

Crane Ridge

Lookout

1931

CRANE RIDGE LOOKOUT - 1931

Livermore, California

by

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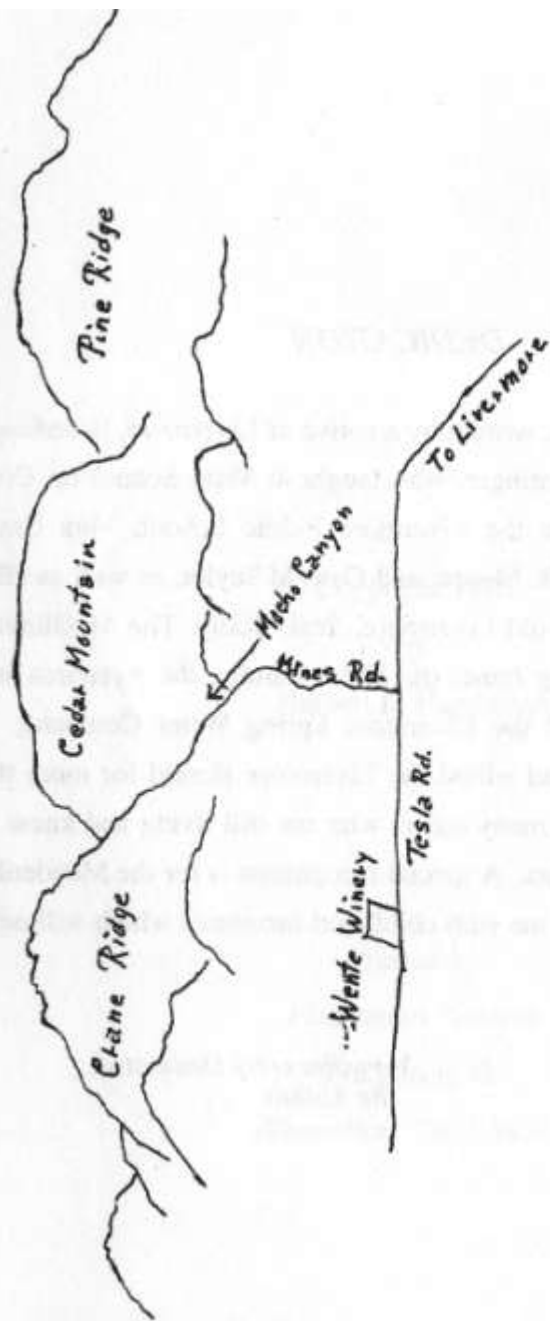
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DEDICATION

This little story, written by a native of Livermore, is dedicated to: my Aunt, Julia Kottinger, who taught at Vista School on Crane Ridge, my teachers at the Livermore Public School, Vera Crane, Phoebe Jackson, Lea B. Moore, and Oswald Taylor, as well as all of the lovable people of old Livermore, Susie Kelly, The McGlinchey Family of fire fighting fame, the Holm Family, the Aylwards who developed and owned the Livermore Spring Water Company, the Henrys who owned and edited the Livermore Herald for more than fifty years, and many, many others who are still living and knew the old community as it was. A special recognition is for the Mendenhall Family, who provided me with childhood memories which will never be forgotten.

*Very Sincerely Dedicated,
The Author.*



Crane Ridge, a nearly treeless promontory, is S.E. of Livermore. Access is by a nameless road joining Mines Rd. in the Mocho Canyon

Author's Note

The following pages contain a brief story of a closed chapter in the history of the Amador-Livermore Valley. The idea of a lookout on Crane Ridge grew out of the need for rural and range land fire protection. The Stockmens Protective Association of Livermore, which covered Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, was the first organization in the state to promote and develop this type of fire protection. In 1914 the Crane Ridge lookout was built with volunteer labor, material supplied by the Stockmens Protective Association. Members of the Association also built the telephone line which served the lookout, John and Jim McGlinchey being the tree climbers, stringing the wire on living trees instead of posts. An agreement with the landowners had been made that one acre would be fenced for the site and, in the event that the lookout would be abandoned, the property would again revert to the owners. Alameda County agreed to pay the wages of the individual who manned the lookout, and the season ran from May first to October first. Dick Famarris was the first official attendant and was followed by George Famarris. In the early 1920's Mrs. Henrietta Mendenhall took charge, serving until 1942, and has been considered the best lookout in the history of the institution. She was followed by James Moy, serving two years, Louis Lugo, serving five years, and Percy Harvey, who served from 1950 until his death.

