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## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN JONES AND KIN

*By Helen Giorgi*

This history of the Benjamin Franklin Jones family reminds us of the popular habit of a century or so ago in large families of using the names of famous Americans. Two issues ago, we met Andrew Jackson Beardslee, Andrew Jackson Lane, and several Franklins.

Chronicles of the pioneers of our county never fail to point out the hard life and the many tragedies of those days just two or three generations ago. Yet there was much happiness in their lives and always hope that their children and grandchildren would see better days. These hopes certainly have been realized.

Helen Giorgi was fortunate in finding firsthand written accounts with which to reconstruct this excellent history of Benjamin Franklin Jones and his many kin in Calaveras County.

Editor

When Jesse William Bryant and his wife, Mary Shelton Bryant, emigrated to Calaveras County from Illinois, they had no idea that their paths would cross that of a certain Benjamin Franklin Jones. They ventured on the perilous Cape Horn voyage at the suggestion of Jesse's uncle, Elisha Williams, a shingle and shake-maker of Murphys, and they brought with them their two young children, Jessie Annette and James Henry. The long journey ended when they settled in a homestead a few miles from Calaveras Big Trees "in a mountain meadow in the heart of virgin forest land."

Jesse Bryant, a Civil War veteran, was a handsome, charming man who worked somewhat intermittently in his younger days. His wife, Mary, was a hardworking woman who willingly turned her hand to any job to help out. At various times she ran a boarding house and took in washing to augment the family income.



**BEN AND MAMIE JONES**

Married on August 21st, 1892, at San Andreas by  
C. F. Walters, JP.

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Jesse was far ahead of his time in his understanding of the need for forest conservation. Appalled at the wanton destruction of trees by lumbermen, he penned an indignant letter to Washington, D.C., and an inspector was dispatched from that city to investigate the charges. The story goes that the inspector was bribed to falsify his report, and that Jesse incurred the ill-will of his neighbors for his conscientious efforts. He suffered a heart ailment for many years, and succumbed to it in January, 1905, at the age of sixty-three. His wife survived him by twenty-five years, the last ten of them in blindness. She accepted her handicap with grace, and delighted in having her grandchildren read to her.

The eldest child of the Bryants was Jessie Annette ("Net"), a striking blue-eyed golden blonde. At the age of nineteen she married Joseph Majors Land, a childhood friend, also nineteen. Her intelligence compensated somewhat for her lack of education, but her bitterness at her husband's carefulness with money made her an unhappy

wife. She was energetic and hardworking like her mother, and she and Joe together managed an adequate living for their family of six children on the rented ranches where they lived. At one time they resided at Chili Gulch and cultivated a truck garden. Joe peddled produce all around the countryside, and their large, delicious watermelons were a popular item in Calaveras County.

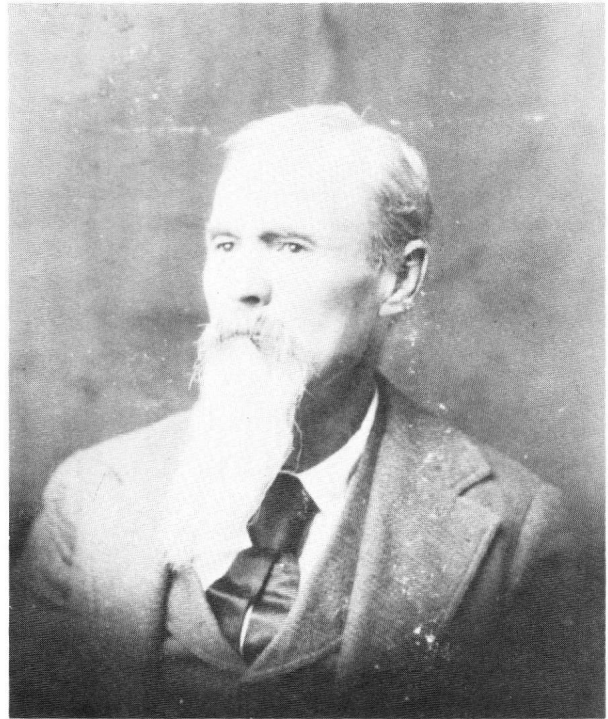
Joe and Net's children developed diverse personalities. Lilith Land, the eldest, was a charming girl and blonde like her mother. A college graduate, she taught school and married a teacher, Henry Russell. The second girl, Gladys, was a dark-eyed beauty. She married a Bay Area teamster, Charles Van Aspern, and their large brood of children were left frequently in the care of their grandmother. In middle age, Gladys left home, and she never returned.

