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THE COLOMBO HOTEL, ONCE A SAN ANDREAS LANDMARK

By Eva Soracco

Young and hopeful, Lorenzo Oneto and his brother Giovanni, (John) natives of Chivori, near Genoa, Italy, arrived in Calaveras County in the late 1850's, during the latter days of the Gold Rush.

Lorenzo, not yet 18 years old, quickly became involved in placer mining along San Antonio Creek, south of San Andreas, near its confluence with the South Fork of the Calaveras River.

John Oneto, who was older than Lorenzo, settled in Sonora where he was to become the owner of a successful restaurant business.

Although he mined with some success, Lorenzo was attracted by the quality of the land that surrounded the
Please see **Colombo**, pg. 43

ROBIE RANCH STANDS AS A MONUMENT TO CALIFORNIA PIONEERING

By Kathryn Robie

Long before arrival of the 20th Century the Robie Ranch on Milton Road had become a Western Calaveras County landmark.

Established in 1860, it is one of the oldest working ranches in the state still under original family ownership.

It also has been admitted to membership of the California State Fair's prestigious 100-Year Club.

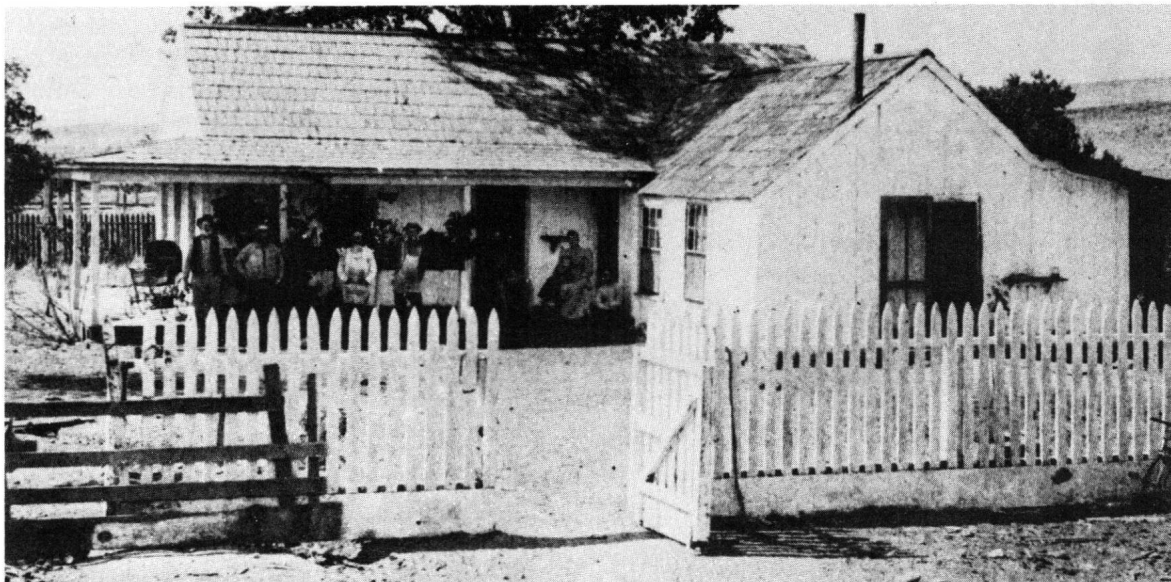
At age 24, Walter Robie, a native of Candia, New Hampshire, in 1850 abandoned farming in his home state to join the California Gold Rush.

Embarking from New York aboard the sailing ship Republic, he arrived at Colon, on the east coast of Panama, then afoot and by small boat, crossed the Isthmus to its Pacific shore. There he boarded the vessel, Tennessee, bound for San Francisco.

After spending only a few days in that city, Robie sailed from San Francisco by river schooner for Sacramento, and from there to Georgetown, in El Dorado County, where he engaged in placer mining with limited success.

Robie's stay in Georgetown was short-lived and with \$300 earned through his mining activities, he headed

Please see **Robie Ranch**, pg. 42



Original Robie Ranch home, built about 1858. Walter Robie [far left], Elizabeth Morgan Robie, seated in chair [far right]. This house served the Robie family until the present ranch home was built in summer of 1906.

Robie Ranch, cont. from pg. 41

back to Sacramento and then to San Francisco.

Again, after only a few days in the bay city, Robie headed out for the gold fields, this time to San Andreas and the Mokelumne River, where he engaged in mining with good success.

Although the largest nugget he found on the Mokelumne weighed only about half-an-ounce, (worth about \$6 in those days) Robie did well with his mining, making up to \$80 per day. After leaving the Mokelumne River he moved to the San Andreas area where he continued mining for another three months.

Far from being uneducated — he had made good use of his hours spent in New Hampshire's common schools — Robie was a shrewd young man who realized there were better futures than gold mining.

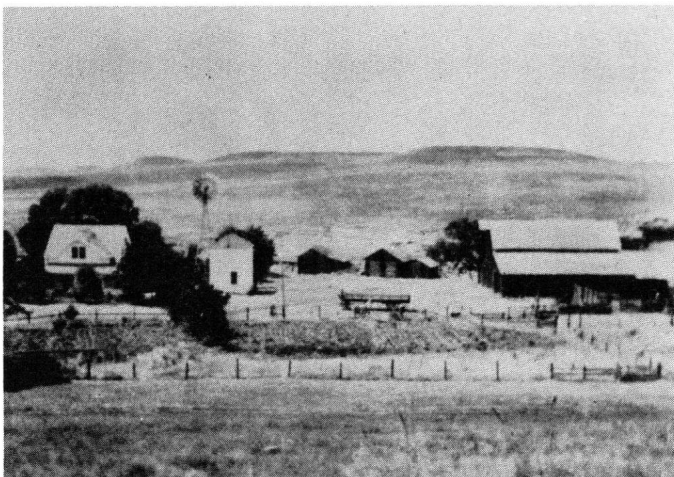
With John Parkhurst and Fredrick Crasly he purchased a \$1,000 share in a store at North Branch, three miles west of San Andreas. They sold out in 1852.