The last official attendant was Gus Thiel, serving one year. In 1973, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors discontinued the service and the old lookout was abandoned. All that remains are the buildings and memories of the place. Those who served so well in this remote place are honored and loved by both valley and mountain residents and ranchers. I wish to extend a special thanks to Miss Mary McGlinchey for her help and information.

Names of persons mentioned in this work are fictitious and any similarity to persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

The Author.

Livermore in the 1930's

Everyone who has reached the age of fifty years or more has a tendency to look back to the life that was and remember childhood experiences and happy days of the early period of life. Looking back to the period of the 1930's in Livermore presents a picture that most residents of this city could hardly believe today. The town was small with a population of some 2,500 inhabitants, and the surrounding area was all ranches, farms and vineyards. Agriculture was the mainstay of the business establishments and everybody hoped for good years for the farmers to enhance their business and trade. The Livermore Public School had 400 students enrolled and the Livermore Union High School, District No. 1, could count something like 160 students. Something different from the modern Livermore of the 1970's! The old town had not made many changes since 1889 when the Herald printed a map picturing the settlement of that time.

These were the years following the great depression of 1929. People who were once well to do were wondering how they could pay their taxes. In the cities there were bread lines, but out on the farm there was plenty of food, just no money. Everyone was driving a car that was bought in the 1920's. We had a long sedan made by the J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company and it hauled everything from kids to machinery.

Our place was close to town, just two and a half miles from the flag pole, and three miles to the school on Fifth Street. In good weather we walked to school, but on rainy or cold days we got a ride in the Case car. What should have taken us twenty minutes to walk, took us a whole hour, simply because we had a lot of visiting to do along the way and usually waited for some neighbors to walk with us. On the way home we walked, looking backwards, in the hope that one of the neighbors would drive by and stop to give us a ride to their gate. No one ever passed the school kids on our road without stopping and giving us a ride.

The ranch we lived on consisted of three hundred acres. My father, at that time, raised wheat and barley and we milked a string of cows, raised some pigs and had chickens. In the long summer vacation, life seemed to get dull with the same old chores every day, gather the eggs, feed the chickens, feed the pigs and calves and get the cows in the barn at milking time. To a kid ten years old all this seemed rather senseless! Eggs, when you took them to the store to trade them for groceries, were valued at ten cents a dozen. The pigs, when you could sell them, went for two cents a pound. It was a rare occasion when there was a thin dime left to buy our way to the show.

Week ends were more interesting. On Saturday the ladies of the neighborhood always made cakes to feed to company that was sure to arrive on Sunday afternoon. On Saturday I would take my friend

Sammy, one of the old work horses, and visit the neighbors who made the best cakes. They let me lick the pots. (The cake frosting bowl was always the best.) Sometimes Sammy would get tired of waiting and come home without me. When my grandmother, who lived in town, would take a vacation, it was our job to water her yard. Sam and Joe, the team, were our transportation and we always went through the school yard, stopping at the drinking fountain to give our charges a drink. We were lucky that they never bit off the porcelain knobs on the fountain. One night, when the carnival was in town, we rode the horses through the area, past the ferris wheel, merry go round and the hawkers screaming their lungs out in front of their side shows. Dotemore, who was chief of police, thought that our horses should be afraid and cause some damage. He tried to take one of them by the bridle and lead us out, but the horse bit him and then sauntered on enjoying the sounds and sights. Good old Sam and Joe were probably the best baby sitters we had.