The next four Land children were boys: Joseph Bryant, Francis ("Pete"), and twins Leslie and Lester. Leslie was blond and Lester was dark, and in that way they were as unlike as were their sisters. Lester died of appendicitis at the age of thirty. Leslie and Francis served with the 91st Division during World War I. Both were wounded but they made it home and recovered. At the time of his father's death in 1935, Leslie was living in Nevada City, but more recently made his home near Valley Springs Peak.

The unhappy Net left Joe for a time, and worked as a companion to an elderly woman in San Francisco and in Sacramento. Joe went to see her and persuaded her to return home with him. On the way home, they quarreled bitterly. When they arrived at the house, the anguished Joe dashed in, scribbled a suicide note, swallowed strychnine and left. When Net discovered the note, she blamed herself for his death, and she committed suicide herself with a shotgun.

The second child of Jessie and Joe Bryant was Net's brother, James Henry ("Harry"). He married Annie Hunter, who was half Indian. Annie and her sister were excellent shake-makers. Their father, George Hunter, had emigrated from New Zealand and their mother, Matilda, is believed to have been a Miwok Indian woman. There are no records available to verify the marriage of Harry and Annie, but the story goes that he married her secretly and told his family that she was his housekeeper. At that time, marriage to an Indian woman would have cut him off from family and friends. Annie was a woman of integrity and sterling character, who took her blind, elderly mother-in-law into her home and tenderly cared for her until her death. When Harry died at the age of sixty-nine, his nieces and nephews were listed as his heirs, but it is to their credit that they never claimed the inheritance but allowed Annie to retain the entire estate.

