



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
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CALAVERAS RANCH FAMILIES

One of the best known ranch families in the county undoubtedly is that of the descendants of Joseph Whittle. The Whittles have been actively working their lands and grazing leases for three generations since the first Joe Whittle came to Calaveras. Ida Whittle (Vergara) Pierce wrote this interesting family chronicle some ten years ago, and presented it before the Society. Today Ida and her brother Clenn are the only survivors of their generation of the Joe and Lilly May Whittle family. There are a number of other descendants of the first Calaveras Whittle, however, here and elsewhere in California. We are pleased to print the Whittle story in this issue, illustrated with some of the family pictures.

Our second article concerns another Calaveras pioneer, Frederick William Mentz, and the Mentz Ranch on Love Creek, now owned by the Elsworth Alford. Grace Alford gave the Mentz history for us at our March meeting in 1978, and Dale Clifton, a Mentz descendant, kindly loaned some of the family photographs.



THE WHITTLE SURREY

Don Whittle, Bill Reyes,
Harry Whittle and Mr.
Hodges are off to town.

THE WHITTLE FAMILY

by Ida Vergara Pierce

In the year 1849, when the call of California gold was echoing around the world, a number of people from Australia answered this call. One of these was Joseph Whittle of Sydney, who, with his family, emigrated to California. They came to San Francisco and on to the Sonora area. At that time there was much placer mining for gold along the Stanislaus River, so the Whittles moved down onto the river below the present town of Melones.

A son, Joseph (Jr.), had been born in Sydney in 1843. He grew up along the Stanislaus, where he met and married an Irish girl, Mary Ann Quigg, in 1868. The Quigg family were homesteaders on the Calaveras side of the river near the little settlement of Bostwick's Bar. They had emigrated from County Cork, Ireland, to California by way of New York. Mary Ann had two brothers, Henry and Mike, and a sister Kate. The latter worked later on for the Fair family of Virginia City fame, in New York.

Early in 1896, young Joe Whittle struck a rich pocket of gold near Albany Flat. He used part of this to purchase Isaac Nantz's 160-acre homestead which Nantz had proved up about six years earlier. Joe paid him \$300 plus \$6.00 in back taxes and \$10.63 in court costs. Some stock was also included in the purchase.

This parcel, about three miles south of Angels Camp, is now known as the "Old Whittle Ranch". At that time, the adjoining ground was owned by the Brunner family. The ranch has both gentle slopes and some rocky hillsides. Below where the first home was built was a spring and small reservoir for stock-watering and garden use. The Whittles raised stock mostly for their own use. Joe also bred and trained a few head of trotting horses, much in demand at that time for buggy horses.



JOSEPH AND LILLY MAY WHITTLE

They were married in 1897 at Lemoore.

Joe and Mary Ann were the parents of six living children, Henry, Elizabeth, Kate, Joseph, Mary Ellen, and Addie. In addition, triplets were born, but died soon after birth. All the children were born at the ranch.

While the children were still small, Joe worked for the county on the roads and also as a road and poll tax collector. The story handed down affirms that he was conscientious in his job, such as the time he stopped a friend who refused to pay toll. Joe walked up to the wagon, unhitched one horse and led him away before the astonished eyes of the owner, saying, "I'll keep the horse until you pay toll." The friend, bowing to the lesser of two evils, paid the toll.

It was on October 7, 1886, that Joe Whittle, known for his exceptional strength, suddenly became ill and collapsed. He died a few hours later from internal injuries caused by lifting a wagon stuck in the mud. This left his widow, Mary Ann, to raise the six children alone.

One way Mrs. Whittle brought money into the household was by walking the three miles into Angles Camp to do housework. She was also called out around the community to act as midwife and to care for the mother and

babies. The children helped at home by doing the gardening and tending the livestock.

When there was need for a new house, Mary Ann, with the help of her good neighbors, laid the floor. Then she gave a public dance to finance the purchase of the lumber for the rest of the house. In no time the house was finished.