One of the entertainments in the winter was the killing of pigs. I could always manage to convince my mother and the teacher that I was sick so as to get in on the gory operation. Everyone had to eat, including the hired men, so we often had four pigs hanging in the oak tree in the back yard. As long as I was around it was my job to save and stir the blood for sausage and pudding. This part was a little hectic since I didn't seem to do things fast enough. No coagulation was

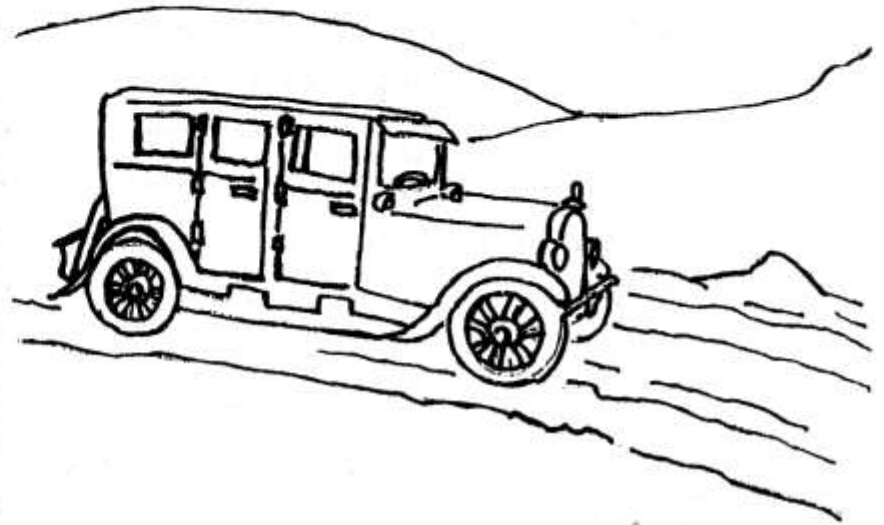


allowed and my father was forever hollering, "Stir faster-more salt"! All this was going on while the next pig was waiting to get his throat cut. The next thing to do was to scald and scrape the pig which took painstaking care to get the temperature of the water just right, and then a meticulous scraping that seemed to take ages. Then the carcasses were strung up in the oak tree to cool during the night. A cold day was always chosen for this and usually it seemed more cold than the north pole. (Once a pig froze so hard that it stood on its frozen ears). The next day was meat cutting day. I got to help trim the lard, which I really didn't like. All of the meat was cut into roasts and chops, the hams trimmed and the scraps and shoulders were ground and flavored for sausages. My mother was usually busy cooking liver and other ingredients for liver sausage. The third day was the best! The sausages were stuffed and hung in the smoke house. By the time the day was over, we were all ready to be finished with butchering until the next year.

Another nice job I had was assisting one of our hired hands, Tino Gonzales, in butchering a lamb. Tino was a native Indian who must have weighed three hundred pounds. He took a bath twice a year and came to work in a cart. His horse was just as skinny as Tino was fat. One day, in the summer, my mother thought that it would be nice to have a change of diet, so I was assigned to help Tino with the lamb.

When it was finished, I delivered the liver to the house on a plate and was greeted with, "Where is the rest of the liver?" I was not successful in convincing my mother that the liver was small and that was all there was, so there was nothing to do but go back to the barn and ask Tino where was the rest of the liver. Some question for a kid! Tino, naturally, was insulted and came out with the remark, "What you 'tink, I am a crook?" By the time I returned to the house my father had come in to save the day and convince mother that there was no more liver.