In 1854 Robie & Co., (John Parkhurst) purchased the Pleasant Valley House, a stage stop and general store a mile west of Jenny Lind. The 1856 assessment for 160 acres was \$58 — 27 cents per acre. They also owned the old Brooks Store in Rich Gulch, near Jenny Lind and in 1858, sold the stores and White's Bar Ferry on the Mokelumne River, which had been purchased in 1850.

Walter Robie met Mary Reed at her family's stage stop near Linden. Her family had come to California from Massachusetts in the early 50's.

Walter and Mary were married in 1858 and had two children: Georgia Ann, born in 1861 and Walter John, born in 1863.

In 1860 Walter Robie obtained a grant of 160 acres near Milton and he homesteaded 320 acres in 1862.



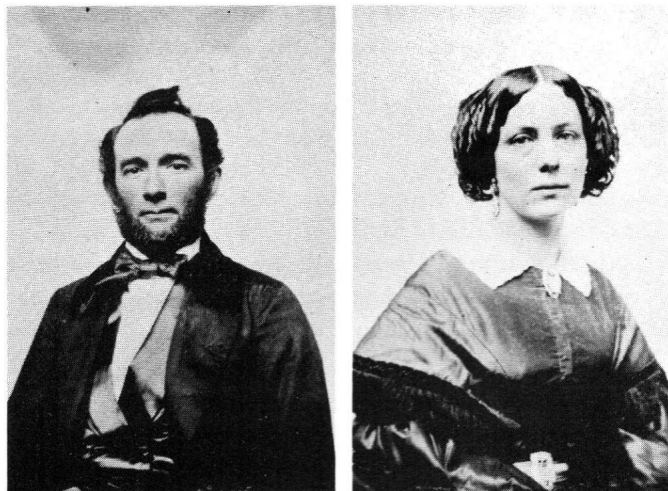
The Robie Ranch as it appeared about 1922.

He began building up a livestock herd which included a considerable number of Mexican cattle and horses which he identified with the brand "22".

But ranching was no easier a century ago than it is now, and in the late 1850's and early 60's a severe drought hit Central California, followed by serious flooding in the winter of 1862.

Robie & Co. was forced to sell all of the Mexican horses and cattle — about 500 head — that carried the brand "22".

During the drought years Mary said she was able to keep the family going with gold she had saved from Walt-



Walter Robie

Mary Robie

er's trouser pockets and the floor of the buggy.

In 1870 he and four other men paid \$1 each for a mining claim in the Brushville Mining District, on the South Gulch Fluming and Tunnel Claim. Also, during the 1870's and 80's he purchased 17 different parcels from other homesteaders, (some of whom he had encouraged to file just for that purpose) as was the common practice in those days.

In 1869 Robie purchased 294 sheep at \$2.50 per head.

By 1874 wool was selling for 23½ cents per pound, about half of today's price, and the following year, 1875, Walter Robie drove his sheep to Bear Valley, on the Calaveras-Alpine County line for the first time.

Mary Robie taught her children at the Whiskey Hill School near Jenny Lind, on the south side of the Calaveras River. Later, in 1883 and 84 her son, Walter John, went to the College of the Pacific, in San Jose. Tuition was \$30 and board was \$20 per month.

Mary Robie was killed in 1887 when the horse she was driving suddenly bolted, throwing her from her buggy.

Please see **Robie Ranch**, pg. 48

Colombo, cont. from pg. 41

placer diggins', quickly realizing its potential for farming purposes. He acquired land at what became known by the Oneto family as the Dry Creek Ranch, at the mouth of San Antonio Creek. Giving up mining, he started a large truck gardening operation, selling his produce at mining camps and nearby towns.

Lorenzo also, during that period, married Madelena, who had come from her native Italy to Calaveras County. The marriage ceremony was held at the Dry Creek Ranch.

During the 1860's and 70's the Oneto Ranch prospered, as did John Oneto's restaurant in Sonora, then catastrophe struck John's restaurant business.

Fire destroyed the restaurant, and John, out of business and despondent over his loss, came to Calaveras County to visit his brother.

What he found impressed him. He admired his brother's ranch and gardening operations and decided he too, would like to go into ranching rather than launch another restaurant or retail business.

Lorenzo, by the same token, was tired of farming and it took no great amount of persuasion to induce him to sell the ranch to his brother. The ranch today still remains under the ownership of the Oneto family.

For a time after selling the ranch, Lorenzo operated a grocery store at Dry Creek. Then he, Madelena and their

children moved to San Andreas where Lorenzo purchased property on St. Charles Street, where Winkler's Village Market now stands, and proceeded to build a hotel there.

Oneto and his wife opened the Colombo Hotel in 1881.

Meticulously built of native stone, Lorenzo did virtually all of the work on the two-story structure himself. He cut and carried huge blocks of stone without help, and many attributed his early death to over-exertion while he was constructing the hotel.