The youngest Bryant child, Mary Virginia ("Mamie"), was



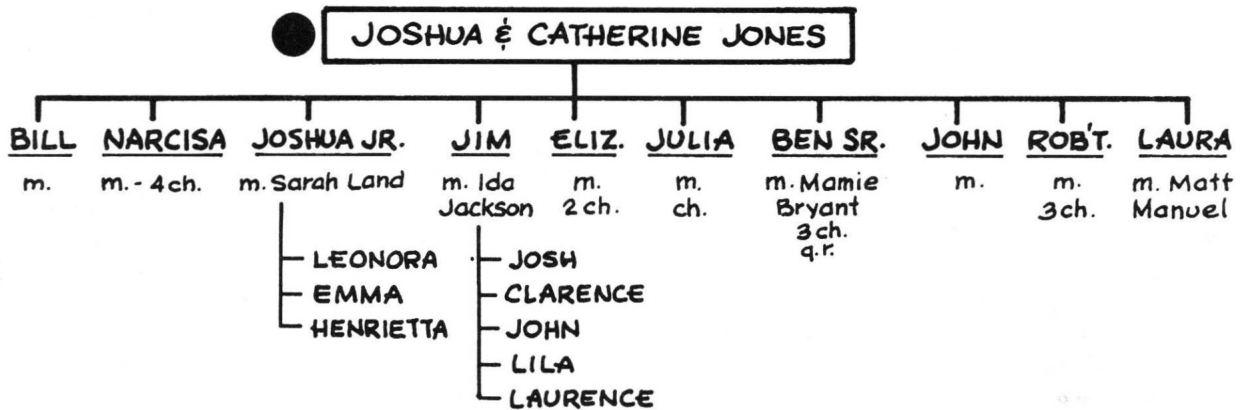
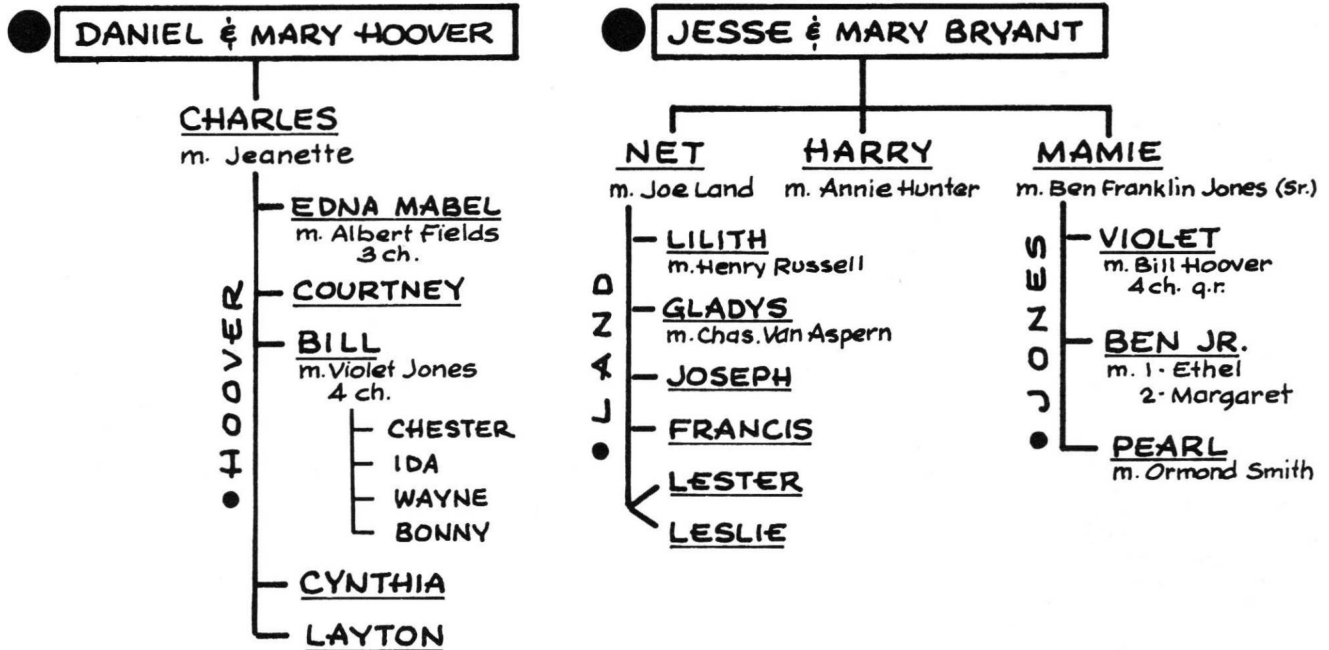
**JESSE WILLIAM BRYANT**  
(1839-1905)

born in Silver City, in Alpine County, on June 12, 1874. A small gentle girl, Mamie was still spunky enough to stand up to her father when he forbade her marriage to Benjamin Franklin Jones because of Ben's lameness. Ben's leg was broken four times during his lifetime, once at the age of ten, again at fifteen, and twice after his marriage. Mamie loved square dancing, but Ben was never able to dance with her because one leg was shorter than the other. Mamie could handle a team or a horse and buggy skillfully, and had a way with a horse. The family owned a bright, affectionate horse named "Old Fox", given to the Bryants by Matt Manuel after the horse ran away with Matt's wife, Laura, who was Ben's sister.

Joshua Jones, father of Ben, had emigrated west with his wife, Catherine Parks, before the Civil War. He was a hard man with his ten children, and he put Ben on a team before his short legs could reach the brake. Joshua would tie a rope to the boy's leg and the other end of it to the brake.

Ben's older brothers, Bill and Joshua Jr., became prosperous teamsters, hauling freight into the mountains and transporting logs back down to the sawmill at Angels. Joshua Jr. married Sarah Land, sister of Joe Land who had married Net Bryant. Joshua and Sarah had three daughters, Leonora, Emma, and Henrietta. Henrietta was deaf and married a man who was also deaf. Joshua served two

# GENEALOGY OF THE ● JONES ● HOOVER ● BRYANT FAMILIES



*Other Calaveras families mentioned in the text:*

- ELISHA WILLIAMS
- GEORGE HUNTER
- PETER PETTIS LAND
- LEWIS POTTER

*More complete genealogical records of these families, compiled by Helen Giorgi, are on file in the Society's archives.*



**BEN JONES SR.**

terms as Sheriff of Calaveras County.

