



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
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WADE HAMPTON JOHNSTON

(Compiled from the Letters and Scrapbooks of
Miss Effie Enfield Johnston)

A California pioneer of 1854, Wade Hampton Johnston was born at Little Rock Creek, Jefferson County, Missouri, on August 31st, 1832. His ancestors, Johnstons, Byrds and Thomases, all took part in the Revolutionary War, and were among the early pioneers of Kentucky and Missouri. He was the third son and the seventh child born to Benjamin and Katherine Byrd Johnston of Fairfield, South Carolina. He was named for his Virginia ancestor, Wade Hampton, one of the earliest colonists, or for General Wade Hampton, active in the War of 1812. As a child he knew many of the officers and soldiers of the Revolutionary War who had settled in Jefferson County. From his grandfather Byrd, he heard many interesting stories of George Washington, General Marion, and other heroes of that war. Much like his grandmother Byrd, he had a splendid memory and an interesting way of retelling events of the past.

Johnston crossed the plains with the Richardson wagon train from Missouri in the early 'fifties, reaching the diggings at Hangtown (Placerville). After working in various mining camps along the Mother Lode, he finally settled at Yaqui Camp on Willow Creek, about two miles southeast of San Andreas. Here he joined a company of three other miners, each of whom had a 100-foot claim on the west side of the gravel-capped hill afterwards known as the Wade Johnston gravel mine. In later years, because of litigation and straitened financial circumstances, Johnston lost this mine, and in 1912, moved to the Abdullah mine nearby. In early days, when working the gravel mine, he had bought a two-room house in Paradise Gulch, formerly the home of Ike Bradley and his Spanish wife. Later he built on a large kitchen and eventually a spacious pantry or storeroom and a porch across the front of the house. Water was obtained from a spring near the gulch. A building was constructed around the spring so that butter, milk, and fresh meat could be kept there. A vegetable garden, grapevines, fruit and walnut trees, and some flowers, were planted on the property. For in that day and age, the providing and storing of food was a most necessary part of country living. This Paradise Gulch home burned in 1892. A new house was built on the same site the following year.

The marriage of Wade Johnston to young Martha Cottle of Fourth Crossing at the Cottle home on June 2, 1867, was celebrated with a wedding dinner cooked by



WADE HAMPTON JOHNSTON

Just as many, many thousands of young men like him, he left a secure and comfortable home in the east to seek his fortune in the California goldfields. This, he conservatively estimated, might take as long as five years. Yet some three score and ten years later he was still on the Lode, still looking for that elusive fortune in gold. This interesting portrait, from a daguerreotype, shows Wade Johnston shortly after his arrival in California.

Mrs. Joe Bryan and served to some thirty neighbors. To this marriage two daughters and a son were born at their Paradise Gulch home: Effie Enfield, February 1, 1868, Martha Augusta, July 22, 1869, and Charles Hampton, born February 3, 1872. Unhappily, a separation occurred in 1875, and Mrs. Johnston went to San Andreas to live. There she worked at the Metropolitan Hotel and for Dr. Robinson while getting her divorce. Mr. Johnston often took the small children to visit her, and she made clothing and toys for them. In spite of his mining and other activities, he never neglected his children and did all that he could to make a happy home for them.

The parents were their children's teachers until in 1879 the girls started to school at Upper Calaveritas, riding the four miles each day on horseback. In 1881, Mr. Johnston was instrumental in the formation of the Willow

Wade Hampton Johnston

(Continued From Page 1)

Creek School District, and a school building was erected close enough to the Johnston home for the children to walk, and to be able to come home for lunch. Mr Johnston performed the duties of trustee of Willow Creek School for a period of thirty-eight years. Another civic responsibility carried out by Mr. Johnston when yet a young man was two terms as county supervisor. He maintained a life-long interest in politics.

Most of Mr. Johnston's active life was devoted to prospecting and mining at Yaqui Camp and Paradise Gulch. Anyone familiar with placer mining knows the frustrations of this type of work — either too much water or too little, leaking ditches, broken flumes, endless backbreaking work, good prospects and then disappointments. Pocket hunting has similar frustrations. All of these Johnston knew well. Then, too, his sheep were sometimes killed by stray dogs and other predators, or his garden killed by heavy frost or ravaged by wild animals or livestock. All this he took in his stride and cheerfully accepted as a part of his life at Willow Creek.