The building was 60 feet long and 36 feet wide with a large stone lined basement in which meat, vegetables, and beverages were kept cool and raviolis were made, cut and laid out, to be taken up to the kitchen the next day.

On holidays and special occasions enough raviolis were made for everyone in town who wanted them. They were always in demand and no person ever was refused.

Another specialty of the house was a large, three-layer coconut cake made with fresh shredded coconut.

The ground floor of the hotel contained a large bar-room, kitchen, dining room, wash room and two bedrooms. The kitchen was built with a large serving window through which the food was passed into the dining room.

The front entrance on the main floor was through iron double doors that led to the barroom. That room was bare except for a large, heavy card table and chairs. A trap

Please see **Colombo, pg. 44**



The Colombo Hotel in its heyday [circa 1890]. Baptiste [Bob] Oneto, standing in doorway.

Colombo, cont. from pg. 43

door beside the bar led to the basement.

However, the walls were covered with bright murals of beautiful horses and outdoor scenes reminiscent of those often found on the walls of old buildings in Italy and throughout Europe.

Iron doors and window shutters were installed all around the building and its second floor was reached via a set of European style outdoor stone stairs on the structure's west side. A narrow balcony with ornate wrought iron railing ran across the front of the second story, fronting on St. Charles Street.

In the wall at the top of the second story was a flat stone with the date, "1881," chiseled into it.

Tragically, Lorenzo Oneto died January 19, 1896, at age 54, only a relatively few years after the Colombo Hotel was completed.

However, his widow with their five daughters, Amelia, Janie, Teresa, Kate and Edith and two sons, Baptiste (Bob) and Frank, continued to operate the hotel for many years.

The Colombo became noted for its fine food and warm hospitality. Those who came once always returned, and to many who stayed there regularly, it was like coming home.

During its heyday the Colombo served meals that included soup, salad, macaroni or raviolis, chicken or other meat, along with wine, all for 25 cents.

Madalena Oneto passed away at age 75, on October 20,



Lorenzo and Madelena Oneto

1923, but the family continued to operate the hotel well into the 1930's.

It was saddening news to those outside as well as within the county when the Oneto family announced it was closing the hotel.

After remaining closed for a period, interior modifications were made, the old outside stone stairway was removed, an inside staircase was built to the hotel's second floor and the old dining room was turned into a restaurant.

Several restaurant owners operated in the hotel over the years, the last being Blewett's Cafe, run by Mary and Howard Blewett, until they moved their operation to North Main Street where they operated another cafe until they retired.

The old hotel remained in the ownership of the Oneto family until the mid-1950's when the property was acquired by the State of California to make way for the realignment of Highway 49 through San Andreas.

In 1955 a wrecking ball finally brought an end to the historic stone structure that for nearly three-quarters of a century had played an important role in the everyday lives of the people of San Andreas.



THE ONETO SISTERS . . . [Front Row, L to R] Teresa Oneto, Kate Oneto. Back Row, Janie Oneto, Amelia Oneto. Edith Oneto not in picture.

A PIONEER DAUGHTER REMEMBERS GIRLHOOD IN THE MOTHER LODE

By Ruth Lemue

A descendant of pioneer Calaveras County families, Ruth Lemue, of Angels Camp, celebrated her 93rd birthday on June 6, 1987.

Urged by family and friends, she has compiled her memories of girlhood in the Mother Lode during the years when the 20th Century still was young.

Modestly, she explains in her opening paragraphs that "this is the story of an average person from an average family who has lived in a gold mining town most of her 90 years."

Truly, it is far more than that.

It is a collection of heartwarming reminiscences of life in Calaveras County and the Mother Lode during the period that is too quickly being forgotten.

This is Ruth Lemue's story:

"I believe I should first tell you something of my ancestors.

On my Mother's side, Wade Hampton Johnston married Martha Cottle, of a California pioneer family of Fourth Crossing.

On my Father's side, Moses Hiram Harper, from Tennessee, married Delpha Jeffries, of Terre Haute, Indiana. All were pioneers who came to California in the early 1850's.

Wade Johnston, from Little Rock Creek, Jefferson Co., Missouri, arrived with the Richardson Party in Hangtown (Placerville) in 1854. The Harpers, by way of Salt Lake City, came to Ione, Amador County, in 1852.

During the early years Wade supported his family by hydraulic mining in the vicinity of Yaqui Camp, near San Andreas. One of the monitors he used has been donated to the Angels Camp Museum.

He later became mining recorder for lower Calaveras County, was instrumental in founding Willow Creek School and served as a trustee for nearly 40 years.

When I was a child I was fascinated by his blacksmith shop with its bellows and forge in which he sharpened his tools.

Wade and Martha Johnston had three children, Charles, Effie Enfield and Martha Augusta Johnston, born in their home at Paradise Gulch.

Martha Augusta Johnston, who married George Harper, was my mother.

My grandfather Moses Hiram Harper and his wife, Delpha, after arriving in Ione in 1852, moved to Linden



Willow Creek School, 1901 . . . Back Row, L to R: Azalia Genochio, Kati Eder, Rose Ratto, [both Kati and Rose died of typhoid fever], John Eder, Tilly Genochio, Louis and Dolfie Genochio. Front Row, L to R: Seven-year-old Ruth Harper, Louise Eder, Irene Eder, Jimmy Harper, Stella Genochio and their teacher, Mattie Hanscomb.

then to Mendocino County. They reared a large family, but only four children, William, James, Ellen and George survived childhood diseases.

