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MAMIE MEINECKE

A Nineteenth Century Calaveras County Teacher

by Mary Alice Sanguinetti



Avery School - where Mamie Meinecke taught in 1893 and 1894. Mamie is wearing a dark dress and standing on the school porch; the names of the children are unknown. These children rode their burros to school and then sent them home, but on this day the burros stayed around long enough to be photographed. Presumably the children walked home at the end of the day.

— *Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.*

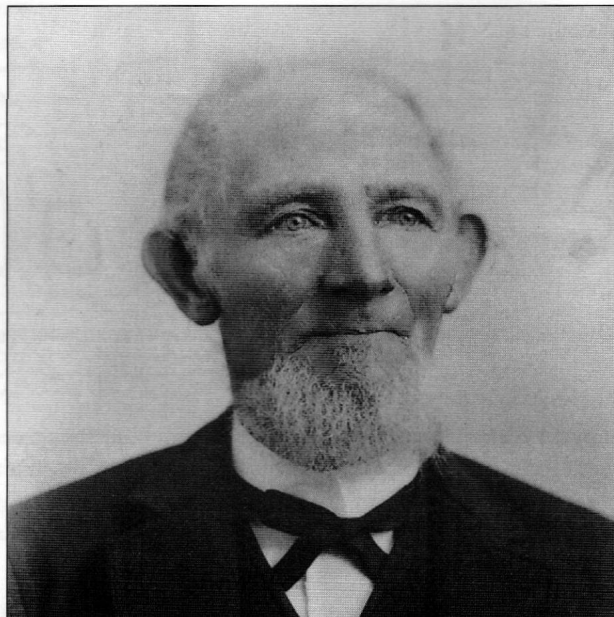
MAMIE MEINECKE

by *Mary Alice Sanguinetti*

The piece of lined paper had yellowed with age. It was in a box of old family photographs which also contained a letter written in 1897. On one side of the paper signs of the zodiac surround a birth date and time, April 1, 1873, at 11:40 PM. On the other side are the words "blue eyes. flaxen hair. sanguine complexion tall... Marriage. No reason for delay. nothing to impede. will be likely to marry in 1898... Occupation. an instructor of others in some line. you can become a fine scholar, and have tact." There is no way of knowing who wrote the horoscope. Its brown ink, paper and handwriting do not match the handwriting on the letter postmarked in San Francisco and addressed to "Miss Marie Meinecke, Esmeralda, Cal. Co., Cal."

Marie Meinecke was my grandmother and she was the tall, flaxen-haired teacher at Esmeralda in 1897. The letter was from her friend Enid, who wrote "Dear friend Mamie," and after referring to various members of Mamie's family continued, "When I spoke of Henry S. to you I only intended to recall our old joke... I must have stumbled right into a secret, but I didn't know I was on that ground. I had not heard anything at all except the wee, wee bit you wrote about some one's coming for you Friday afternoons... You have an easy time in your school, haven't you? I never got to visit you when you were presiding. And there's not much chance now. I'm here and your plans for a prolonged siege of teaching are shattered." The horoscope was wrong about when Mamie would marry but she was already well acquainted with Henry Sanguinetti; they married in 1900. Both were born and grew up in Vallecito, the children of immigrants who came to California in the 1850s and made their homes in the hills of the Mother Lode.

Marie Dorothea Meinecke, known as Mamie, was the fourth daughter and youngest child of J. Marie and W. G. Edward Meinecke; she was born in Vallecito twenty minutes before midnight April 1, All Fools Day, 1873. By the time Mamie was born Vallecito's days as a populous mining town were over and quartz mining had replaced placer mining. Vallecito was a quiet community of farmers, gold miners, store-keepers, a butcher, a brewer and a couple of hotel keepers. Although the community was small it was a



Weirich Gustave Edward Meinecke - Vallecito pioneer.

— *Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.*

cosmopolitan home for immigrants from Italy, Chile, Germany, Ireland, England and the eastern and southern states.

An 1876 map of Vallecito shows approximately forty irregularly-shaped lots. The Meinecke home was located south of the town's center in Block Two with Church Street on the west side and the Grabe family on the south. At the end of the block was the hotel owned by the German, Charles Kohler. Across the alley on the east lived the Rufes, Mitchells and Greenwalls. William Crozier, a gold miner from Ireland, lived across what is now called Rufe Lane on the north. The Rufes, like the Meineckes, were from Germany. George Rufe, a butcher, was from Württemberg, and his wife, Elizabeth, was from Bavaria; all of their children were born in California. Laura Rufe, the oldest, was the same age as Elise, the oldest Meinecke daughter, and like Elise she had three younger brothers and three younger sisters, including Carrie, who was born in October, six months after Mamie. Bertha and Carrie Rufe in particular were friends with Mamie and her sister Amelia. Carrie and Mamie went through school together and Carrie later taught for many years in the Vallecito School. Another neighbor, Robert Greenwall was a blacksmith from England and A.M. Mitchell was a gold miner from Kentucky. All were near the Vallecito School and the General Merchandise store owned by the Italian, John Arata.



Johanna Marie Bartels Meinecke - who immigrated to Vallecito from Germany with her husband Weirich Gustave Edward Meinecke in 1858.

— Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.