It was at the end of the school year in 1931, sometime in May, that I received a wonderful invitation. I had become friends of the Middlestall twins, Charlie and Jack, descendants of a pioneer family of Livermore. Their mother, a daughter of the Wetmes Family who started and owned the Uvas Blancas Winery, kept the county fire lookout on the top of Crane Ridge during the summer months. My invitation was to spend about half the summer there with Jack and Charlie. A vacation in these times for a kid was really something, even if it was only twelve miles away on the top of a four thousand foot, desolate mountain. I was in seventh heaven when I reported at home and my parents said that I could accept the invitation. Two more weeks of school, one week at home, and then off to the lookout for about six weeks of new life and adventure! Those three weeks seemed to be eternity, but, at last, the day came when we set out for the vacation resort on the top of Crane Ridge.



The Trip to the Top of Crane Ridge

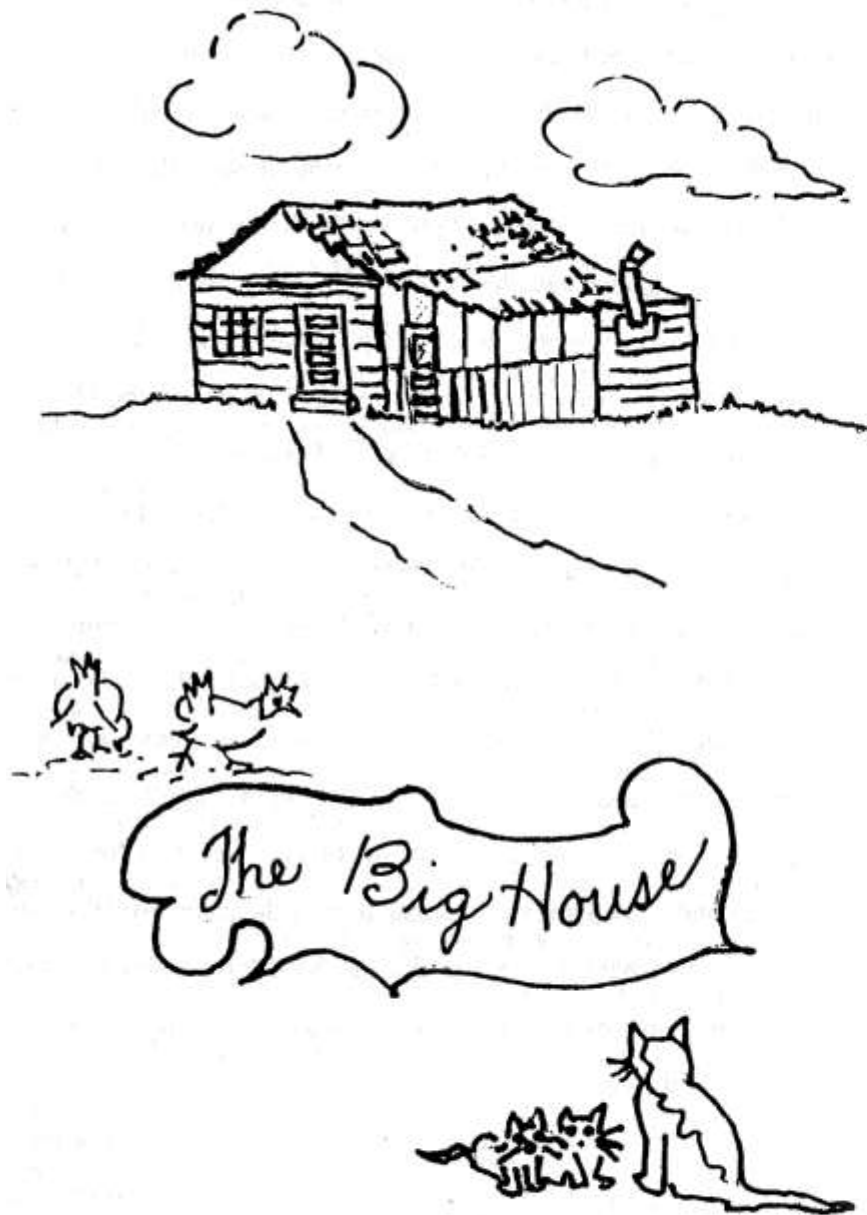
After school was finished for the year, it was necessary to have a week of preparation for my stay on the top of the mountain. First of all, I needed blankets and clean clothes, towels and soap to be clean with. (My mother didn't understand the water supply available!) To add to the cargo we were asked to bring some supplies from the town, since deliveries by the mail truck were only once a week, and the inhabitants of the lookout were starving for fresh produce. We obliged with gathering their order from Beck and Beede's store, adding a few things from our own larder, such as home made bacon, sausage and eggs from the ranch, etc.