Delpha Harper also died while the family was in Mendocino, and after Ellen married and moved to Oregon, Hiram and his sons moved to Calaveras County where he homesteaded land along Murphys Grade Road.

My father, George Harper, after obtaining a good job (above ground) at the Utica Mine, married Martha Johnston. His father gave them land across the road from his house, but until their home was built, they lived with Grandfather Harper.

I was born in Grandfather's house and he, a deeply religious man, persuaded my parents to name me Ruth, after the Ruth in the Bible.

Our own home, when completed, was a pretty little four-room white house with green blinds and lattice work beneath its high porch, flowers in the yard and a vegetable garden beside it.

My brother, James Johnston Harper and my sister, Beatrice Elaine, were born there.

We were quite happy there, but my father was working 12-hour shifts and the distance he had to travel to and from work was too great.

Our new home was on the Billings property, on a hill, overlooking the Stickle and Utica Mines which were located in what is now Utica Park.

I could look down on the huge piles of timber awaiting

Please see **Pioneer Daughter**, pg. 46

Pioneer Daughter, cont. from pg. 45

to be used underground and I could watch the miners, clad in their wet oilskins, as they stepped off the skip at the collar of the shaft.

Each morning the mine whistle blew at 5:30 a.m. and again at 6 a.m., calling the men to work.

I remember my father, provoked at the noise, once called out, "Blow, you ring-tailed screamers."

The year was 1899, I was five years old and we rented a house from Mr. Peachy, a former teacher, on property now owned by St. Patrick's Catholic Church.

There, another sister, Thelma Doris was born.

My sixth birthday arrived but my parents did not enroll me in school.

Childrens' diseases, including diphtheria and scarlet fever, were raging in Angels Camp. Children were dying and many homes were quarantined. My parents felt that school at this time presented too great a chance of exposure to the deadly germs.

Often, the white plumed hearse, carrying small coffins, passed our house on the way to the cemetery in Altaville.

Black plumes were used on the hearse for older people, black and white for those of middle age, and white for children.

I still remember the funeral processions with bands playing dirges and solemn marchers following the hearse.

Those processions were for miners and members of lodges.

In 1900 the Alaska gold rush was in full swing and in 1901, my father with his brother, Jim and several other mill people from Angels Camp, sailed for the Alaskan gold fields.

Before Father left he moved Mother and us children into a home which Uncle Jim had built near Grandpa Johnston's, on Willow Creek.

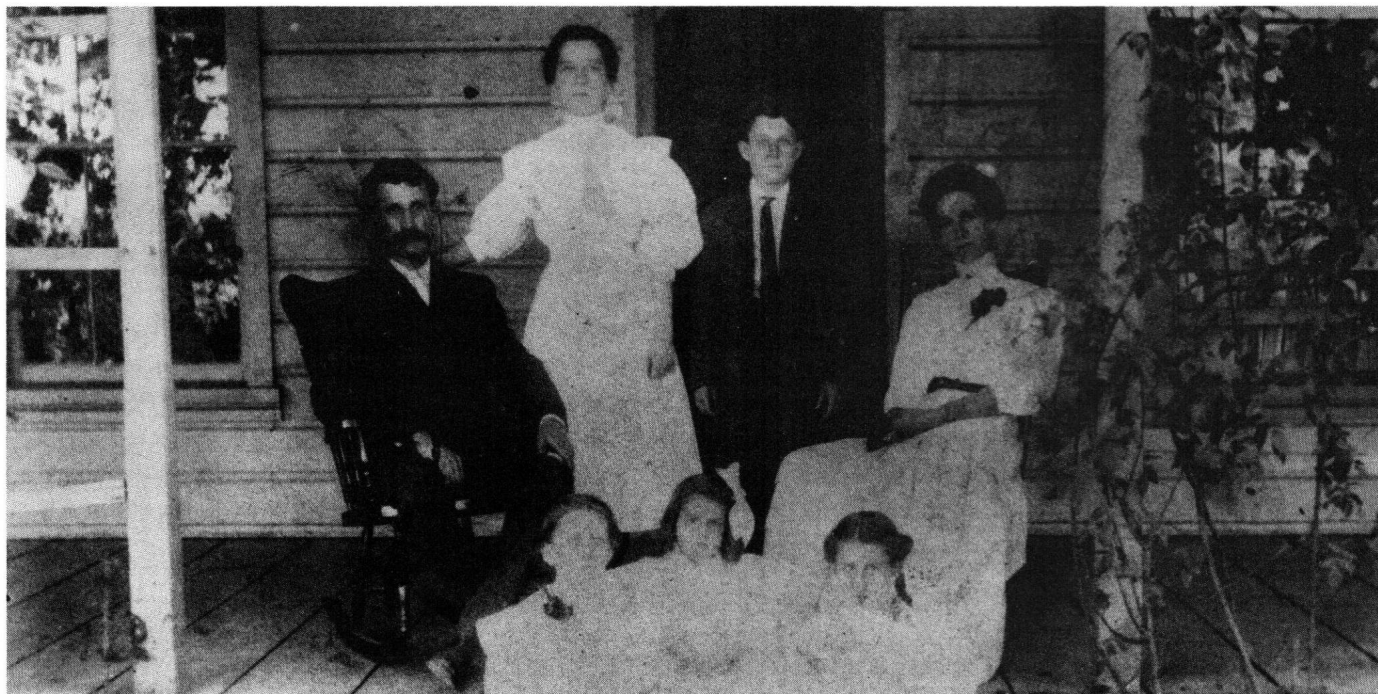
There, I began classes in the Willow Creek School. I liked our teacher, Miss Rosa Agostini, and enjoyed learning to read from the big chart.