Mamie's father, Edward Meinecke had never been a miner. Edward and his older brother Frederick had immigrated from Hanover to the United States. Their widowed mother, Margaret Almeras Meinecke, sent her two youngest sons to America to prevent their conscription into the army. After reaching the United States Edward first worked as a clerk at a store in New York while his older brother traveled to Wisconsin, joined a party taking cattle to California and spent a brief time mining. Frederick then returned to the east coast via Nicaragua and, joined by Edward, again journeyed to Wisconsin. The two brothers left Wisconsin with 150 milk cows in 1852, spent the winter in Salt Lake City, and reached Calaveras County in 1853. Frederick engaged in dairying in Murphys for a few years while, in 1855, Edward bought a ranch in Vallecito. Edward paid Pedro Secondo, Santiago Abella and Santiago Samona \$500, for approximately 160 acres located along Coyote Creek. The purchase price included two ploughs, two set of harnesses and a wagon. In 1858 the two Meinecke brothers returned to Germany, and there, in the town of Altenbruch, Edward married Johanna Marie Bartels on October 8, 1858. Frederick also married and shortly thereafter the two brothers and their brides, accompanied by a nephew, fifteen-year-old Henry Wohlins, and a niece, seventeen-year-old Meta Van Bronson, returned to California.

One-hundred years later Mamie's sister Amelia Meinecke Shepherd recalled the story of her parents' trip across the Atlantic. Speaking only a few years after the end of World War II Amelia expressed admiration for her grandmother, Margaret Almeras Meinecke who didn't want her sons, Edward and Frederick, to be conscripted into the army.

They went on a steamer and you know if they had left Germany the week before, that steamer burned on the ocean and everybody was lost, and his old mother didn't want her two sons to be married on the same day so Uncle Fritz was married the first Sunday and the following Sunday Papa was married and then they all went together on the same ship and that ship, they had a terrible storm at sea, and, well they lost a lot of baggage and stuff, but when they finally landed – and they didn't have anything but cold potatoes to eat for a day – when they landed in New York – before they landed – they took up a collection among the passengers and they bought the captain a beautiful loving cup, silver I guess it was. Anyhow at that time that was quite a present you know.

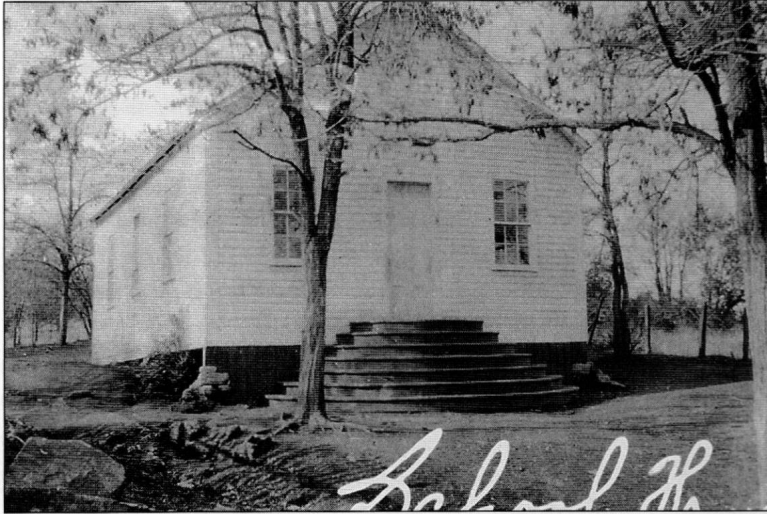
They both came together you see, the two sons. The old mother, she was quite an old lady. That just shows what a wonderful person she was.

She didn't want her sons to be under that rule there. You know how they were. Oh, she hated it. They were fighting then all the time in Germany, you know, and she hated that. In order to save her boys from doing that she sent them to America.

Papa's mother was a widow and I think my father was only three years old when his father died. She raised her children and she educated them all well.

After crossing the Atlantic to New York by steamer the party traveled to Panama. By 1858 the trip from the east coast across the Isthmus of Panama was considerably easier than it had been at the height of the gold rush. In 1855 the Pacific Mail Steamship Company had completed construction of a railroad across the Isthmus which reduced the time between New York and San Francisco to nineteen days. After crossing Panama the Meinecke party boarded the John L. Stevens. This wooden side wheel steamer was owned by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and traveled regularly between San Francisco and Panama from 1853 until 1861. The John L. Stevens was one of three Pacific Mail Steamship Company steamers that were "superior in size, accommodations, and speed to anything else on the Pacific coast."¹ It was large enough to carry 350 cabin passengers and more than 550 steerage passengers and was "provided with an extensive suite of baths for passengers with instant hot and cold water."

Edward and Marie Meinecke, Meta von Bronson and Heinrich Wohlins reached Vallecito on Christmas



Vallecito School - built in the 1850s, one of the earliest school houses in Calaveras County. The Meinecke children attended this school.

— Photo courtesy of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

Eve, 1858. In 1954, Mamie's sister-in-law, Dora Twisselman Meinecke recalled stories of the family's arrival in Vallecito. "On October 8, 1858, these two married and arrived in Vallecito Christmas Eve... All the way up they were so proud. I think that Uncle Fredrick owned those cattle too, because he and Grandfather Meinecke were partners there. All the way up they would find cattle..."

Two events marked Edward and Marie Meinecke's first year together in Vallecito. The summer after their Christmas Eve arrival, on August 12, 1859, the town was almost completely destroyed by a fire which started at a store in the center of town. The lower end of the town where the Meineckes lived was saved by the force pump in the well of Mr. Baker. A few months later, on November 30, 1859, their first child, Elise Fredericka, was born.

