a grist mill, a distillery that used the wheat grown on the flats, and the making of cloth from hemp also grown on the flats ...²⁶

While the Town of Mount Morris was established in 1818, the village was not incorporated until 1835²⁷ when W. A. was nine years old. Reminiscing in 1882 about those early days in a speech, W. A.'s cousin Governor Josiah Begole said,

our dwellings were built of round logs just as they were found in the primeval forest. Occasionally a pioneer would build his residence by hewing the logs both outside and in, providing he was so fortunate as to have a little spare money that he had

earned before coming here. This was called “aristocratic” or “putting on the style.” The fireplace was always ample, often extending more than half way across the house Some of us remember with pleasure the big backlog drawn to the door with oxen, and requiring the combined strength of the family to place in position; then a smaller log was placed on top, making a fire that imparted both light and warmth to the family group gathered about the hearth.²⁸

1840: Death of W. A.’s Mother and His Father’s Remarriage



W. A.’s mother died in July 1840, the year Charles Henry Dana published his romantic California tale, *Two Years Before the Mast*. W. A. was fourteen years old. His oldest sister, Elizabeth (Betsey), had been killed in a wagon accident four years earlier.²⁹ In May 1840, just two months before his mother’s death, his sister Nancy had married Nathan Bills, a local fellow. Still living at home with their father were the four boys: Joseph (20), Joshua (16), W. A. (14), and Ben (9). The next March, only eight months after their mother’s death, their father, Benjamin, remarried thirty-year-old Maria Ewart of Groveland.³⁰ Maria was only a few years older than W. A.’s sister Nancy, and the new marriage was also something of a convoluted family affair. W. A.’s new stepmother was also his cousin by marriage. (Maria’s brother, Harvey Ewart, was married to W. A.’s first cousin Mathilde Begole, daughter of Benjamin’s older brother, Thomas Begole,³¹ the Groveland land agent.) Marriages of cousins were still quite frequent and ordinary in the nineteenth century

Ten years later, according to the 1850 Federal Census, none of Benjamin Begole’s first family of children were living with their father and new stepmother. W. A.’s older brothers Joseph and Joshua were unmarried farmers, boarding in the Mount Morris household of a family that lived next door to their uncle William Augustus Begole.³² The younger boys, W. A. and his brother Benjamin, were not living in

Mount Morris and somehow eluded the 1850 US Federal Census records entirely. Their absence suggests that they were either travelling or living where the United States Census could not find them.

Leaving home for the wild lands was a family pattern. Only three of the sixteen children who grew up together in Mount Morris stayed there. W. A.'s oldest cousin, Josiah, moved to the Michigan frontier in 1836 when he was barely twenty, followed by his brother Frederick and numerous siblings and cousins. Brother Benjamin Bradley Begole, who later called himself B.B., was by 1855 married and living in Chicago, Illinois, where he died at the age of forty-five in 1876. Considering the death of his mother and appearance in less than a year of a young stepmother, it's possible that the future San Diego City Father, William Augustus Begole, left his father's home even before 1846. To twenty-year-old W. A., mid-nineteenth-century America must have been aglitter with the promise of adventure and myriad options. He might have bunked with family in the Genesee and Livingston counties of Upstate New York where many of the Marylanders had settled, or in the more distant frontiers of Flint and Ann Arbor, Michigan, or St. Clair, Illinois, or may have chosen to seek his fortune in the American West.