On the second Sunday of June we loaded the Case car with all the supplies, managed to get ourselves in, four in number, and set out to climb the Wilson Grade and get on to the top of Crane Ridge. In those days Mines Road on the Wilson Grade was just one track, with plenty of sharp curves, steep and in some places hardly wide enough to let J. I. Case make the turns. As we climbed in second and low gears we all said a secret prayer that we wouldn't meet the "Frenchman" from Camp Repose on his way into town. He always drove six horses in an empty lumber wagon and at full gallop in spite of the dangerous road. Never got hurt because he was always a little tipsy from his home made wine. Everything went well until we got to the Overacker place when J. I. Case decided it was tired and stopped.

Something was wrong with the fuel flow, and, as my father looked under the hood, he found a cotter pin missing on the vacuum tank. Always resourceful at the right time, mother pulled a hair pin out of her hair, we fixed the vacuum tank and went on our way.

Our instructions were to go past the Bailey place to a gate on the left. Through the gate there would be a good road that would lead us directly to the lookout. Some people have strange ideas about a good road! The road we saw after the gate was something like two cow trails together and I think that's what they were. We set out, hoping that the cattle hadn't made another trail branching off that would lead us into a bad situation. We traveled on through a wooded area, following the trail that led us through all kinds of ruts and holes. At one place the road was so pitched to the right that we thought that J. I. Case would roll us down into Corral Hollow. After some very steep climbs we emerged out of the trees on the top of a knoll and there it was, the vacation spa on the top of the highest elevation for several miles around. The place was desolate of growth, except for grass, and the wind must have had a velocity of about forty miles per hour. About half a mile more of grinding in low gear put us into the fenced area along side the house. We had arrived!

If there was ever a bald mountain, this was it! You visualized yourself on the top of a dome with no place to go except to slide off the sides of the dome.