Edward raised cattle on his land until the floods of 1861-1862. That year in Sonora seventy-two inches of rain fell between November 11, 1861 and January 14, 1862.² Dora Twisselman Meinecke recalled,

"It was such a wet winter that they could not go with horses out to gather up the cattle. They could not get any feed for them because the grass was all rained into the ground and the cattle all bogged down and they lost an immense lot of money. All the cattle died. When they went out there they'd find one bogged down here, one died there. All the cattle died for eight or ten miles where they'd always been running... he never did get started in the cattle business again. They always had hay. They'd sell hay every year on that homestead or that piece of land that he owned."

Despite this setback the Meinecke family continued to grow and prosper in Vallecito. The peach orchard

which Edward Meinecke developed became one of the most valuable in the area. Much of the fruit was dried and the children helped with this work. By the time Mamie was born the Meinecke family was well established. Her oldest sister, Elise, was nearly fourteen, Amelia was seven and Meta was five. Her three older brothers, Frederick, eleven, Gus, nine and Edward, two, could also look after her and introduce her to life in Vallecito. The children grew up in the Vallecito house, about a quarter mile from Edward's ranch.

Mamie's older sister Amelia had been born just a year before Laura Ingalls was born in the big woods of Wisconsin. Laura Ingalls Wilder and Amelia Meinecke Shepherd would share almost the same life

span; both died nearly a century later in 1957. During the years when the Ingalls family was moving by covered wagon between Wisconsin, Indian Territory, Minnesota and Dakota Territory, the Meinecke children were growing up in Vallecito, attending the one-room Vallecito school which had been built in the 1850s and was similar to the ones Mary, Laura, Carrie and Grace Ingalls attended on the prairie.

Itinerant artisans with horse-drawn studios sometimes moved from town to town in the Mother Lode country. Perhaps it was an itinerant photographer who photographed Amelia and her sister Meta in 1870, three years before Mamie was born. The two serious little girls wear similar light-colored dresses, their gathered skirts trimmed with dark braid. Matching braid is seen at the waist and on the tucked bodice of Amelia's dress and on the short sleeves of both dresses.

There were several mines in the Vallecito area including one owned by Italians at Vallecito Flat, near the Meinecke Ranch. According to Amelia her father allowed Italians to mine on his ranch and they took out quite a lot of gold, including one large "chispa" which was on display in the Palace Hotel in San Francisco for many years. On December 25, 1872, a few months before Mamie was born, the *Calaveras Mountaineer*, reported,

The Italian boys on Vallecito Flat are known to be doing well. All summer they have been taking out dirt (which is laid by to slack in the air) in which gold is plainly visible. Our Italian population are generally very reticent as to what they are doing, but notwithstanding this enough is known to justify the assertion we have made above.

In 1879 when Amelia was thirteen and Mamie was six Vallecito celebrated Christmas with a community Christmas tree. In Chapter 31 of *On the Banks of Plum Creek* Laura Ingalls Wilder describes Laura's delight when she sees her first Christmas tree at a similar community event,

Laura decided it must be a tree. She could see its trunk and branches. But she had never before seen such a tree... From the branches hung packages wrapped in coloured paper, red packages and pink packages and yellow packages, all tied with coloured string... Lavish strings of white popcorn were looped over all this.

Vallecito children probably felt the same wonder and excitement. On January 3, 1880 the *Calaveras Weekly Citizen* reported:

A Christmas Tree for the amusement of the little ones of Vallecito was held on Christmas Eve... Santa Claus was represented by Mr. John Greenwall, who kept the audience in a continuous roar of laughter by his witty sayings. After over an hour's time the Tree being cleared of its contents, the hall was prepared for the dancing assemblage in attendance being the largest that has congregated in Vallecito for fifteen years.

In the 1880s, when Amelia, Meta, Edward and Mamie were probably all attending the Vallecito School, autograph books became popular. In *Little Town on the Prairie* Laura Ingalls Wilder writes about the autograph albums which Ma brought back from Iowa after taking Mary to the college for the blind.

"I found that autograph albums are all the fashion nowadays," said Ma. "All the most fashionable girls in Vinton have them."

"What are they, exactly?" Laura asked.

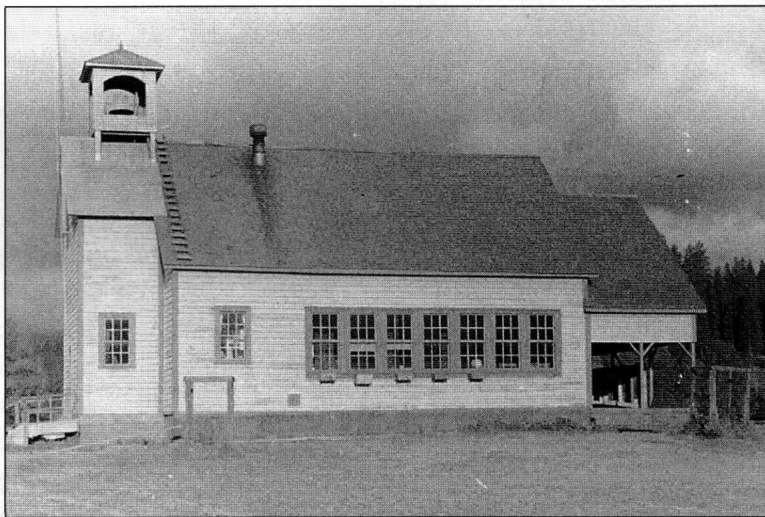
"You ask a friend to write a verse on one of the blank pages and sign her name to it," Ma explained. "If she has an autograph album, you do the same for her, and you keep the albums to remember each other by."