Along with the hardships were pleasures, and Wade Johnston acquired much local fame and popularity by playing his violin for parties on the "Shoe String" route, so called for the "dago red" made from grapes grown in home vineyards along the route. This was served at two-bits a bottle to friends who congregated for a good time of Bocci playing, organ music, singing, dancing, and indulging in eating the delicious home-cooked food. Many a night after he had retired, Johnston was aroused by visitors arriving on horseback or in carts, requesting his presence. He would willingly dress and accompany them with his cherished violin to the scene of the evening's fun. The most popular of these social gathering places were the Seifferts at Kentucky House and the Raggios nearby, the Rattos and Genochios at Lower Calaveritas, the Onetos at Dry Creek (at the junction of the San Antone with Cherokee Creek), the Bence Ranch on the San Antone, and, of course, Fourth Crossing. There were excellent dance floors at Fourth Crossing and Calaveritas where grand balls were frequently held.

Not only locally was the faithful violin heard. For example, there are records of a party as far away as Calaveras Big Trees, where, in August, 1859, thirty-two people rode in two four-horse wagons from Fourth Crossing, camping on the way, and entertained by Mr. Johnston's music. A favorite tune of that day, and which we may assume was played on this trip, was "The Drunken Hiccough."

Johnston's oldest daughter, Effie, went to work as waitress in hotels all the way from Catalina Island to Oregon, and she worked in various industries and factories, but came home to Willow Creek whenever she was needed.

Daughter Martha married George P. Harper in 1893. The Harpers lived on the Murphys Grade Road, and George worked at the Utica mill in Angels. Later on he was mill superintendent of the Lightner and Sultana mills. When the mines at Angels started running out of ore, he moved to Amador County, where he was superintendent of the Central Eureka mill, at Sutter Creek, until



THE FIDDLER FROM WILLOW CREEK

This picture, snapped in 1914, shows Wade Hampton Johnston as many still remember him, posed on the front porch of his Abdullah mine home.

he retired in 1940.

Son Charles never married. He stayed at Willow Creek and carried on mining activities in the area until his death in 1943.

In 1912, the Johnstons moved to the Abdullah mine, to the little house surrounded with porches, with artistic steps, and with flower beds all around, that still stands. This is the home to which Effie returned and spent many happy years until entering a rest home two years ago.

During Wade Johnston's later years he reminisced about the early days, and his daughter Effie faithfully compiled these just as he related them, as "Talks by Wade Hampton Johnston."*

Johnston continued his interest in mining and prospecting, even in advanced years, as we can see by a letter he wrote to a relative in December of 1919, in which he

*Wade Johnston's description of life in Calaveritas in the 1850's, printed in the April, 1958, issue of **Las Calaveras**, is lively reading today about lively times so long ago.

Wade Hampton Johnston

(Continued From Page 2)

said, "We are getting our share of cold weather. The needle gets down to 21 or 22. The Kid (Charles) is off digging for a pocket. I have just got a hole started once more and it looks well but there is too much ice in sight for a man past 87 years old."

He also continued his interest in his violin, as he reported to Mr. Lewis, the editor of the **Citizen**, on September 5, 1925, as follows:

"Dear sir:

"I will ask you to print a few lines in your valuable paper to let my few old friends in Old Calaveras county know that I am still on top pulling against the stream of life. On Monday last, the 31st of August, I recorded my 93rd birthday in a quiet way. I got up early in the morning and had my mush and milk with a cup of good coffee, but soon after breakfast I had a slight pain in my stomach, so treated myself to a Dr. Watkins cocktail (47 per cent alco.) and soon felt better. Now my next move was to hike over to the mine and treat the boys to cigars, then returned and ate my dinner, which consisted of a piece of ham and a cup of cold coffee and topped off on watermelon; and the next item on my program was the old violin that had been asleep for a long time. I got to work on it and it was a big job to get it in tune, but I managed to dish up about a dozen of my old pieces, the names of which I will write on a separate piece of paper. My E-string broke and that closed my birthday. If it had not been for my rupture, I would be hiking in to San Andreas to see the improvements. At any rate, when San Andreas gets ready to elect a mayor I hope that I may be one of her 'hairpins.'