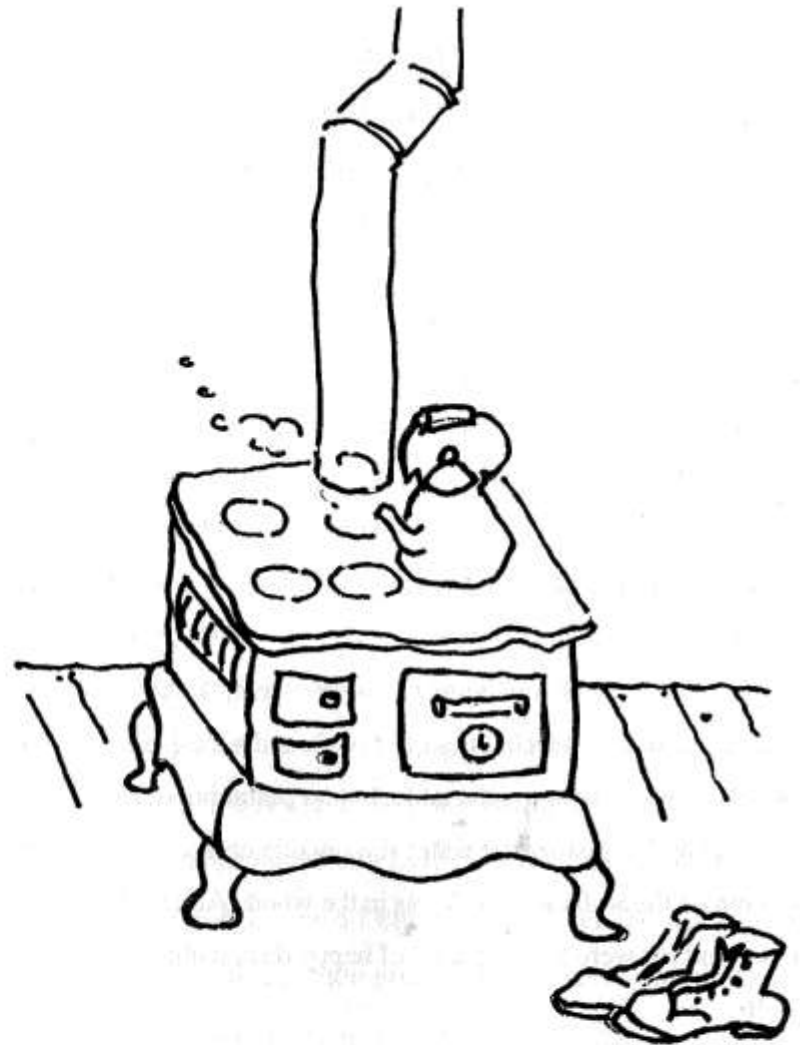
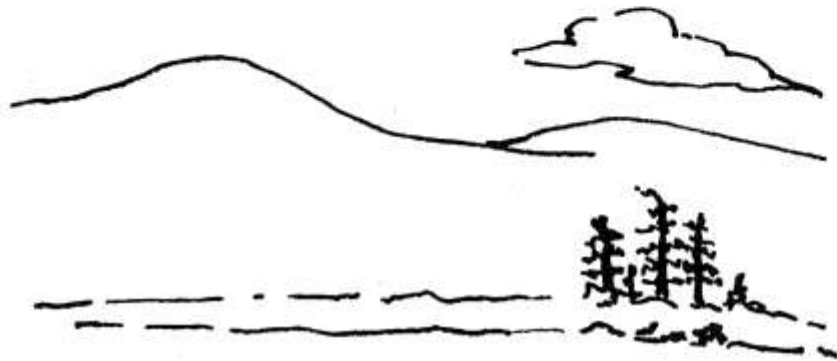


It seemed a mile to the nearest tree and the wind, when there was a breeze in the valley, seemed like a hurricane. However, one thing compensated for all the faults of the place, the view! It was Magnificent! You seemed to be on the top of the world with everything within view as you scanned the horizon. It was something that could keep you interested for days on end, as though you were seeing a tremendous relief map with all points visible.

Our valley was clear below. Each house and ranch was easily identified all the way to Dublin and beyond you could see the reflection of the sun on San Francisco Bay. Mt. Diablo stood high and majestic, the king of mountains with its vassal valleys and lowlands at its feet. Scanning to the south, Sunol was visible, the Livermore foothills and the old Livermore ponds still holding water on high ground. Pine Ridge looked blue with its covering of oak and pine and further to the south east, Cedar Mountain was interesting with its thick coverage of cedars, its species growing only here and in Lebanon. To the east you looked down into the rolling hills and flats of Corral Hollow and beyond the sites of old Tesla and Carnegie and the San Joaquin Valley.

As the weather cleared the snow capped peaks of the Sierras were visible and on several occasions we could see, to the north, Mt. Shasta, standing alone in all its majesty. This was a view that would interest anyone for an entire month. On days when the fog rolled into

the inland valleys from the bay, we seemed to be in another world, alone on the top of the mountain. The lowlands appeared as huge lakes of mist with only the mountain tops visible. My father had brought along binoculars and we spent most of the rest of the day viewing the tremendous landscape that was visible from this promontory.



"Old Red"

The Lookout

When the folks decided that it was time for them to return home, we waved good bye and watched the old Case pull over the last hill. Then I was invited to explore this mountain retreat that I had been so excited about. When asked what I thought about it, I exercised all the polite manners I could muster and said that it was really nice. The house was a typical mountain shack, consisting of three rooms, a good sized kitchen, a small room with beds in it and a telephone, a bedroom, and a very low screen porch, loaded with a bed, harness and saddles and a pack saddle, along with water containers of every description and size. A small passageway was left so that you could enter the house.