Then tragedy struck the family. The children all came down with typhoid fever, and were all very ill. Mary Ann was beside herself. Not one of the neighbors would come near her. They were afraid of this dread disease. The children were too ill for her to leave and go for supplies. A family of Indians, named Dixie, lived nearby. Their son, Joe, who had had typhoid fever earlier, came and stayed to help her nurse the children back to health. Her son Joe was always grateful to Joe Dixie saying, "If it hadn't been for his help, I never would have survived." The Indian boy had cared for him day and night.

Henry (Harry), the eldest son, became a carpenter and worked in and around Angels Camp all of his life. He married Lizzie Albers, but this marriage lasted only a short time.

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Whittle married Frank Reister and raised a family of six children, Mary, Frank, Ann, Kate, Charles (Bud), and Louella. They purchased a farm west of Altaville on the Copperopolis road, where they ran a dairy for many years.

Kate married William Carpenter. Of this marriage there were four children, Mary, Jack Lewellyn, and Addie. The Carpenters spent some years in Angels Camp and then moved to the San Jose area.

Mary Ellen (Mamie) married Daniel O'Toole of Plymouth. They lived in Amador County for awhile, and then moved back to Angels Camp. There were five children, Lanthe, Daniel, Lillian, Clarence, and Ella. The O'Tooles later moved to Stockton where they lived for a number of years. After Daniel's death, Mamie moved back to Angels Camp.

Addie married William Beyer of Angels Camp. There were no children of this marriage. The Beyers moved to Stockton and lived their remaining lives there.

Joseph Whittle (the third) married Lilly May Battenfield of Lemoore, in Kings County. Lilly May had made a visit to Angels Camp with her cousin, and there met Joseph. He went down to Lemoore where they were married on December 21, 1897, by Reverend Reeve Wright, an uncle of the bride. They came to Angels Camp to the ranch where they built a house. There they spent all their married lives. There were seven children born to Joe and Lilly May. Earl Warren, their first child, passed away at the age of two years. John Donald, Harry Wesley, Joseph Loren, Winter Mills, Ida May, and Clenn Warren were the other children.

Joe Whittle (the third) was the only one of the children of Joe and Mary Ann who took an interest in ranching. He worked part time in the mines, but his first love was



**JOSEPH WHITTLE
RANCH**

**This was the old ranch
where Joe and Mary Ann
lived.**

**Grandpa and Grandma
(John and Pauline Batten-
field) come to visit, and
pose with Harry, Ida,
Don, Joe, and Winter.**





OLD WHITTLE RANCH

Joe and Lilly May on the porch.

the ranch. In 1908 he had accumulated more stock and took twenty pairs of cows and calves to the mountains in the Beaver Creek area along with the Herman Cordes herd. Somehow during that summer his twenty head, the only ones out of all the cattle in that area, got into poison. Joe lost all but a couple of cows and calves. After that blow, the Whittles couldn't go to the mountains for a few years until they had built up their herd again.

In 1913, Joe and Lilly May homesteaded 160 acres on Bear Mountain near Fowler Peak. Later they purchased another 160 acres of land from the Peri Estate, nearby, which bordered on the Bacialupi Ranch.

In 1925, Joe and his oldest son, Don, bought cattle from Herman Cordes and took over his mountain range permit. It was not until this time that the "J.W." brand was officially registered with the state to comply with Forest Service regulations. In 1924 they had rented the Gerber Ranch which was located on the Stanislaus River and Angels Creek, not far from the home ranch. Don Whittle still rents this ranch.

Soon after this, Joe and Don got a permit for the Beaver Creek mountain range. Don dropped this range in 1962 to take over the Pacific Valley range. He had a permit for 468 pairs and ran them on 18,000 acres rented from the Pickering Lumber Company and approximately 20,000 acres rented from the Forest Service. During a period of some forty years, the rent on this mountain range had raised from four to eight cents an acre!