Jim Jones, who was five years younger than Joshua Jr., was a tall man. He married Ida ("Bird") Jackson and they were said to have had twenty-one or two children. All the children died in infancy except four boys and two girls. Three of the survivors met with unfortunate accidents. Their eldest boy, Josh, perished in a mining accident at the age of forty. The second son, Clarence, was struck by a train, and the third son, John, died of a fall from a tree while working for Pacific Gas and Electric Company.

Laura, the youngest of Joshua Sr.'s four daughters, married Matthew Manuel, son of a successful cattle and timberman. After Laura's death in 1946, Matt married Alpha Inks. He had inherited his father's business acumen, and when he died in 1961, his estate was appraised at a million and a half dollars.

Benjamin Franklin Jones, the sixth child of the family, we have already encountered in this history. He was born in September, 1867, when the family was living at Stone Corral, a ranch on the Jenny Lind-Valley Springs road. Stone Corral was on the left side as one traveled toward the Mother Lode, and was well known for its buildings and corral, all constructed from field-stone.

Ben and Mamie were married in 1892 in San Andreas.

They were the parents of two girls and a boy, Violet, Pearl and Benjamin Jr., and they were foster parents to an orphan Indian boy, Bob Ross, taken in at the age of twelve. Bob Ross would compose jingles to entertain the Jones children, and Ben's daughter, Pearl, could still recall two of them at Christmas time in 1962:

*"As I was going down to Silver Lake,  
I met a little rattlesnake.  
He ate so much jelly cake;  
He made his little belly ache."*

and

*"Jackie, little Jackie, cried so much one day;  
her mother couldn't stand it, and she had to run away."*

About 1899, Ben Jones moved his family to a tract of land of 160 acres above Murphys, where his horses could enjoy a large expanse of grazing land. Ben was a long-line skinner, skillfully controlling a team of twelve, fourteen, or sixteen horses and mules with one long line. Frequently a team would be harnessed up with two horses next to the wagon, and the remainder of the team would be mules. The driver did not sit on the wagon seat; he rode one of the wheel horses. The animals were incredibly agile at maneuvering back and forth over the long chain line, as they negotiated turns.

Ben Jr. was born while the family lived above Murphys. His sister Pearl recalled walking a mile up the hill to Avery



**MARY VIRGINIA BRYANT  
(1874-1919)**



to a one-room school house, where grades one through eight were taught. The Jones children carried their lunches in a lard bucket, and when their dog, Shep, accompanied them, he carried his lunch bucket, holding the handle in his mouth all the way. Frequently Pearl would have to slip under a fence on her way home from school to avoid the herds of cattle on the road. The cattlemen would be driving the herds from the valley into the mountains for grazing during the hot summer months and bringing them back again in the fall.

Avery Hotel served loggers and lumbermen as an overnight stop between Murphys and Dorrington, and the Joneses kept a dipper by their spring to refresh the thirsty travelers. The Averys were neighbors of the Joneses and once after Ben Jr. had visited them, he told his mother that the Averys must be very poor because they had no stove, just a fire in the middle of the room. Actually, it was small Ben's first acquaintance with a fireplace. The Darby family were the nearest neighbors, and their five children were undoubtedly welcome company for the Jones children.

Food was plentiful at the Jones' home. There was always a milk cow and a thriving garden. Mamie canned fruit and

vegetables, pickled grapes, and concocted delicious watermelon preserves from the rinds of the melons purchased from Joe Land. Neighbors shared generously with one another. Whenever a family slaughtered a pig or a beef, a portion went to some neighbor who was in need of meat. The men shot deer, and the Joneses kept a line behind the stove for converting fresh meat into jerky. For the rare occasions when Mamie was indisposed, Ben had two menus he could put on the table: baked beans and baking powder biscuits, or squirrel stew and dumplings. For special occasions the family would make ice cream using the galvanized tub that also served as a washtub and as a bathtub on Saturday nights.