"Yours respectfully,

"W. H. JOHNSTON"

The songs were:

The Girl I Left Behind Me
Washington Over the Delaware
Flatfoot, a Negro Hoedown
Go to the Devil and Shake Yourself
We Won't Go Home Till Morning
Come Haste to the Wedding
Leather Britches
The Jim Donovan Polka
Where, Oh Where Is My Wee Little Dog
Turn Down the Sheets
Crank's Fox Trot
Arkansas Traveler

On December 31st, 1927, Wade Hampton Johnston died, at the ripe old age of 95, at his home at Willow Creek, cared for by his three children. He was a man who had contributed more than most to making life in this Mother Lode community full of pleasant memories, both for his devoted children and for his appreciative neighbors.

Forthcoming Meetings

Feb. 24—Angels Pioneer Families (Ed Leonard, Ch'm)
Mar. 24—Murphys Pioneer Families (Al Gross, Ch'm)
April 28—Dinner Meeting—Essays
May 26—Pioneer Families of Mokelumne Hill (Allen Peek, Ch'm)

THE JOHN PEIRANO FAMILY

(Presented before the Society on November 18th by
Mrs. John P. Lemue)

John Peirano was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1824, where he grew to manhood. He has been described as a man of rather small frame, fair-skinned, with fine reddish hair and beard, and clear, bright blue eyes. He smiled a great deal and took pleasure in the simple things of life. Leaving Genoa when a young man, his destination was the California goldfields. There he hoped to make a fortune and help those he left behind in Italy.

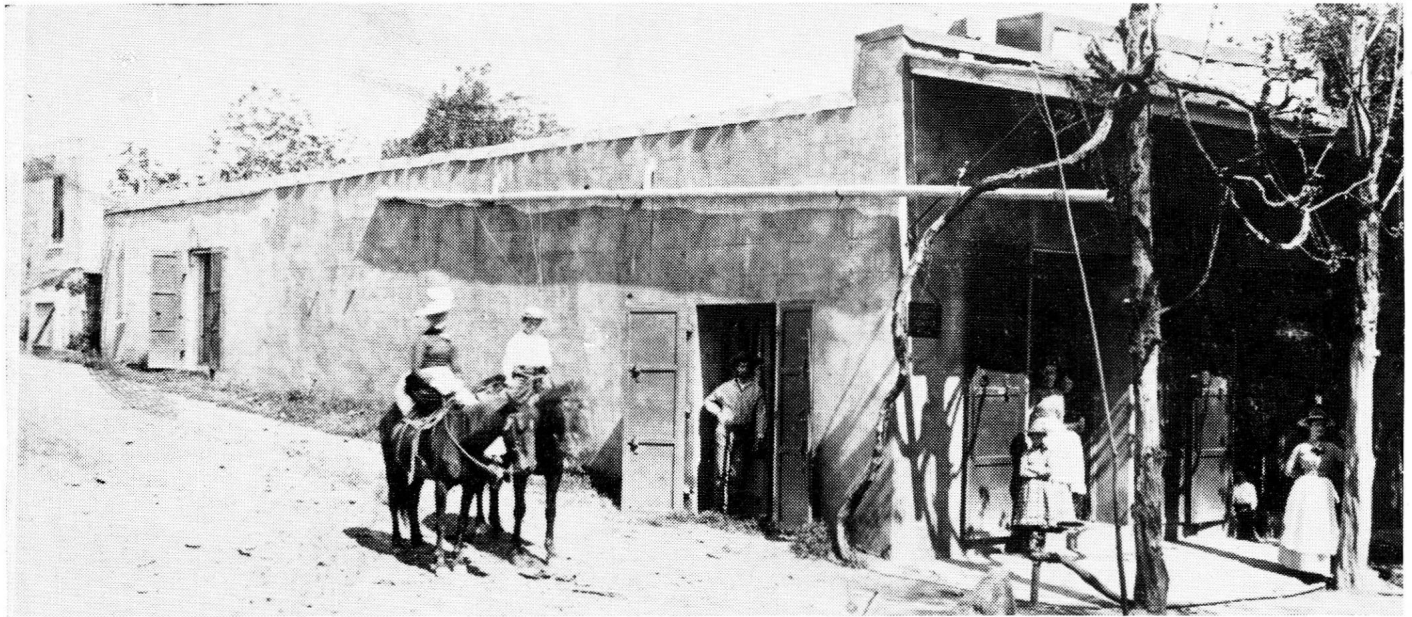
Leaving Genoa by ship, Peirano sailed to the Isthmus of Panama, made the hard trip across the Isthmus, and arrived in San Francisco about 1850. From San Francisco he traveled overland to the Mother Lode country, and along with others, pitched his tent on Angel's Creek. He mined here for a few years quite successfully and bought a large acreage of land on the south side of the creek.