In 1940 an opportunity came to buy the Bacigalupi Ranch on Angels Creek. Don, still retaining his one-half interest in the "J.W." cattle, and his younger brother Clenn bought the 1960-acre ranch for approximately

\$12.50 an acre. Soon after, in 1943, they purchased 75 pairs from an Adams estate in Tuolumne County and took over the Adams mountain permit in that county for 150 pairs. This range encompassed what is now the Dodge Ridge Ski area. Clenn continued on this range until 1961. Since the deaths of Joe and Lilly May Whittle in 1957 and 1960, Don Whittle has run his cattle with the "J.W." brand, and Clenn runs his with the "Quarter-circle W" brand.

In 1953, Don Whittle's son, Don R., who had been raising a few cattle since before his high school days, was discharged from the Air Force and started ranching with his father. His brand is "Y Quarter-circle", which his father and Clenn had registered for him in 1950. In 1958, Don (Sr.) was offered a chance to purchase a one-fourth interest in the 3700-acre Pyle Ranch near Copperopolis for approximately \$40 an acre. He and Don R. bought this interest and have since rented the rest of the ranch.

The history of the "J.W." brand, first used in 1869, had a slow start for the Whittles, like so many others that came to this area in the mid-1880's, were primarily interested in gold mining. It was not until the gold fever had run its course that the Whittles turned to ranching for a living. Of the children of Joe and Mary Ann Whittle, only young Joe took up cattle-raising. Of his children, only Don and Clenn followed ranching. In the younger generation there are two Whittles raising cattle, Don R. and Clenn's son Loren (who also works for P.G. & E.). The land the Whittles acquired over the years has remained in the family. Don now owns all but a 1/24th interest in the "Old Whittle Ranch". The rest is divided among other rela-

tives. Lilly May deeded the homestead on Bear Mountain to her grandson, Don R. for his help with the cattle. The Peri property was deeded to Don and Clenn.

Of the children of Joe and Lilly May, Herry married Opal Ellis of Bakersfield. He left at the age of eighteen to work in the oil fields and has followed the drilling of oil wells. His work has taken him to Iraq, to Africa, and around the world. He is presently living in Sacramento. There is one daughter of this marriage, Elizabeth Jane.

Joe Warren was married to Margaret Volf of Angels Camp. Joe passed away in 1934, leaving two children, Alberta and Joe.

Ida May married Dolph J. Vergara of Sonora. They are the parents of Glenn Allen and Dolores Marilyn. They make their home in Angels Camp.

Winter married Myrtle Dillon from the Lemoore area. They had two children, Gene and Irene. This marriage ended in divorce. Winter later married Gladys Hendrickson of Murphys. Winter has had a butcher business and at present runs the trailer park in Altaville.