Despite his lameness, Ben was an expert skinner and was highly respected for his expertise. He labored from before dawn until long after sunset. There were no eight-hour days nor five-day weeks for him. Just the act of harnessing the horses and mules was a long and arduous task. Ben was a loving father and overly lenient with his children; Mamie was obliged to be the disciplinarian. Ben's nickname "Cap" was derived from the comic strip "The Captain and the Kids." In it the children, Hans and Fritz Katzenjammer,



#### HAULING FOR THE PENN MINE

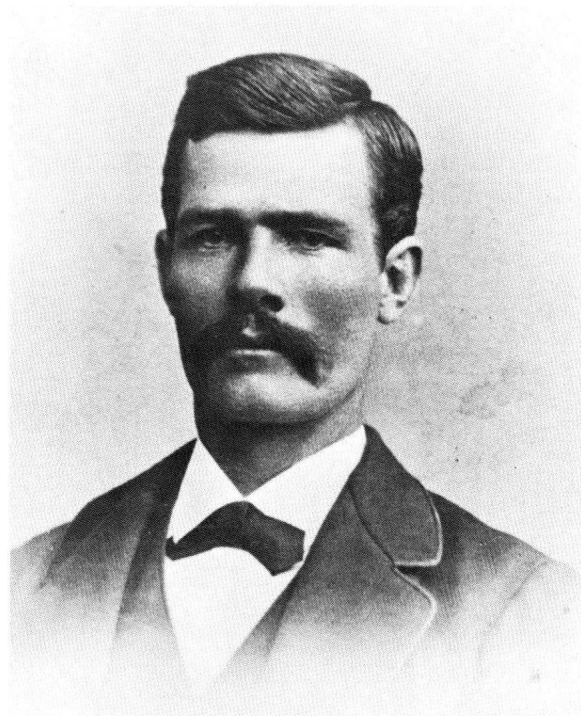
Ben Jones at the reins, with Flora, Sodie, Ned, George, Prince, and a new horse in training, on the way to Campo Seco from Valley Springs.

were always playing pranks, and their father would explode verbally, but would never really punish his children.

The men would take a holiday on the Fourth of July, Christmas and sometimes on Thanksgiving Day. They would purchase a block of ice from Murphys Ice Plant, and cases of soda pop or sarsaparilla, and firecrackers on the Fourth of July. The women would prepare tasty cakes, rich ice cream and other goodies. No alcoholic beverages were allowed at these family parties. Once, when Pearl was about four years old, the party was held in San Andreas and she remembered her Uncle Joshua, who was sheriff, taking her to see the jailhouse. A Great Dane dog was there, and Joshua hoisted her onto his broad back and allowed her to ride him.

Mamie Jones was a petite, pretty woman, just over five feet tall and she weighed less than 100 pounds. She maintained an immaculate house, cared for her children, assisted Ben in harnessing the horses, and pumped and carried water until the last year they lived at Murphys when it was piped into the house. Three traits of character enabled her to endure the vicissitudes of early day country living: a delightful sense of humor, a capacity for hard work, and an ability to stand up for her rights.

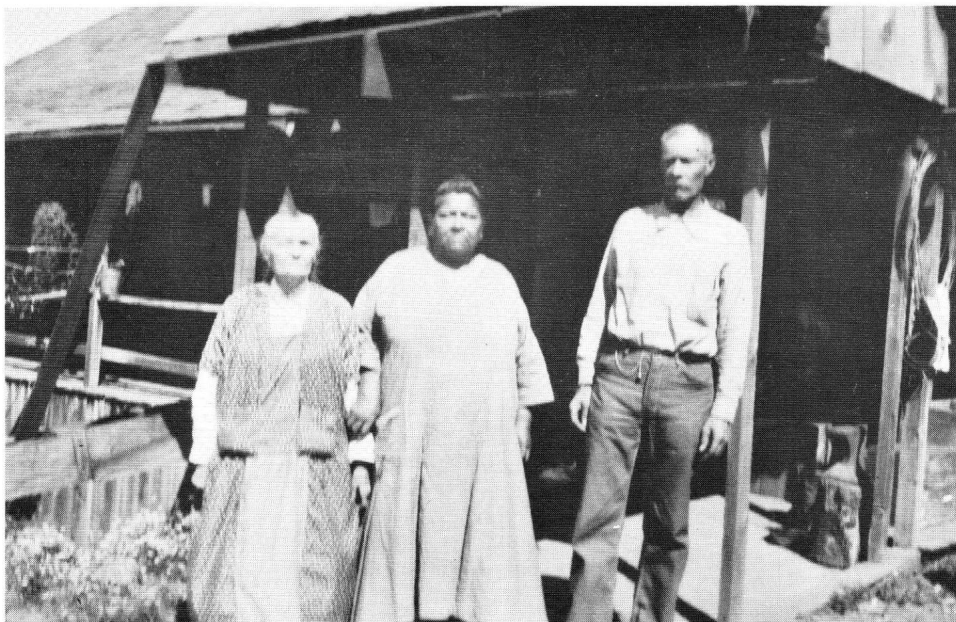
Pearl reminisced about a time when her mother had been low on firewood and had repeatedly asked Ben to fill the woodbox. At last Mamie had burned every twig and scrap of wood and paper in the yard and the house. She knew that her husband would be expecting a hot supper, and the only wood that remained was lumber that Ben had purchased for a new wagon bed. Mamie had gazed longingly at that lumber for weeks while scrounging for fuel. The ex-