Amelia's album, a little brown, cloth-covered book suggests who some of her friends were as well as possible trips she made during this decade. On the cover is the word "Album" adorned by birds, flowers and leaves. Inside are sentiments written by her sisters, her teacher, Mrs. H. A. Morgan and various schoolmates and neighbors. Most of the names accompanied by the word "schoolmate" are dated from 1881 to 1883 when Amelia was between fifteen and seventeen years old and finishing her education in the Vallecito School and Mamie was just beginning school.

On one page toward the back of the album is a delicate drawing of two horses pulling a wagon in which there are six passengers. The entire picture is three inches across and less than one-and-a half inches high. Surrounding scenery includes a leafy bush and what might be a creek bed. Several of the passengers, from their hats, appear to be women. One, a bit smaller and with a braid down her back, may be a young girl. Another, holding the reins is probably a man. A sign nearby, best read with a magnifying glass, says "to Carson." Underneath the drawing are the words "A case for the S.F.T.P.O.C.T.A.,"³ perhaps indicating that the horses had too heavy a load to pull. Also on the page are the words, in fine copperplate script, "As usual, Arthur S. Harris, Vallecito, July 3-4, 1885." This page could be a remembrance of a particularly pleasant Independence Day outing to Carson Hill when Amelia was nineteen.

Several autographs dated 1885 and 1886 include the location – Stockton – suggesting that Amelia spent some time visiting in Stockton during those years. These include members of the Shepherd family in Stockton who were probably related to Amelia and Mamie's brother-in-law, James Shepherd.

Mamie and Amelia's older sister Elise, and James S. Shepherd, known as Jim, had married in October 1884 when Mamie was eleven and Amelia was eighteen. Elise and Jim were married in Calaveras County and lived in a number of different places, including Vallecito and Copperopolis. Elise and Jim Shepherd had five children, Hazel, Willard, Harold, Carl, and Meta. James Shepherd worked at various



Eureka School - in Railroad Flat, built in 1866, where Mamie taught in 1893.

— Photo courtesy of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

jobs. For a while, around the turn of the century he was a mill superintendent at the Royal mine near Copperopolis. Later he worked in Stockton, then Kern County and Los Angeles. In Kern County he worked in the Kern River Oil Fields and the family lived near the Henry Sanguinetti family.

When the Meinecke children were growing up in Vallecito there was no high school in Calaveras County. The one- and two-teacher schools of the county usually offered nine grades. State funds were available to support "grammar schools" but not for high schools. Eventually rural schools started offering a "grammar school course" which was equivalent to a high school, but which was funded by the state. School terms varied in length, however a school was

required to provide a six month term in order to get its state apportionment. The county's newspapers announced many school openings in August and September and school closings in May and June but a school term could start during any month and often schools were in session in the summer months. The *Calaveras Citizen* noted that "many school teachers forget that the law requires them to notify the Supt. at least one week before school closes." Uniform textbooks were prescribed by the state and California was considered to have

a very progressive education system. An act passed by the state the year Amelia was born required local districts to provide ink, chalk, pens and paper to the schools and to establish a system of school libraries.

Like her brothers and sisters Mamie attended the Vallecito school. Mrs. H.A. Morgan was her teacher in the 1880s when she received several "Certificates of Merit." One certificate, presented March 26, 1884

when she was eleven years old states "Certificate of Merit Presented to Mamie Meinecke for Perfect Lessons and conduct." Another, dated April 23, 1886, says "Diploma of Honor. A Merited Certificate for Excellence in Scholarship Awarded to Mamie Meinecke for diligence and success." In 1889 the Vallecito school closed on June 14. The event was marked as usual by an exhibition of the students knowledge. The community was pleased with the work of Mrs. H.A. Morgan who was retiring.

Two years later Mamie completed her education at the Vallecito school. By this time Calaveras County schools granted a Diploma of Graduation which was equivalent to a high school diploma. Applicants for the Diploma of Graduation were required to pass a written

examination in reading, arithmetic, grammar and composition, geography, spelling, penmanship, history, physiology, bookkeeping, algebra and mental arithmetic. Examples of the examination questions were published in newspapers to help teachers in preparing their students. One of the ten history questions in the *Calaveras Weekly Citizen* on April 4, 1891 was "What parts of this country were first settled by the following: Quakers, Catholics, Huguenots, Mormons, Puritans." Potential spelling words included vermicelli, Yosemite, manzanita, Stanislaus

and surcingle. In mental arithmetic a student might be asked, "If 5 yds. of cloth cost 62 1/2 cents what will 8 yds. cost at the same rate?" while grammar questions included "Correct the following and give reasons: Rye or barley when they are scorched may supply the place of coffee. Does that boy know who he is speaking to?" In 1891 Miss Etta Gallagher was the Vallecito teacher and school closed on June 5. A photograph which may

 **The Pupils of Avery District** 
Carry Out an Interesting Program

Ed. Prospect - Our community was treated to a very interesting entertainment on November 4th, which did credit to both the pupils and their enthusiastic teacher, Miss Mamie Meinecke.