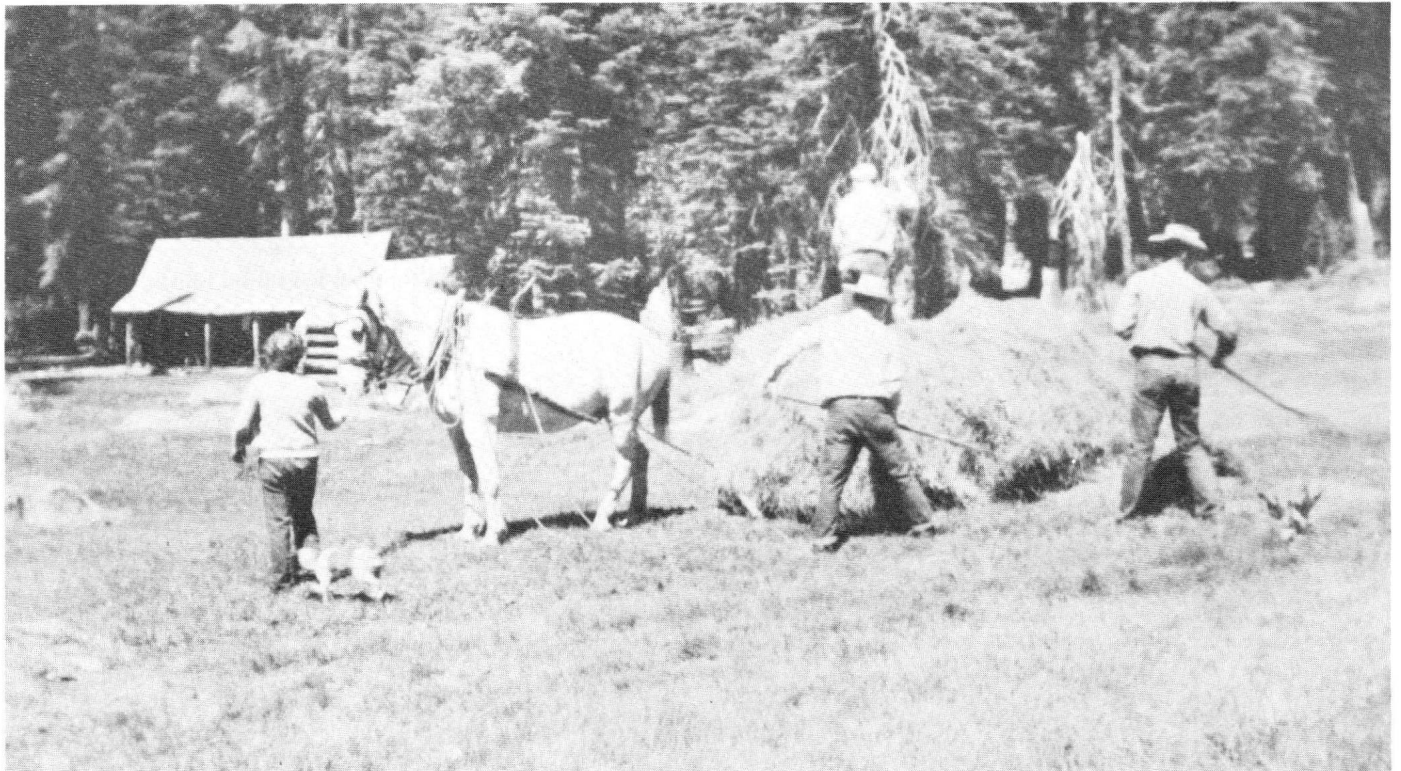
Clenn married Angelina Antone of Jamestown, and they have two children, Loren and Clenn, Jr. They are ranching at present in the Angels Area.

Donald married Marie Vassasa of Oakland. They have

two sons, Raymond and Donald Rex.

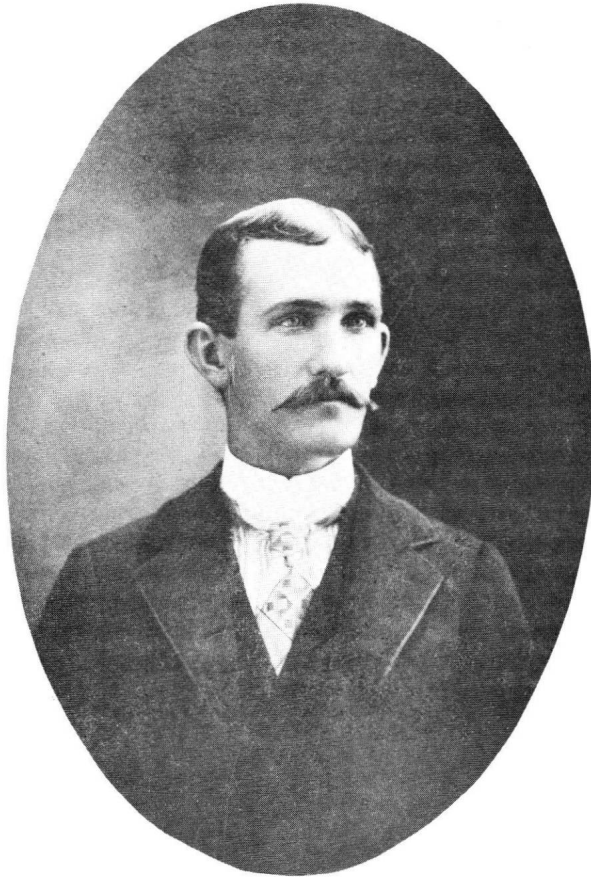
This brings the history of the Whittles up to the present day. It has been said that never a person who came to the Whittle Ranch over the years, not matter what the color or creed, was ever turned away. The hand of hospitality was always extended and an invitation for food and lodging, whatever it might be, was given whole-heartedly. This was the way of life among most of the pioneers of this area. Many a weary person stopped at the ranch — Chinese with basket-laden shoulders, Indians, cowboys, miners, and young boys without homes. The welcome sign was always there with the extended hand and family love.