Grandfather's place had a big room where people often gathered and danced to the fast tunes of his violin. I was allowed to stay up and watch the dancing — the quadrille, Virginia reel, rye waltz and a fast two-step. I would proudly hold a lady's cape or shawl while she danced, then join the dancers to partake of Aunt Effie's potato salad and apple pie.

After four months Father and most of the Angels Camp men returned from Alaska, but we continued to live in Uncle Jim's house for a year.

Then, father became superintendent of the Sultana Mill and we moved into a house in Altaville on the Grade Road, near what is now Gardner Lane.

Sometimes, my father allowed me to visit the mill with



Harper family at home on Democrat Hill. L to R: George and Martha Harper, son James in doorway, Ruth Harper seated, with young sisters Beatrice, Naomi and Thelma seated in the foreground.

him. It was an exciting experience, watching the big stamps crushing the ore and watching the concentrators on the lower floor as the quicksilver caught the gold which washed along with the pulverized rock.

I was enrolled in the Altaville School.

The red brick building at the rear of the school grounds was called the "Little Room," and grades 1 through 4 were taught there. A frame building, closer to the road, was called the "Big Room" and classes for grades 5 through 8 were held there.

Miss Lizzie Hannon taught the first four grades and "Len" Redding, the principal, the upper grades. Mr. Redding also was an excellent teacher and a strict disciplinarian.

Sometimes we had trouble solving problems in the old, brown Milne arithmetic book and Mr. Redding would threaten to send us back to the "Little Room."

We must have improved, because he never carried out his threat.

Those were exciting years in Angels Camp.

The Sierra Railroad arrived in 1902 to be greeted by bands, fireworks and a balloon ascension and to serve the area until 1935.

Another big event in those days was the circus with its caged animals, elephants, acrobats and clowns.

From our home on the Grade Road we watched the large herds of cattle being driven to and from summer pasture in the mountains.

We watched the logging teams of 12 or more horses and mules as they hauled timber to the mines.

When a jerkline teamster was observed throwing rocks at the lead animals (as all jerkline teamsters did) Aunt Effie, always an animal lover, rushed out and shouted, "stop that, you brute!"

Despite a disastrous fire that destroyed a number of homes, times were improving in Angels Camp.

I enrolled in Sunday School, which I greatly enjoyed; my father became superintendent of the big Lightner Mine mill and we bought a seven-room home on Democrat Hill.

In those days underground miners were earning \$2.50 per day and mill men \$3.50, but as superintendent, Father was making \$5 per day, so you see, we were doing very well.

During "clean-up" time at the mill my father would not come home, so Mother would meet him at the top of the hill with a hot meal in a three-compartment lunch bucket. One section contained hot tea or coffee; the next, meat and potatoes or macaroni and the third, a dessert of pie or pudding.

Mamma did a lot of sewing in order to keep us attractively dressed. When schoolmates asked, "Is your mother a dressmaker?" I replied, "Oh no, she just makes our clothes."

Ours was a happy childhood. By now there were five of us children, the youngest, Naomi Nadine, was born in our new house.

We took long walks, picked flowers in the spring, gathered pine nuts in the fall and in old clothes swam in a big ditch and played "Run Sheep Run."

We went to birthday parties, enjoyed the Independence Day parades, attended shows staged by traveling actors. I thrilled when Eliza, pursued by bloodhounds crossed the ice, and cried when little Eva died.

I entered Bret Harte High School and now, we had a movie theater in town. We students talked about our favorite stars, the Gish sisters, Talmadge sisters, Gloria Swanson, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.

The years flew by — I was loving every minute as a student at Bret Harte High.

We were fortunate to have an exceptionally fine principal, L.D. McKinley, and a staff of excellent teachers. High school then included two years of algebra, one of geometry, one of physics and four years of Latin.

We held debates every two weeks before the whole assembly. I will never forget my first debate as a Freshman. My partner was Virgil Airola, later to become the distinguished Judge Airola. Happily, we won the debate.

I took part in school plays, took violin lessons and later played accompaniment with our church organist, Elsie Harry.

In my senior year I was elected by the student body as editor of our school annual.

I graduated from Bret Harte in 1912, and since I hoped to become a teacher, Mr. McKinney recommended that I be accepted by the State Normal School in San Jose.

However, due to the expense of college, I decided to do what others were doing — take the teachers examination



**Ruth Harper, age six,
waiting to start school.**

Please see **Pioneer Daughter**, pg. 48



John Lemue was a soldier when he married Ruth Harper at Camp Kearney, on February 17, 1918.

Pioneer Daughter, cont. from pg. 47
given by the County Board of Education.

Summer, highlighted by picnics, fun and a few trips to the mountains quickly slipped by, and I busied myself studying for the teachers' test to be held in San Andreas in December. Calaveras had the reputation of giving the toughest test in the Mother Lode.

My friend, Olive Bennett, another girl and I took the examination, which was quite difficult. We were tested in 24 subjects, including word analysis, bookkeeping, law, methods of teaching, and music.

In order to pass the test we had to achieve an average of 85%. All of us failed but I did pass in enough subjects that I was encouraged to try again. So, in June, 1913, after months of intensive study, I took the examination, passed with the required 85 percent and received my teacher's credentials.

With the optimism of a 19-year-old, I went to the Angels Elementary School Trustees, asked for a place on their teaching staff and the request was granted.