The following is a programme of the evening's entertainment.

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| Opening Address - Belle Avery Song, Greeting Glee - Alta Shepherd Recitation, "My Brother" - Maude Avery Dialogue, "The Secret" - Belle Avery, Nettie Martin Tableau, "Hallowed Be Thy Name" Recitation, "Who Made the Species" - Georgie Avery Recitation, "The Little Tot" - Mary Avery Recitation, "My Little Sister" - Fred Mentz Song, "Blame Yourself if You are Sold" - by the school Recitation, "Tired of Thinking" - Maude Avery Tableau, "Maude Muller" Dialogue, "Gretchen" - Maude and Georgie Avery Song, "In the Fire" - Alta Shepherd Recitation, "Keeping His Word" - Alfred Mentz Recitation, "Be Polite" - Bertie Miller Recitation, "My Best Friend" - Georgie Avery | Recitation, "Mary's Best Friend" - Mary Avery Dialogue, "Seeing a Ghost" - Hattie Avery, Effie Miller and Mabel Miller Recitation, "A Child's Prayer" - Amelia Mentz Dialogue, "We are Four" - Belle Avery, Maude Avery, Amelia Mentz and Georgie Avery Recitation, "The Clown's Baby" - Lester Flanders Recitation, "Guilty or Not Guilty" - Hattie Avery Song, "Down on the Farm" - Effie Miller, Hattie Martell Recitation, "The Tale of a Nose" - Belle Avery Tableau, "The Gypsy Camp" Farce, "Little Angels" Recitation, "Asleep at the Switch" - Miss Elsie Miller Tableau, "A Free Smoke" Song by the school Recitation, "The Polish Boy" - Miss Meinecke |
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Article from the Calaveras Prospect newspaper, November 25, 1893 highlighting the program performed by Mamie's students.
— Material courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.

have been taken that year shows forty-eight boys and girls gathered in front of the Vallecito school with their teacher in the doorway. Mamie stands in the back next to her classmate Carrie Rufe.

The Calaveras County Board of Education met in San Andreas on June 23, 1891 to examine the papers of twenty-four applicants for Graduation Diplomas. Schools represented were Bald Mountain, Camanche, Chaparral, Evergreen, Mosquito Gulch, Robin-son's Ferry, San Andreas, Sheep Ranch, Vallecito, Valley Spring, Wallace and West Point. Fifteen of the applicants, including Mamie Meinecke and Carrie Rufe, met the requirements for diplomas. Etta Gallagher signed Mamie's diploma which is dated June 25, 1891.

The August after Mamie's graduation from the Vallecito school, Amelia, who was twenty-five, married Henry Wise Shepherd of Stockton. Henry Shepherd was the widowed brother of Jim Shepherd who had married Elise Meinecke six years earlier. He had two children by his first marriage. The next June Amelia and Henry's son, Arthur E. was born. He lived only from June 30, 1892 until September 18, 1893 and is buried in the Vallecito Cemetery.

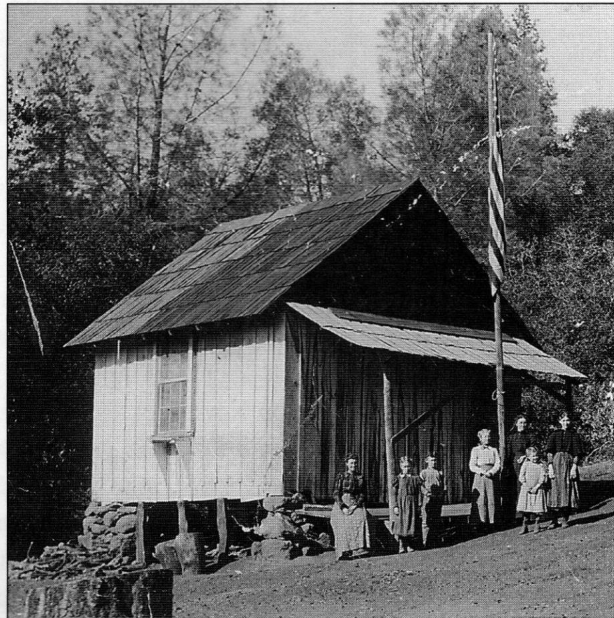
Mamie's father was good friends with Giovanni Sanguinetti whose fourth son, Henry, was six years older than Mamie. The Sanguinettis lived on, and farmed the land next to Edward Meinecke's. In the 1880s when Mamie was probably just starting school, Henry left Vallecito to live with his older married brother, G.B. Sanguinetti, in Mokelumne Hill. Here he learned the trade of millwright. Later Henry traveled throughout Calaveras County and Kern County building stamp mills so Henry and Mamie probably knew each other only slightly when Mamie was growing up. In 1891 when Mamie was completing her education at the Vallecito School, Henry Sanguinetti was at Stockton Business College; a picture of his

Business College class dated 1891 suggests that he may have graduated that year.