Note: In the decade that has elapsed since Ida Whittle Vergara wrote the above, she has remarried. Her brothers Harry, Winter, and Don have passed away. She and Clenn have both retired in Angels Camp. Don R. and Loren are the ranchers of their generation, although Loren still works for P.G. & E. The Gerber Ranch, which Don used to rent, is now partly under the waters of New Melones. Tragically, Clenn Whittle, Jr., a jet pilot in the Air Force, lost his life when only 24 years old, in a plane crash.



HAYMAKING

Don Whittle, Donnie Ward, Tudy Anderson, and Marilyn Vergara Fiscus Haying at Upper Rattlesnake Cow Camp.



FREDERICK WILLIAM MENTZ
1851-1929

THE MENTZ RANCH

The Mentz Ranch is located four miles from Avery on Love Creek Road. It was originally a three hundred twenty-acre homestead filed as such by William and Stella Mentz in 1883.

Fredrick William Mentz was born in Northern Germany in 1851. I quote now from a letter written to us by his son Fred. "At the age of sixteen he shipped on an English sailing ship along the European coast but never reached the Mediterranean Sea. Just past his 18th birthday he returned home for a visit, and his mother said, 'I am glad you are home. You are just in time to start your military service; I will notify the authorities.' She went out the front door to do that, and he went out the back door and got aboard another English sailing ship and never went home any more.

"He reached San Francisco some time in 1875 and jumped ship leaving his pay behind. He worked in the building trades becoming a carpenter, and in 1878 he went to visit his stepsister who lived at a stage stop over on

the Copperopolis road about seven miles from Altaville, called Elkhorn Station. While he was there he met a Mr. Dunbar, who had a sawmill and ranch far up in the mountains, and he needed help, so naturally he took the job."

Fred writes, "My father was so much impressed with the location that Mr. Dunbar said, 'I know a place a short ways over the hills and will go over there with you.' One look made the deal. Father and Mother were married in October 1882, having met and courted at the Elkhorn Station where Mother worked, her home being about three miles away."

Frederick William and Stella Parrish Mentz began their married life on the ranch. In fact they were married in the round house. Six children were born to them: Alfred in 1883, Amelia in 1885, Fred in 1887, Rosa in 1891, Hermann Avery in 1894, and Ernest in 1896. The last two did not live to adulthood; Herman was drowned in the creek at age three.

There was much work to be done on the ranch. Quoting Fred, "There was a cleared spot of not over five acres in the meadow, and that was about the only cleared land on the place. All the low land was or had been heavily timbered with cedar, and that being post timber was the first to be cut. The stumps being of a permanent nature posed quite a problem and for more than fifteen years was a real job. One stump the children worked on for months." About twenty acres were finally cleared in the meadow.

Two big barns were built. The smaller one by the road was built first. It had a large hay loft from which the hay was sent down in chutes into the stalls below where the cows stayed in winter. The floor in this part of the barn was made of hexagonal-shaped slabs of cedar fitted together. There is also a harness room in this area and a steep stairway going to the hay loft. The big barn is fifty-five tall at its highest part with a long sloping roof on one side and a ridgepole twelve to sixteen inches square and forty-five feet long in the center of the roof. We have always wondered how this huge ridgepole was elevated into position. Dale Clifton, the grandson, told me that his grandfather and grandmother managed to do this by means of a block and tackle with grandmother driving the horses. Tree poles support the roof from the ground. There is also a cellar under part of the barn where evidently apples and cider were stored. A ramp was on one side for loading the hay which was baled by a built-in hay press made from oak timbers and from iron rods salvaged from the Utica flume. Much of this baled hay was taken to the stage stops at Avery and Big Trees.