On this land John Peirano built a home and added



JOHN PEIRANO

Storekeeper Peirano, seated in front of his Angels Camp residence, under the fig trees. This picture was taken in the early '80s.



PEIRANO'S STORE, ANGELS CAMP

A view showing the store about 1890, when it was still operated by members of the family, some of whom may be seen in the doorways.

a small reservoir and ditch line to Angel's Creek. This provided irrigation for a vineyard and orchard. (Years later his son Joseph built a fine home on this site.)

Later John Peirano constructed a stone building on Main Street and Chinatown Road, where he established a general merchandise store, then considered one of the finest on the Mother Lode. His descendants still have in their possession numerous statements and receipted bills and other papers showing transactions with San Francisco wholesalers, dating from 1852 to 1858.

At about this time John Peirano married Miss Julia Podesta of Columbia, Tuolumne County. Her parents, Joseph and Nettie Podesta, were hotel-keepers in Columbia. They had come to California from Baltimore, Maryland, where Julia had grown up. Joseph Podesta was well educated, having previously studied for the priesthood. He had taught his daughter Julia to read in Italian and had encouraged her to become familiar with the classics. She never lost her thirst for reading, and during her busy life after working hard all day, would read late at night, long after the rest of the family was asleep.

John and Julia Peirano had three children, Joseph, Nettie, and John. The youngest, "Johnnie" as he was called, died in childhood. Joseph was born in 1860, Nettie in 1863, and John in 1866.

About 1865, he built a new home, a two-story structure directly in back of the general store. This building has been continuously occupied by members of the family since it was built a hundred years ago. The house is made of lava rock with a sand and cement coating. The walls are one and a half feet thick.

John and wife Julia ran the general merchandise store until his death in 1887. Julia would take care of the dry goods department, including millinery, and John looked after the grocery and hardware departments.

In 1885 the town of Angel's Camp had a disastrous

fire which destroyed most of the business section of town. The iron shutters on the Peirano store were closed and it became so hot inside that it was kept closed for over a week, as it was feared that if opened, the building would burst into flames.

The Peirano home was saved by a "bucket brigade" packing water from the creek. A crew also worked within the home, pouring water around the doors and windows. Some of the men started to move the piano out of the house, but John Peirano asked them to put it back. The piano, a Fischer, is still in good condition, but most of the furniture taken outside during the fire was ruined.

The family of John Peirano always believed that he "strained his heart" trying to open a fire hydrant that had already been opened, but which he, in the excitement of the hour, hadn't noticed. In any event, he was in poor health from that time on and died two years later from a heart condition. After his death, his wife Julia and son Joe (as he was known around town) ran the business until her sudden death in 1894.

Joe Peirano married Miss Elizabeth Eudy, whose family then lived in Angels Camp. They had one child, a daughter, Hazel, whose untimely death at the age of seventeen brought great sorrow to the family, and which was a shock to the whole community. When a young girl, Hazel was given a little Shetland pony and cart by her father. She and her young cousin, John Lemue, would often be seen riding around town or on the country roads in the pony cart.

Joe Peirano was engaged in merchandising for several years in the store then known as the "Davey and Carley Building," afterwards called the "Woods Building." In later years Joe became interested in mining and invested in the Bald Hill (Etna) mine and also in the South Carolina mine of Carson Hill. He was working on his mining interests in New York City when he contracted a severe

case of influenza and passed away there in 1920.

Joe and his sister Nettie had also inherited property in San Francisco, much of which was burned during the earthquake and fire of 1906.

Mrs. Joseph (Lizzie) Peirano lived in Angels for several years following her husband's death and then moved to San Francisco. She remarried and continued to live there the remaining years of her life. She was a woman of quiet, gentle ways, and a calm and patient manner.

Nettie Louisa Peirano was a vivacious and attractive young woman and was considered beautiful by many people of her time. She had the fair complexion of her father, possessing light reddish-brown hair and large, expressive, flashing blue eyes.