Stockton Business College was established in 1875 and by 1890 had 600 students, making it the largest private school listed in the *Fourteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*. Because of demand Stockton Business College added normal school courses to the business

curriculum and this is where Mamie continued her education. W. C. Ramsey had taken over the school in 1886 and built a new brick building. Nearby was a dormitory for out-of-town students. In an 1895 issue of *The Overland Monthly* Ramsey, the school's principal, wrote of his college that "Much of its popularity is due to the fact that the students board at the college and the teachers are men of experience, ability and business methods." Mamie could have lived there or with family friends. Ads for

Stockton Business College and Normal School are found in at least one Calaveras County newspaper, *The County Record*. One ad ran:



Esmeralda School - first built in 1888, where Mamie taught from 1895 to 1897. the people in the photograph are unidentified. — Photo courtesy of Calaveras County Historical Society.

BOYS AND GIRLS

If you will send us the names and postoffice addresses of ten persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five years who would be likely to attend a Business college or Normal School we will send you in return an elegantly written personal letter and a fine specimen of offhand flourishing fresh from the pen: also our new catalogue and circulars giving full information about our school.

With her Graduation Diploma from the Vallecito School Mamie was eligible to attend any of the three California State Normal Schools, located in San Jose, Los Angeles, and Chico. However Stockton, fifty miles



Mamie Meinecke - This photograph was taken in Stockton so perhaps it was taken while she was a student at Stockton Business College and Normal School.
— Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.

from Vallecito was much closer than any of the state schools. Mamie could travel from Vallecito to Milton by stage coach or wagon and then by train to Stockton. Normal School courses were generally two years and Mamie probably started the course at Stockton Business College and Normal Institute in the fall of 1891. She completed the course in March 1893 receiving an elegant diploma signed by the principal, W. C. Ramsey. The diploma, approximately eighteen inches across and twenty-two inches long, is ornamented with drawings of books, famous people and tools representative of various academic disciplines. On May 6 of the same year Mamie was granted a grammar grade teaching certificate by Calaveras County.

Mamie's teaching career began soon after she graduated. She was granted a Calaveras County Grammar Grade Certificate on May 6, 1893 having passed the county teacher's examination with a score of 92%. Calaveras County school records show that she was paid \$204 for teaching in the Eureka School District at Railroad Flat in June 1893. Since the average salary for a woman teacher in Calaveras County at that time was \$58.51⁴ a month she may have started teaching in April and been paid for a three month term in June.

Her next position was in Avery; the Avery School had been built in 1886 on land donated by George Avery and was located about a quarter mile from the

hotel. An article in the *Calaveras Prospect* for November 25, 1893 describes an entertainment by the students at the Avery school. The Avery correspondent writes, "Our community was treated to a very interesting entertainment on November 4 which did credit both to the pupils and their enthusiastic teacher, Miss Mamie Meinecke." Sixteen students, five of whom were probably children of George and Henrietta Avery, presented various songs and recitations. Among the other students were Alta Shepherd, Amelia Meinecke Shepherd's stepdaughter. This suggests that Amelia and Henry Shepherd were living at Avery at this time; Mamie may have lived with them or at the Avery Hotel which traditionally provided the teacher's room and board.⁵ The program, reproduced here on page 6, at the school concluded with a recitation, "The Polish Boy" by Miss Meinecke. Because of deep winter snow the sessions at the Avery School began in March and ended at Thanksgiving for many years. The school program on November 4, 1893 may have marked the end of the term. Again it appears that Mamie was paid at the end of the term; she received \$195 for teaching in Avery on December 16, 1893. Mamie returned to Avery in May 1894, signing the roll for Avery at the May 1894 teachers' institute and receiving \$60 each month from May until November. In January 1895 she was paid \$75. Students at the Avery school rode burros to school and then set them loose to return home on their own. We don't know if the burros came back for the students at the end of the day or if the children walked home. On at least one occasion the burros stayed around long enough to be photographed with the children. Traveling back up to her school after a weekend in Vallecito in the spring of 1894 Mamie might have enjoyed the blooming orchards along the way. On April 7, 1894 a reporter for *The Calaveras Prospect* described the area.

At Vallecito and all along the valley of Coyote Creek to the Table Mountain ranch above Douglas Flat, is one of the finest fruit sections of the county. The outlook this year is particularly good for this important product, and the view of well cultivated vineyards and blossoming fruit trees extending in endless profusion in every direction is enchanting. Peach and pear trees are loaded with bloom, and all kinds of fruit trees look very well. It is almost one continuous orchard and vineyard the whole distance, extending from the creek on either side almost to the tops of the neighboring hills, and at this season of the year the view is charming.

Mamie began teaching at the school on Esmeralda Ridge in the fall of 1895. A note in the

Calaveras Prospect for August 10, 1895 says “Miss Mamie Meinecke of Vallecito opened school at Esmeralda last Monday.” and she is listed as the Esmeralda teacher in the *Prospect* the next month. The salary at this school was \$55 a month and she was paid for nineteen months of teaching between September 1895 and July 1898. The Esmeralda school appears to have been open during the summer months and closed between January and April or May.

The letter from her friend Enid provides a tantalizing glimpse of Mamie’s life as a young teacher in Calaveras County more than a century ago. She liked to read and had evidently written to Enid about the difficulty of finding reading material. Enid suggests,

“I thought I would tell you how to get books from the W.F. library if you wish to do so. The agents all over the country can join the library and have books come to them through the express free of charge. You could join through Ernest and have the books come in his name. The terms are twenty-five cents a month; three months in advance, though, for members at a distance. I don’t think you would regret it as there are over 2000 volumes in the library as well as all the magazines. One is allowed to draw two books and a magazine or vice versa and keep them two weeks.”