There was a small blacksmith shop equipped with anvil, blower, wooden vise, and other tools. Here, iron hinges used for the barn doors and huge chains for pulling out the stumps were made.

About one thousand feet up the hillside from the cabin is a cistern built of cement and rock, holding twelve

hundred gallons. This is fed by a spring which never goes dry even in the driest years. There is a fifty-foot drop to the house, so the gravity flow gives sufficient pressure without a pump.

Clearing about ten acres of land and planting three apple orchards was another great task. These apple trees are still bearing, and we have counted over a dozen varieties; there are many old fashioned kinds that are never seen in stores—Spitzenbergs, King Davids, Baldwins, Winter Bananas and others. We heard that the apples were hauled in the farm wagon and sold in Murphys and Angels Camp, about a day's trip away at that time by wagon.

Building the Mentz home must have occupied a good deal of the time, during their first years there. The family lived in a barn-like structure until the new home was built. According to Fred, the home was built partially on one one hundred sixty-acre parcel and partly on another one hundred sixty acres, so that after seven years, when it was necessary to go to the land office in Sacramento to prove up on the claim, they were entitled to three hundred twenty acres. This trip was made in 1890, and Fred, three, accompanied his parents and Mr. George Avery and a Mr. Mullen, who went along as witnesses to testify that the Mentzes had lived on the land. The home had burned down in 1933 before we bought the place, but people said that it was a very well built structure. The remains of the basement made of bricks were still visible. Alongside the basement or cellar was a ditch which evidently carried diversion water from Love Creek and served as refrigeration for things kept in the cellar. The ditch continued along the entire upper edge of the meadow, and the water was used to flood it by a system of iron slabs damming up short sections of the ditch at a time. When water is plentiful, we still irrigate using this same ditch and slabs.

Two other buildings still on the place were both made of huge logs fitted at the corners. One was used as a hog shed which had no door, only an opening with a panel which lifted up or down. The other, called a root cellar, was built partly into the ground and had a double ceiling filled with sawdust. Vegetables, fruit and supplies were kept cool in summer and from freezing in the winter in this cellar.

Split-rail fences surrounded the meadow. Mr. Alford estimated there must have been at least four thousand rails there when we bought the ranch. One day Fred looked at them and commented, "I wonder if Abe Lincoln ever went back to look at the rails he had split!"

The children went four miles to Avery to school riding on a donkey. School was held in the summer, as it was difficult to get out in winter when there was much snow. The ranch is at the four thousand-foot elevation, about the same as Arnold.

Dale Clifton, son of Amelia, and the only surviving grandchild of the Mentzes, was the source of the follow-

ing recollections of his grandparents and of his visits to the ranch:

"My grandfather was a master carpenter and helped to build the Dorrington Hotel.

"My grandmother's brother used to be a caretaker at the Big Trees. One day at the ranch they heard a loud noise like an explosion coming from the direction of the Big Trees, about four air miles away. Grandmother hitched up the horses and buggy and went up to the Trees to see what caused the noise. That was when the big tree of Big Stump fame fell!

"One year, about 1893, when Alfred was ten years old, he was taken to Angels Camp to see the Fourth of July celebration. It was quite an undertaking to go that far, and Alfred was very excited about going. When they got there, snow was on the ground.

"Some Indian families camped winter and summer on my grandparents' land. They were always very friendly, and the folks bartered with them, and traded meat and other things for work. Sometimes, when the Indian chil-



MENTZ FAMILY

**Standing, l. to r.: Amelia, Alfred, Frederick,
Sitting: Frederick William, Rosa, and Stella.**

dren got sick, they were brought to my grandmother for treatment.

"My grandparents left the ranch about 1925 and moved to Angels Camp. My grandfather would go back in the summertime, and grandmother stayed with our family. I remember fishing in the creek, watching my grandfather work in the blacksmith shop and helping in the apple orchards."

Just a little more about the family. Alfred, the oldest, had an ice plant near the Tanner Ranch in Murphys. Later, he operated the Angels Ice & Soda Works, the ruins of which are still visible near Angels Camp. He died in 1950.