When still young, she was called "a tomboy" by her mother, who sent her to a young ladies' finishing school at Benicia. Julia thought that Nettie should have more education and also needed the "polish" such a school offered. At Benicia, Nettie received instruction in music, both voice and piano, in elocution, painting, needlework, penmanship, and in the fine points of "ladylike" behavior, as well as in the basic three R's. When Nettie returned home, she had lost some of her "tomboy" ways, but was still the laughing, fun-loving girl who could never be really sedate. She enjoyed entertaining friends at home in the parlor, where she played the piano, and all joined in singing as they gathered around her.

Her mother Julia often went to San Francisco to buy merchandise for the store, and sometimes Nettie accompanied her. Besides the gingham, calicoes and other plain materials brought back were silks, satins, velvets and rich brocades then used for making dressier clothes. Being a skillful seamstress, it was Julia's pleasure to create pretty clothes for Nettie. She also brought back from San Francisco thin solid satin dance slippers. Many years later Nettie remarked that she almost wore out the thin soles in one evening of dancing on the rough floor of the old theatre building, where most of the dances and entertainments were then held.

Nettie Peirano married Ralph Lemue in San Francisco on October 18, 1888. They had one child, John Peirano, born on September 25, 1891. Ralph Lemue was born in Montreal, Canada, in 1861. His family had moved to the placer mines in Nevada City where Ralph first worked as a blacksmith's helper. Later the family moved to Stockton where Ralph learned the carriage-making business.

When the Angels mine owners decided to institute the new Burleigh air drills, Ralph Lemue was called to Angels to sharpen the drill steel used in the drilling machines. He was well-suited for this new development, because of his training and experience, and was the first mechanic in Angels to successfully sharpen the steel. He followed this trade for some time, and taught others his skills. Later, he returned to his craft of carriage builder in a shop on the site now occupied by the Texaco Gas Station. He built many carriages and wagons, some of which are on exhibit at the Angels Camp Museum. He continued in this business until 1917, when he and his son John bought the Angels Hotel from Otto Dolling.

Ralph Lemue passed away in October, 1927. His son John continued to operate the hotel until it was sold in 1946.

John Peirano Lemue served for two years in World

November Meeting

Pioneer families of the Angels area was the subject of the November meeting of the Society. Mr. Ed Leonard was in charge of the evening program which was most interestingly presented by several persons. Mrs. John P. Lemue gave the story of the John Peirano family, including also information on the Podesta, Lemue, and Harper families (see elsewhere in this issue). Mrs. Mary Tarbat told the history of the Lavagnino and Tarbat families, and this was followed by Mrs. Leonard reading a paper on the Norman Smith family with information also on the Cutlers. Mrs. Leonard then read a manuscript about the Rolleris, and her husband concluded the evening's program with a brief history of the Maltman family.

As Mr. Leonard has several more reports coming in, a second meeting on Angels Camp pioneer families was scheduled for February 24th. Mr. Leonard is to be congratulated on the fine papers that have been written because of his enthusiastic efforts in recording the history of the Angels area.

Quarterly Dinner Meeting

The October dinner meeting of the Society was held at Dave Copello's fine new restaurant in Altaville, adjoining the Forty-Niner Village, his outdoor museum and gold panning establishment. Mr. Copello has built up a fascinating collection of antiques, relics and what have you, all nicely arranged for visitors and tourists.

Some 75 members and guests enjoyed the roast beef dinner. Members Mr. and Mrs. Bernhardt Jensen of San Andreas, who have spent much of the past five years in Nigeria, Africa, for the Ford Foundation, presented a very interesting set of colored slides with accompanying remarks on their experiences in northern Nigeria. The dinner meetings continue to be our most popular activity, and we are happy to see so many members of the Society at these events.

War I, one year being spent overseas in France and Germany. John and Ruth Harper, a teacher, were married in San Diego on February 17, 1918, when he was then in training in the 115th Engineers at Camp Kearny. Ruth Harper descended from pioneers on both sides of the family. On her mother's side, Wade Hampton Johnston crossed the plains in 1854, settling at Yaqui Camp near San Andreas. On her father's side, grandfather (Moses) Hiram Harper was a pioneer who spent many years of his life near Murphys, on the Grade Road. He was a farmer and also a beloved minister of the gospel. He worked hard during the week caring for his garden and orchard, and then served in the pulpits of the Murphys and Vallecito churches on Sundays. Grandmothers Martha Cottle Johnston and Delpha Jeffries Harper were also pioneers who crossed the plains in covered wagons.