The Wells Fargo library had been started in the mid 1890s to enable employees “to improve their minds and fit themselves for promotion in the company’s service”. It was located at the Wells Fargo office in San Francisco and Wells Fargo employees in remote areas of California, Nevada and Arizona could request books which were sent without cost by express.

The Esmeralda school was one of the smallest in Calaveras County and the students were mostly the children of ranchers in the area of San Antone Camp, San Antone Ridge, Esmeralda and San Domingo Creek. A post office had been established in the community of Esmeralda, on Indian Creek, in 1887 and the school was built the next year. A picture in *An Album of Pioneer*

Schools of Calaveras County shows a small, roughly constructed building. The side facing the camera has one window in the middle. It was close enough to Vallecito, where Mamie’s parents, Edward and Marie Meinecke, her brother, Gus, and her sister, Amelia, lived, to be a pleasant buggy ride on a sunny autumn afternoon. Henry Sanguinetti was working in Bakersfield as a carpenter during part of the 1890s but he also helped his brothers, Luke and Charlie build houses in Vallecito.

During these years Mamie and Amelia also spent time in fine handwork. Mamie crocheted an elegant

lace edging for an apron which she wore while teaching and in October 1894 Amelia and Mamie received a blue ribbon at the Calaveras County fair held in Copperopolis. The prize was given to “Mrs. Shepherd & Miss Meinecke” for “hair work.” Hair work meant creating elaborate, and delicate ornaments in the shape

of flowers, leaves and other objects from hairs that were collected when women combed their long hair. After only a few years of marriage Amelia had been widowed and left with a step-son and a step-daughter. She probably returned to Vallecito at this time. Her step-daughter Alta Shepherd, appears in a Vallecito school photo dated 1895-1897 but was not living with Amelia in 1900.

By the end of the 1890s the Meinecke children were spreading out from Vallecito. Meta went to Stockton where she was employed as a cook for the family of a German carriage maker, Leo F. Salbach. The Southern Pacific Railroad reached San Luis Obispo in 1894 and San Luis Obispo County became accessible for farming. Mamie’s brothers Edward and Frederick took up wheat dry-farming on the Carrizo Plains in northeastern San Luis Obispo County and in 1898 Ed ward married Dora Twisselman whose parents were from Switzerland and Germany. In April of that



Henry Sanguinetti and Mamie Meinecke Sanguinetti - This picture was taken in Bakersfield, so was probably taken around 1900 shortly after they were married. — Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.

year Mamie's father, W.G. Edward Meinecke died. Gus had taken over the Vallecito ranch and Amelia kept house and looked after her elderly mother.

The following autumn Mamie left Calaveras County to teach in the Bitterwater Valley near where her brothers were farming. Mamie was issued a Grammar Grade County Certificate by the Board of Education in San Luis Obispo County on December 24, 1898 after having received a California teacher's certificate on September 10, 1898. San Luis Obispo County school records show that she taught in the Choice Valley School District for the 1899-1900 school year; this district later became part of the Shandon School District. At this time Henry Sanguinetti was working as a carpenter in Bakersfield. The school term may have ended in March as Mamie Meinecke married Henry Sanguinetti on March 7, 1900 in Stockton, California. The marriage was performed by W.C. Evans of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Mining declined in Calaveras County during the 1890s and many of those who were involved in the mining industry traveled to Nome, the Klondike and southeastern Alaska. The *Calaveras Prospect* often printed letters and news from Calaveras County miners who were prospecting in the far north. Working as a millwright and carpenter at mines throughout Amador and Calaveras County as well as in Kern County Henry Sanguinetti had many opportunities to meet men who were engaged in mining like the mining engineer John F. Littlefield. The Littlefield family had lived in Amador and Calaveras County for over twenty years and John F. Littlefield had married Rose Green of Sutter Creek Valley before traveling to southeastern Alaska where he was employed as the Mine Foreman by the Snettisham Gold Mining Company. In April, soon after Henry and Mamie were married, Henry Sanguinetti also traveled to Alaska where he was employed in building a stamp mill at Snettisham. Mamie remained in Vallecito, living near her mother and Gus and Amelia until the autumn of 1900. In the fall she traveled to Alaska with another couple, joining Henry and the Littlefields at Port Snettisham.

Amelia remembered stories of Henry and Mamie's stay with the Littlefields at Port Snettisham. She also recalled Mamie's story of a delicious turkey that was cooked while they were in Alaska. "It ought to have been good. The woman basted it with a half pound of butter." According to Amelia, while Henry and Mamie

were at the Littlefield home "the employees gave them quite a big shivaree that night and oh, they got a lot of nice presents from the different ones there too. Mr. and Mrs. Littlefield gave them a beautiful set of table linen, table cloth, and a dozen great big napkins about a yard square." The stamp mill was completed but lacked belt lacings necessary to make it run. Henry and Mamie wanted to return to California so they never did see it operate although Henry later received a letter saying it worked fine.

From Alaska Henry and Mamie returned to Kern County where oil had been recently discovered. Soon after they arrived in Bakersfield Henry was offered a job as superintendent of some oil wells in the newly opened Kern River Oil Fields and he and Mamie moved out to the Kern River Oil Fields. Their first daughter, Marie was born in December 1901. She was followed by Doris in 1905, Henry in 1909 and Jack in 1915. They lived in the Kern River Oil Fields until Henry's death in 1941. Then when the United States entered World War II Jack enlisted in the Navy and Mamie moved into Bakersfield.