I was given the Third Grade in the school at which Mr. Charles Schwoerer was principal. Those teaching with me in the Angels School at that time were Reba Carlow, Mary Mulgrew, Esther Carley, Teresa Rivara, Sadie Bund, Della Smith, Kate Cutler, and Charles Schwoerer.

In 1915 my parents sold their home on Democrat Hill and moved to Martell, in Amador County, where my father had taken a good paying eight hour job as mill superintendent of the Central Eureka Mine at Sutter Creek.

I remained at my teaching job in Angels Camp, living with my friend, Esther Carley Nichley and her husband, Sam.

By 1916 I had become a member of the Rebekah Lodge and with a group of friends in the Rebekah and Odd Fellow Lodges, made a trip to the World Fair in San Diego.

Among our group of delegates was a young man, John Lemue, who had been my escort to shows and parties in Angels.

Meanwhile, my parents were urging me to move to Amador County and had even lined up a teaching job for me at the Oneida School at Jackson Gate.

Although I moved to Martell and was teaching school at Jackson Gate, John Lemue and I kept up a steady correspondence. He frequently came to Martell for short visits.

His parents had purchased the Angels Hotel and while John and his father were remodeling it, John and I became engaged to be married.

With World War I now reaching its climax, John was drafted, but he and I were married at Camp Kearney, in San Diego, on February 17, 1918.

The war ended November 11, 1918, but it was not until July, 1919 that John returned from Europe and was discharged from the Army so that we could take up our life together.

We went on to live a wonderful and fulfilling life surrounded by friends and devoted children and family.

Today, at 93, I look back and can only express thanks for the happiness I have had and for a warm and loving childhood.

Robie Ranch, cont. from pg. 42

Her death came as a severe blow to the family.

But the Robie Ranch and its herds continued to prosper. That same year they sheared 3,502 sheep.

In May, 1889 Walter John moved 4,200 head of sheep to the mountains and lost 253 on the way. In September they lost 306 on the way home.

In 1889 the Robie Ranch sold cattle at \$27 per head.

By now, the Robies had acquired what they called "The Lower Ranch", located in Stanislaus County, about five miles south of Milton, on which they raised wheat and barley for their hogs. By the 1890's they were selling more than 75 hogs annually.

The ranch still is owned by the Robies.

Walter John Robie married Elizabeth Morgan Schrobrel, of Milton, in 1888. His father gave them a buggy for a wedding gift.

They had seven children:

Rothwell Walter "Bud," 1890-1974. Lived on and ran Robie Ranch.

Viola Adeline, 1892-1967. Nurse, never married.

Georgia Louise, 1894- . Teacher, married, lives in Stockton.

Faith Adaphine, 1896- . Business woman, married, lives in Sacramento.

Marguerite Naomie, 1898- . Telephone Co. Married, one child. Lives in Bay Area.

Dorothy Mary, 1900-1971. Business woman, married, two children. Lived in San Andreas.

Elizabeth Schroebel, 1911- . Teacher, married, two children. Lives in Sacramento.

Six of the children went to Riverside School, a mile south of Jenny Lind, but Dorothy and Elizabeth also went to the Milton School. All of the girls went to Nazarine University, in North Pasadena.

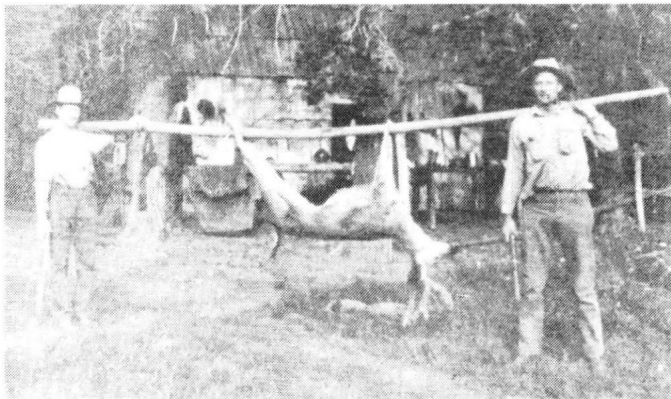
Rothwell Walter (Bud) was the favorite of his grandfather who in his later years, used a cart to travel around the ranch.

Bud traveled with him whenever he could, and sometimes when told by his mother he could not go, would sneak out and hide under the seat of the cart. His grandfather would climb into the cart, drive away, and when they were out of sight of the house he would say "O.K., you can come out now."

When they arrived home Bud's mother would have a switch waiting for him, but his grandfather would not let her touch him.

In 1898 Bud's father, Walter John, sent 40 head of horses, eight mules and 120 head of cattle to the mountains. In May they also started for Bear Valley with 4,072 head of sheep and put 2,072 head of sheep on stubble near Farmington.

When Bud was 12 years old he went to the mountains



Rothwell Walter "Bud" Robie [right] and hunting partner with a buck at Blood's cabin, in Bear Valley.

for the first time to stay all summer with the cattle and sheep. In 1905, when he was 15, he herded cattle and broke horses at the Dardanelles and in the Lake Alpine area. He stayed in cow camps and herded cattle each summer around Lake Alpine and Gabbot Meadow and in the fall attended Santa Rosa Business College.

It took about three weeks to move the cattle to and from the mountains, and in the fall of 1898 they got caught in an early snowstorm and it took from September 28 to October 16 to get the cattle home.

When Walter John and Bud went to the mountains in 1906, Elizabeth Robie had carpenters begin work on the large two-story home in which the Robie family still lives today.