Amelia Bernadine Mentz attended Teachers College in Stockton and taught for twenty-six years in various elementary schools in this county and in Tuolumne City. Dale remembers staying during the week with his mother in a small cabin near the Fisher District School. They would return to their ranch in Altaville for the weekends. Before he was of school age he would go to school with his mother as he was too young to be left at home. Later Amelia served as postmaster in Altaville for seven years. Her husband was Samuel Clifton and they had two sons, Jerold and Dale. Dale has a son Dale and a daughter Robin and six grandchildren. Amelia died in 1954.

Frederick Warren Mentz was a master machinist. He worked at Mare Island during World War I. Later he lived in Southern California in Glendale and La Crescenta. He finally moved to Sonora where he died in 1965 at the age of seventy-eight.

Rosa Mentz was born in 1891. She married William Reid and lived near Redding. She died in 1915 from childbirth.

Frederick William Mentz and Estella Parrish Mentz and their three youngest children now rest in the private family cemetery in back of our present home—a suitable resting place on the land where they worked so hard and which they loved so much.

In 1943, sixty years after the original filing of the homestead, my husband Elsworth and I bought the ranch from Amelia Mentz Clifton and Fred Mentz. Alfred was still living but had sold his interest to the others.

In 1950, electricity was brought in, and we installed an electric pump and sprinklers to irrigate the meadow. Two dams were built on Love Creek making reservoirs for enough water for irrigation and recreation, as Love Creek often runs dry in summer.

We have carried out some restoration of the barns and log buildings to try to preserve them. Many artists come by to paint or photograph the barns, We use the smaller barn as our apple house for storing and boxing the apples.

We have taken care of the seventy-five-year old apple orchards, pruning and spraying the trees, thinning and picking the apples. A few of the trees have fallen over or died. Apple harvest time in October is always a fun time for our family and friends who come to help us pick. We also make our own cider using the old-fashioned press dated 1860. We used to sell our apples to a man in Fremont who ran an apple stand and could dispose of all the strange varieties, which stores will not handle.

One year our daughter suggested that we advertise and give the names of the kinds of apples that we have. We found out that people will come up even from Stockton and Oakland to buy some of their favorites. Of



**SCHOOLDAYS AT THE
MENTZ RANCH
1896**

**Lilly May and Joe Whittle
with their children (l. to r.)
Joe Jr., Winter, Harry, and
Don, with Clenn and Ida
in front.**



course, they also enjoy the trip to the ranch.

The hog shed we now use as a wood shed, and the other log building, the old root cellar, is idle, although in good shape. With electricity, modern refrigeration has taken its place!

The old Mentz home had burned down before we bought the place. The only dwelling was a small two room cabin without electricity, but with running water coming from the spring across the road and up the mountain side. This old cabin has been torn down.

In 1952, we built our new home of "core" logs. At the present time, our four children: Bob, Dorothy, David and Wendy, are co-owners with us. They want to keep and take care of the old "Mentz Ranch", which we now call "Love Creek Ranch".

"There's Only One Coke"

We wish to call your attention to the recent book about the late Professor R. Coke Wood, our long time member and one of our founders, by Berenice Lamson. Mrs. Lamson was a student of Dr. Wood's, and later was on the staff at the Pacific Center for Western Studies at U.O.P. She recorded her interviews with Coke and used these as the basis for the book which is named, "There's Only One Coke".

The book is well illustrated with a number of photographs, and contains much documentary material about the life of this remarkable man. It may be purchased from Mrs. Lamson, 3253 Calhoun Way, Stockton, CA 95209, for \$12.00 plus \$1.50 tax and postage.

**Calaveras County
Historical Society**

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

Are you receiving your copy of “Las Calaveras” late? Don’t blame our efficient production editor. Rather, look to the editorial staff who seem always to be several months behind in their work. Any volunteers to help out?

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1861-1927**

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Invite a friend who is interested in Calaveras history to join the Society. Mrs. Lillian Filippini, Star Route 2, San Andreas, will be glad to send an application.