Mamie's sister and brother, Amelia and Gus continued to live with their mother, Marie, in Vallecito until she died in 1906. By this time Meta was married to Aaron Eller, a postman, and living in Stockton. Jim and Elise Meinecke Shepherd and their children Hazel, Willard, Carl and Meta were still living at Hodson. Amelia recalled that her mother died on the day of the San Francisco earthquake, April 18, 1906. Amelia was with her at the time.

I know that Mama died at the time of the big earthquake. I was sitting at her bedside and all the bed and all the furniture in the room shook awfully and my mother said, "an earthquake."

I said "Yes, don't get frightened"

And she said "Oh no, I wouldn't get frightened"

And you know, all that day there was, oh, people coming through our garden, and stopping at the door and talking to me all day long about... well they'd get news from San Francisco, about San Francisco burning, but of course I never told mama and she died that day. She died at four o'clock in the afternoon... [Meta] was with me just the last month you see. I was all alone. I had all the care of her for several years you see and I was just about all in and so she came up and stayed with me the last month. Aaron and Willard - Willard was living with them in Stockton - they came up there but they didn't get up there in time for the funeral... Willard was living with them and going to... the Stockton Business College... Carl was ten years old when Mama died... When they left for home after the funeral they didn't like to leave me alone and Lisa said "Would you like to have Carl stay with you?"



A reunion of Mamie and her sisters in 1926. From left to right, Mamie, Meta, Elise and Amelia. This picture was taken at the home built by Elise's eldest son Willard in Pasadena, California. — *Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.*

Carl said "I'll stay, I'll stay Aunt Melie." Really he was a godsend to me. He slept in one bed in the big bedroom and I in the other. In the evening after we'd go to bed he'd sing one song after another. He'd just seem to think he had to keep me cheered up. He'd say "Shall I sing another song Aunt Melie?"

I'd say "Yes, you can sing another one." and then finally I'd say, "Well I think probably you had better go to sleep now."... He was such a thoughtful little kid. He didn't want to go off to play with the boys and I'd say "Now Carl you don't have to stay with me all the time, you go on and have some fun, play with the boys."

"Oh," he says, "It doesn't make any difference to me Aunt Melie. I'd just as lief stay with you." I just had almost to push him off to get a little exercise, and a change. He was always so thoughtful."

After Marie died Amelia kept house for Gus. "I kept house for Gus for a long, long time. Then finally, I don't know, I guess one of you children [one of the Sanguinetti children]... your mother [Mamie] wanted me to come down to be with her when the babies were born... That's how it happened." Eventually Gus sold the Vallecito Ranch to Mills Mitchell. Gus died of diabetes in 1916 in Stockton. He had never married.

From their nineteenth century childhoods in Vallecito Mamie and her brothers and sisters moved out into the rapidly changing world of the twentieth century. Automobiles, airplanes, two world wars, the depression of the 1930s and many other events and inventions would be part of their futures. Mamie lived to fly in an airplane piloted by her nephew, Willard Shepherd. Elise, Fred, Meta and Ed all died in the 1930s. Mamie died in Bakersfield on June 24, 1947. Amelia Meinecke Shepherd lived, in Pacific Grove, from the 1920s until her death in July 1957.

Horses and wagons are no longer seen on the roads of Vallecito. The stores, butcher shop, lumber yard and hotels of the nineteenth century are gone. But if you go to the cemetery you will find the graves of five Meineckes there among the other pioneers. On marble tombstones are the names of J. Marie and W.G. Edward Meinecke and three of their seven children, Fred, Meta and Amelia, whose footsteps and voices were once heard in the byways of Vallecito.

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² "Floods of 1862." *Las Calaveras* 4 (April 1956).

³ I assume that this stands for "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals."

⁴ Kenfield, David Guinn. "A History of Education in Calaveras County, California, 1850-1900." University of the Pacific, 1955. p.43.

⁵ Karr, Sharon. "Avery, a Stopping Place for a Hundred Years." *Las Calaveras* 41 (April 1993):36-37.

Note

Mary Alice Sanguinetti is the granddaughter of Mamie Meinecke Sanguinetti and resides in Seattle, Washington. The research that lead to this article was propted by a discovery she made in her late grandmother's belongings. *Las Calaveras* is grateful to Ms. Sanguinetti for sharing this article with us. Most of the photographs were provided by her as well. Some of the photographs were from the archives of the Calaveras County Historical Society and may have previously appeared in their fine publication *An Album of the Pioneer Schools of Calaveras County*, which is available for purchase at the Museum Bookstore.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museum while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058.

Museum Donations

The Calaveras County Historical Society wishes to thank the following persons who recently made donations to the Calaveras County Museum:

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2 pictures of Louis Family Shop

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Meeting Schedule of the Calaveras County Historical Society

September 28 in San Andreas - Dinner meeting in the Jail Yard with guest program on Judges of Calaveras County.

October 26 in San Andreas - Program on the Ghosts of Calaveras County to be presented in Black Bart's Hideaway.

November 16 in San Andreas - Social Gathering at the Courthouse where we can share our special potluck treats with each other. Program to be announced.

December 14 in San Andreas - Annual Christmas Party! Dinner party at the Metropolitan with program celebrating Early Day Calaveras Christmases.

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