In addition to range cattle and sheep, the Robies from 1907 until 1919, had a dairy herd and shipped cream out of Milton to Stockton by train. They also cut and baled their own hay, just as they still do today.

In 1917 when the U.S. entered World War I, Bud went into the Army and served in France in the 91st Pine Tree Division.

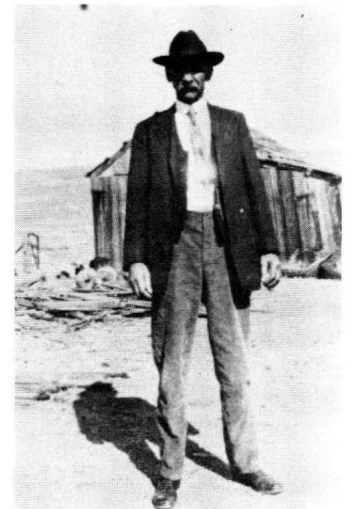
In 1927 Robie & Son moved 854 head of sheep to the Islands west of Stockton via a route which took them through town. Needless to say, the sheep became decidedly unpopular when they occasionally surged onto front lawns and began browsing on flowers.

In 1936 Milton Gold Dredging came through South Gulch and records show 2,287 ounces of gold and 145 ounces of silver were taken out. The Robie family purchased the River Ranch from Borden in 1937.

Walter John Robie passed away in 1936 and Elizabeth Morgan Robie died in 1938. Both were very active in the Nazarine Church in Milton.

Rothwell Walter married Edna Hendrickx, of Stockton, in 1937. They had one son, Walter John, born in 1938. Rothwell died in 1974.

The Robie Ranch, operated by John and his wife, Kathryn, still is a vigorous working cattle and sheep operation. Its "diamond" brand, No. 1803, is one of the oldest still in use in the state, and actually, was used for many years before it was registered.



Walter John Robie

LETTER FROM A SHEEP HERDER

[The following is a letter written by a sheep herder from a camp near Bear Valley, to Walter John Robie, in the summer of 1904.]

Affrican Lion Camp
July 21st

Friend John—

Your letter recd & glad to hear from you and from humans once more. Sorry to hear of Georgias sickness. Sheep are doing well & think we have feed to last until 15th of August & get down home 25th or 27th.

Rothwell is getting fat & hearty. Jack says he will try & send you some fish as soon as he can.

Well John, I had quite an exciting time yesterday afternoon. Between sundown and dark I was trying to work the sheep to camp & something would keep chasing them back to me, finally I went to the lead to see what it was.

Colonel & Tip started up the mountain barking & I after them as fast as I could run chasing them for ½ mile then their voices changed & I knew they had something up a tree, I hurried on being near out of breath, got there & found they had a mouster lion up a tree, as big as a affrican lion.

I opened fire on him with old Sue, (name I have given the 45 S & W) first shot he looked like he was going to spring on me, but instead spring to another Fur tree 20 feet away, in the mean time I had given him another one of old Sue's pills intentionally some where near the heart then he dropped 100 feet striking the ground like a thousand of brick more or less, came within ¼ of an inch of falling on Colonel, his tail did strike him but didnt hurt him much.

Then I run up & give the war whoop and clapped my hands and Colonel and Tip chewed him to a Queens taste. Rothwell was in camp and all he heard was old Sue barking. Shot him 3 times, every shot taking effect, he measures 9 feet tip to tip.

Tell Mrs. Robie I must call it all off with the chicken business if you will sell me Colonel & Tip I shall go into the Lion & Bear business, more excitement about it & and that is what I am living for.

Rich.

Note: "Old Sue," the revolver — actually a .44 Smith & Wesson Russian — which was used by the sheep herder, still is in the possession of the Robie family.

GUNFIGHT AT WALLACE

Eighty-seven years ago, on March 10, 1900, a gunfight that cost the lives to two men — one of them a Calaveras County lawman — erupted at a way-station near Wallace.

The killer of the lawman also died of a gunshot wound, but who actually fired the shot that killed him is only one of the questions that remains unanswered.

From the report of the Calaveras County District Attorney Arthur I. McSorley: from the coroner's inquest and the pages of the Calaveras Prospect, this is the story of the shooting.

A blustery, late winter storm had turned the March afternoon miserable as James Goodman, enroute from Camanche to Wallace, noticed a buggy parked beside the way-station he was building at the junction of the Wallace and Clements Roads.

As he drew nearer, he saw two men were camped on the partially enclosed porch of his incompleated building.

Drawing up beside them, Goodman halted his wagon, identified himself as owner of the building and asked what they were doing there. At the same time he recognized the pair as the same men he had seen earlier that day in Camanche. As he talked to them, both men drank from a wine jug which they offered him, but which he declined.

After a somewhat lengthy conversation during which the two identified themselves as Fred Brown and Louis Dibble, traveling painters looking for work in Amador and Calaveras Counties, Goodman with some misgivings, permitted them to camp on the porch overnight, then drove toward Wallace.

That was at mid-afternoon.

Shortly before 6 p.m., with darkness falling, William Robinson, enroute from Camanche to Wallace, arrived at the wayside station to be suddenly confronted by Brown who covered him with a revolver and demanded his valuables.

Robinson replied that he had no money or other valuables, and an argument ensued when the gunman ordered him out of his buggy, stating he would take that.

Brown then climbed into the rig where he found a bottle of whisky. Pouring part of the bottle's contents into a tin cup, he began drinking it, while offering Dibble and Robinson drinks from the bottle.