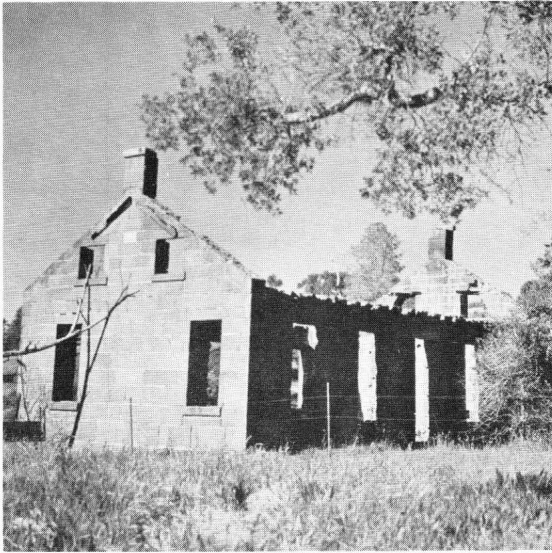
**JOSHUA JONES, JR.**

**He was Sheriff of Calaveras County.**

asperated little woman finally picked up a saw and went to work, and when Ben arrived home, he ate a supper cooked on a stove stoked with his good lumber. He went out immediately after the meal and cut and brought in wood to fill the empty woodbox.



**AT SHEEP RANCH**  
**Grandma Mary Bryant with**  
**her daughter-in-law**  
**Annie, and her son Harry.**



#### AFTER THE FIRE

The sturdy stone walls of the Wildermuth-Jones house as they appeared in 1970, just before the restoration by the East Bay Water Company. *Society Files*

Grandmother Bryant resided for many years near Calaveras Big Trees in a simple frame house. There was also a small cabin nearby, a barn and a spring house in her "mountain meadow". The spring house was a small structure built over a running stream where such perishables as milk and butter and watermelons were kept fresh and cool. Mary Bryant liked to spread a red-checked tablecloth on her table, and her salt and pepper shakers were always on the table and ready for the next meal.

All of the other grandparents had died by the time Pearl was three years old. Grandma Bryant was losing her sight and when the doctor recommended surgery, Pearl accompanied her grandmother to Oakland for the operation. The small girl was terrified by the indoor plumbing in that city.

Whenever Ben was unable to find work for his teams, he would hitch up the wagon and transport his family to Grandma Bryant's home. There they would make shakes for a living until word reached them that the teams were needed again. Ben and his mother-in-law Mary both had the skill and energy required for shake making, and it provided money whenever they needed it. Eventually Grandma Bryant moved to Sheep Ranch to live with her daughter-in-law, Annie.

With the introduction of the traction engine, the era of the long-line skinner drew to a close, and Ben had to look for another way to support his family. About 1909, they moved into the Wildermuth house near Watertown, on the old river road from Campo Seco to Mokelumne Hill. The large imposing home was constructed of native stone with

"1861" carved near the front door. All of the outbuildings were made of stone, also, with the exception of the barn. The place had served as a stage stop in days past, and it still showed signs of having been a fine residence. The Jones family was able to purchase it at a very low price, because it was reputed to be haunted. Mamie was afraid to move in and was never happy there. In later years, the property was acquired by East Bay Water Company, and Pardee Lake backed up almost to the spot where the barn had been located. A brush fire burned out all of the house except the stone masonry. In 1971, East Bay Water restored the old house, and it is now open to the public on occasions as a meeting place.