John and Ruth Lemue had two children, John Harper, born August 8, 1920, and Barbara Marie, June 19, 1923. A grandson, Robert John, was born to John Jr. and Betty (Hankammer) Lemue, June 2, 1948. He is the youngest descendant and great-great grandson of John Peirano, pioneer of Angels Camp.

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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.

EDITORIAL

We are only too apt to take for granted the fabulous communications, transportation, and facilities for amusement that we have today. Even up here, on the Mother Lode, merely fingertip pressure on a switch, dial or button serves to bring us almost anything we need or want. But things were not always this way.

The two interesting family stories in this issue were chosen for the picture they present of country living in Calaveras of two, three or more generations ago—a life some of our eldest members still recall with fond memories, but one that most of us will know only from the written word.

After the excitement and flush placer mining of the gold rush, the Mother Lode country settled down into a pattern of living characterized by hard work, with money more or less scarce, and conditions that permitted few luxuries. Some, as is always the case, prospered well. But the many found a life fully as hard a struggle as the one that they had left, in another state or nation—except that it was far freer of social, religious and political bonds, and often a more hospitable climate. These people that stayed after the rush, and those that joined them later, were determined to make a success of their new life. They all showed the same pioneering spirit that was the basis for the formation of our county.

Mining and prospecting provided a livelihood to many. This was not an easy one, and few made more than wages from their efforts. Others found their place in the storekeeping, innkeeping, teaming, in county work, schoolteaching, or in other fields.

One unusual occupation, or rather, avocation, but none-the-less most essential to social life of the times, was

The Christmas Program

Once again, Vice-President Alice Eldridge organized a delightful Christmas party, the 11th annual. The program featured the "Monday Nighters," a singing group of 21 from Stockton, colorfully dressed in white shirt, black bow tie and red coat. This unusual treat was arranged by Ralph Treat, who is one of the "Monday Nighters."

Other presentations on the program were as follows:

Letter to Santa	Mrs. Alice Eldridge
Christmas in the Early Days	Dr. Coke Wood
The Birthday of a King	Solo by Al Gross
Reading	Mrs. Ed Leonard
Christmas Carols ..	Mrs. Norma Wolfe, accomp.
Monologue	Mrs. Pauline Newton
Holy City	Solo by Laverne Hofeditz
	Mrs. Hofeditz, accomp.
Solo	Miss Penny Newton

Mrs. Hattie Hertzig played the part of Santa Claus in distributing the exchange presents, and pie and coffee were served to some 60 members and guests. The beautiful Christmas table decorations were arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Drew Garland.

An Invitation to Join the Society

We reprint the following from the April, 1961, issue of **Las Calaveras**:

"Judge Smith, our beloved president, wants to make it clear, through our quarterly publication, that we extend a cordial welcome to all those interested in the objectives of our Society to join the Calaveras County Historical Society. No special invitation is required and no sponsorship is necessary, but only an interest in the past, so that we can more fully understand the present."

Al Gross, membership chairman, urges members to call the aims and activities of this Society to the attention of their historically inclined friends so that all those interested in Calaveras history can participate with us in this work.

that of the country fiddler. The importance of this personage in the community would have been readily acknowledged by young and old, had the question been asked, for balls and dances were, far more than is the case today, one of the most popular forms of recreation. In those days, so long before radio, television and automobile transportation, the fiddler was the key to a successful evening's event. Although music was just a hobby with Wade Johnston, history has awarded him a niche as the popular fiddler from Willow Creek.

In a more prosaic occupation, the village storekeeper wielded far more influence than he knew in shaping the details of daily living, and, like the newspaper, provided a most important link with the outside world. John Peirano will be remembered for the store that he and his descendants operated for so many years in Angels Camp, and for the excellent service provided the many Peirano customers. The Peirano Store was a vital force in the economy of the Angels Camp area for four decades.

The current project of our Society is to preserve more of these family stories, more of the lives of the hard-working and dedicated pioneers that built the foundations of the communities in which we now live. We ask you, whether you are a member or not, to help us with this work before too much of the information is lost forever.