As Robinson continued to argue for return of his buggy, another rig was heard approaching from the direction of Camanche, and moments later, Constable S. D. Holman, of Jenny Lind Township, arrived. Holman

owned a saloon in Camanche and was on his way home.

According to Robinson's later testimony to District Attorney Arthur McSorley, as Holman's buggy reached the station, Dibble ran into the road and told Holman to stop.

Exactly what conversation took place between the two men is not known, but Robinson said it ended when Holman jumped from his wagon, shouted "you can't insult me," and struck Dibble a heavy blow in the face.

Holman then climbed back into his wagon, told Robinson to follow him and both men began driving toward Wallace.

As they traveled, said Robinson, Holman described Brown and Dibble as "hard characters," and proposed that upon arriving in Wallace they get help and go back and arrest them.

In Wallace, Holman obtained the help of Prentice Hamrick and Robert McMurray, who armed themselves and with Robinson, accompanied Holman back to the way station, about a mile northwest of town.

As the four men arrived they observed Brown and Dibble on the porch where a candle was burning. Dibble was standing on the open part of the porch and Brown was within the partially enclosed section, seated on a sack of grain.

But, before the posse could even climb from their wagons, the candle was suddenly extinguished. Consequently, the ensuing action took place in darkness.

Instead of walking straight to the porch, Holman first went to Brown's and Dibble's buggy where he removed a shotgun which he placed in his own rig.

Holman himself, was armed with a double barreled 10-gauge shotgun and a Colt revolver.

As Holman stepped onto the porch he placed his hand, presumably on Dibble, and informed him he was under arrest.

At that instant a shot exploded from the porch and Holman, reeling backward, exclaimed that he was hit.

Then, recovering momentarily, Holman fired both barrels of his shotgun into the darkness of the porch, then began firing his revolver. His three companions joined in a general fusillade of the porch and reportedly, shots were fired at them in return, but none of the volunteer possemen were hit.

As the firing ended the four posse members withdrew, and then it was realized that Holman was critically wounded. A bullet believed fired by Brown had struck him in the lower chest and ranged upward.

Without even taking the two suspects into custody or investigating the results of their own shooting, Robinson, Hamrick, and McMurray, with the help of neighboring



Judge Arthur Ignacious McSorley [standing] and G. Fred Wesson, in front of Metropolitan Hotel in San Andreas. As District Attorney prior to becoming Judge, McSorley helped sheriff Thorn probe Wallace murder of Constable S. D. Holman. Wesson, who once was Calaveras County recorder, was a member of the Wesson Family of Smith and Wesson Arms Manufacturing Company fame.

residents attracted by the lights and shooting, loaded Holman into a buggy and left the shooting scene.

Holman, who was 35, died two hours later at home.

Notified of the shooting, Sheriff Ben Thorn, his deputy, Will Dower and District Attorney McSorley arrived at daylight.

Louis Dibble and the buggy were gone, but in the corner of the enclosed porch they found the body of Fred Brown. He had been shot in the knee and in the head. His revolver lay beside him.

Buggy tracks indicated that Dibble had fled in the direction of Camanche, and had gone into Amador County. He was arrested later that day in Ione and returned to Calaveras County where he was booked in the county jail.

A coroner's inquest found that Constable Holman had died from a bullet fired by Brown, but failed to name Brown's killer.

Complicating matters was the fact that several witnesses said a single shot was heard on the porch of the way station some 15 or 20 minutes after the posse had left with the wounded constable.

After several delays in court, Dibble pleaded guilty to stealing a hog from Mrs. Hill, in Camanche (part of a hog carcass had been found in his buggy) and the Calaveras Prospect of April 6 noted that Judge Kean had sentenced him to 30 days in jail.

The paper noted that the charge against Dibble of being an accomplice in the slaying of Constable S. D. Holman was not pressed, "and it appears doubtful he ever will be tried on that complaint."

The paper's observation ultimately proved to be correct.

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## Calaveras County Historical Society

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas — except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

The Society's office is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 to 5:00. The telephone number is (209) 754-1058. Visitors are welcome.

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A FEW SCHOOL ALBUMS STILL ARE AVAILABLE

A few copies of the Historical Society's Album of the Pioneer Schools of Calaveras County still are available for purchase.

This limited edition, hard cover book which contains 160 pages and 120 photographs, provides a history of some 60 schools that existed in Calaveras County between the 1850's and 1912.

They may be obtained at the Historical Society Office, 30 N. Main St., San Andreas, or by writing to the Calaveras County Historical Society, P.O. Box 721, San Andreas, CA 95249.

Cost is \$19.00 plus six percent sales tax and \$1.00 handling charge.

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DIRECTORS ASK MEMBERS TO ACCEPT SINGLE COPY OF LAS CALAVERAS

Over the years it became tradition to mail two copies of **Las Calaveras**, the quarterly bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society, to each of its subscribers.

However, due to today's printing costs the Historical Society's board of directors at their last meeting, have proposed that the **Las Calaveras** mailings be reduced to a single copy per person or family.

If this is not satisfactory and you require a second copy, please fill out the enclosed form and mail it to the historical society office, P.O. Box 721, San Andreas, Ca. 95249, and you will continue to receive your second copy of the **Las Calaveras**.

IN MEMORIAM

John W. Bingham, Stockton, April 5, 1987
Jack Darby, Murphys, April 27, 1987
J. Robert Loke, San Andreas, May 3, 1987
Burton Alexander, Mountain Ranch, May 4, 1987
Ernest Stegman, Angels Camp, June 29, 1987