While the family lived there, William Wayne Hoover, then seventeen, came to work for them. A cheerful boy, third in a family of five, Bill had formerly lived with his paternal grandmother, Mary Potter Hoover. His grandfather, Daniel Wayne Hoover, had been blind for many years before his death in 1907 at their home in Campo Seco. Bill's sister, Edna Mabel, was married to a rancher, Albert Fields, and they had three daughters. A brother, Courtney Hoover, lived with their father, Charles Henry Hoover, in Shasta County. Courtney was a handsome boy; unfortunately he was thrown from a rearing horse and died at the untimely age of twenty-one. He was buried in the cemetery at Campo Seco. When Charles Hoover's wife,



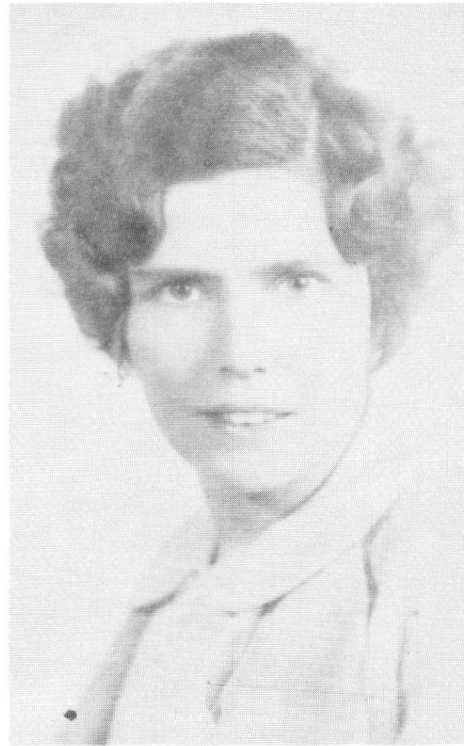
**BEN JONES, SR.**  
With grandson Wayne



Jeannette Nordyke Hoover, died in Igo, Shasta County, in 1904, he had brought the two younger girls, Cynthia and Layton, and young Bill to Campo Seco to live with their grandmother. The grandchildren were quite a burden to Mary Hoover, who was already caring for her blind husband.

At the time of Bill Hoover's arrival at the Jones home, their daughter, Violet Mary, was living with Grandma Bryant at Sheep Ranch, in order to complete her grammar school education. During family visits, Bill and Violet became acquainted, fell in love, and were married when she was sixteen and he nineteen. Unfortunately, it was a stormy marriage.

One summer night, when Ben Jr. was about twelve, he picked up his shotgun, whistled for his dog, Shep, and went hunting. The family and Bill Hoover were enjoying the balmy evening on the back porch. Bill and Ben Sr. had been hauling ore from the Penn Cooper Mine at Campo Seco to the railroad at Valley Springs with a six-horse team all day, and suddenly they heard an anguished cry for help. Ben Sr. hurried to investigate and found his son badly injured. While crawling under a fence, the boy had thrust an arm back to drag the big gun through after him.



**PEARL JONES**



**WILLIAM WAYNE HOOVER**



**THE WM. WAYNE HOOVER FAMILY**  
Bill and Violet with their children



It had gone off and had shot him just below the knee. His father carried him home, and Bill Hoover rode for the doctor.

When the doctor arrived at last, he was accompanied by his son, a recent medical school graduate. After the examination, the older physician informed the family that an immediate amputation was imperative, but the younger doctor asked that he be allowed to try to save the boy's leg. Mamie Jones collected all of the lamps for illumination, and the two physicians laboriously picked pieces of bone and shot out of Ben Jr.'s leg. For years to come, small pieces of bone would continue to work out of the leg, but Ben Jr. walked on it for fifty more years.

About 1915, the Jones family moved to a five-acre parcel of land on the outskirts of Mokelumne Hill. Their neighbors across the road were the Juri family: a mother, father, two sons, and a daughter. Pearl Jones, who was thirteen at the time, enjoyed the company of the youngest Juri girl, Mary, who was two or three years older than Pearl. The Juri girls and their mother had been well-schooled in all of the social graces, and the boy was a dashing figure on a horse.

Next door to the Joneses was a handsome, outspoken maiden lady, Rose Sheridan, whom Pearl recalled as being in her late fifties. The early death of Rose's sister had left her the responsibility of rearing her brothers and sisters, so she had never wed. She appeared to be financially well-off, and her only companions were her three cats. Three rather rough and uneducated brothers moved to Mokelumne Hill, and to the astonishment of the Jones family, the eldest man courted and married Miss Sheridan.

From age fifteen to seventeen, Pearl Jones rode a horse to high school daily and stabled him in the school barn. In winter, she would tuck her hands under the horse's mane to warm them sufficiently to unsaddle him. She attended school at Mokelumne Hill for two years only, because of the death of her mother. A sympathetic Aunt Net invited her to come to San Joaquin Valley to live, but Pearl preferred to finish school nearby. Her father found a boarding home for her in Jackson, and she was graduated, valedictorian of her class. She regretted that her mother had not lived to share in the happiness of her graduation day. On July 26, 1950, Pearl married Ormond Cecil Smith. Violet Mary had married William Wayne Hoover in 1912 at West Point and their brother, Ben Jr., was also married. Ben Sr. never remarried after his wife's death. He was a dearly beloved grandfather and lived happily with his various children until his death in Oakland, California, in 1940.



**PEARL JONES**

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#### REFERENCES

The biographical material and family pictures were provided by Mrs. Dale Davonne Hoover of Ukiah, California, whose husband, Wayne, is a grandson of Benjamin Franklin Jones, Sr.

Additional information came from these sources:

Genealogies of the California State Society of Daughters of the American Revolution.

Census and Probate Records of Calaveras County at the Calaveras County Museum Archives, San Andreas.

Three unpublished articles by the late Pearl Kathryn Jones Smith, daughter of Benjamin Franklin Jones, Sr.:

Such as We

Record of a California Family

A Walk Down Memory Lane

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#### "THE JUMPING FROG"

We have available for sale a limited number of the Dover edition of Mark Twain's celebrated story "In English, then in French, then clawed back into civilized language once more by patient unremunerated toil." The list price is \$2.50 plus 60 cents for postage and handling. Members may purchase a copy for \$2.00 plus postage by notifying our office (209-754-1058) or writing to the Society at Box 721, San Andreas, CA 95249.

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### OUR SCHOOLHOUSE PROJECTS

As we go to press (late as usual), the Altaville schoolhouse has been moved safely to its new location near the highway, in front of the State Forestry Station. Restoration will continue as weather permits, and especially as additional funds become available. As many of you know, the County and the City of Angels have each provided \$5000, and the Society \$2500 for the restoration. In addition, members of the Society, members of the Berkeley City Club, and other individuals and organizations have contributed (at last count) some \$7350. Local suppliers have helped by making materials available at a special price or as a donation. The State Forestry and the Baseline Camp continue to provide substantial help in supplying labor and some equipment. However, additional funds will be needed to complete the restoration. The society will be pleased to receive such funds, which are tax exempt expenditures, and forward them to the Committee.

Another project that has been in progress for a year or so is the collecting of pictures of our early schools, many of which were of the one-room variety, and of information about them and the teachers and pupils. We hope to con-



ALTAVILLE SCHOOL

Just 100 years ago, nearly sixty pupils and their teachers stand in front of the school for the annual picture. The Prince, Demarest, Frazier, Nuninger, Baumhogger, Becker, Lee, Starr, Marchal and Smith families were among those sending children to Altaville school in the early 1880's.

*Society Files*

clude this study with publication of a book on the Historic Schools of Calaveras County.

Many persons have assisted the committee in supplying pictures and information. But we still need pictures of the schools listed below. If you can help, please get in touch with Eva Soracco, Star Route 3, San Andreas, CA 95249, or Bessie McGinnis, P.O. Box 542, Angels Camp, CA 95222.

Bald Mountain	Evergreen	Pleasant Springs
Bear Mountain	Lincoln	Rindge
Big Trees	Negro Gulch	Table Mountain
Black Hill	Oak Grove	Taylor's Bar
Burson	O'Byrnes Ferry	Union
Cave City	Pine Log	Washington Ranch

### NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Arighi, Arnold  
Celia M. Beltramo, Angels Camp  
Mrs. Charles Gross, Marysville  
Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Peyton, San Andreas  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Stewart, Mountain Ranch  
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