The kitchen was equipped with a sink, a cast iron stove that was red instead of black, (slightly rusty), and a long table with benches. There was a lamp on the table, but no plumbing in the sink, except for a drain that just let the water run outside on the ground. The decoration on the walls was the knots in the wood. All in all, it was a cozy place and we were to enjoy a lot of happy days within the rough board walls.

Stepping outside I was told that the county had made a deal with the land owners to set aside an acre for the lookout. This was fenced with a three wire fence, posts about twenty feet apart, because it was so far to go to find a tree where you could make a crude post. At each end there was a "Portege gate", so that Mr. Middlestall could

drive his team and wagon through the yard. One thing impressed me. It was a small, low rock house near the cabin that was put together with mud mortar, its purpose to store some chicken feed and keep a few things cool. Outside the fence there was a good sized barn with a team of horses, Jenny, the burro, some baled hay and a spring wagon. There were also about two dozen fat chickens grazing all over the place. The reason they were fat is because every time you took a step a million grasshoppers jumped out of the dry grass and the chickens spent all day gobbling up these delicate morsels. There were also a couple of dogs, very friendly, and about a dozen cats of all sizes and colors.

Last, but not least, was the bathroom plumbing. Chic Sales did quite a job of engineering when he figured this one out! I made the mistake of asking what that building was and got a down to earth answer or explanation from Jack, who was inclined to speak out very plainly. It had the appearance of a mountaineer's smoke house, built with weather beaten shakes on a flimsy frame. When the winds blew from the four directions, the little house leaned with the wind. Quite a sensation if you happened to be inside within the privacy of its not very stout walls! As outdoor plumbing goes, it was not the best, but adequate. When the hole was dug for it, bedrock was struck within one foot of the surface, so it was the chicken's job to keep that part of the "plumbing" in condition, (leveled off).



The back shakes low down were left off just for this purpose. They liked to go in there because the place was forever full of yellow jackets and grasshoppers, everything very tasty for the old hens. However, for the person on the upper floor, supposed to be in quiet solitude, all this activity was slightly nerve wracking. Fortunately it didn't rain while I was there, because it was no difficulty to look up and know what the weather was like outside. Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward's catalogs were stacked alongside the one holed seat for convenience. A well worn, dusty trail led from the big house to the little house that would easily lead you to the place of solitude on a moonlit night. However, I was always cautioned to take along a lantern or a flash light, just in case there might be an unfriendly snake with rattles on it coiled up in the confines of the lower level. Our hats off to Chic Sales for making life interesting!

This was the summer residence of the Middlestalls. Their period of occupancy began about the middle of May and went on until the first rains of fall when the danger of grass and brush fires would end with damp weather. Mrs. Middlestall was the official "Lookout" and her salary was from eight hundred to a thousand dollars for the season, a tidy sum for the 1930's. She was a rather stout woman, perhaps then in her forties, and is today considered the best individual who manned the old lookout since it was established. She had an uncanny knowledge of every canyon, hill, mountain, section of land and valley farm,

and when she reported the location of a fire it was always exactly where she said it was. She had been a school teacher before marriage, her name being Henrieta Wetmes, and was well read on many subjects which she shared with us ten year old kids when we had nothing else to do but learn something new and hear some interesting old stories. Both her family and her husband's family were old Livermore pioneer stock. As I remember, she had straight hair, cut short, and wore flat shoes and was always walking from window to window, or outside, to look for smoke of any kind in all directions. If we had a small bon fire on the ranch that you would think was not visible, she would report it and the county fire patrol would telephone and ask if we needed help. She did her best to present a good appearance on this wilderness mountain top, but available resources for beauty care did not make this easy.

Eddie Middlestall, the father, was a tall, lean individual, always wearing Levi's blue jeans and a blue shirt, high heeled boots and a slouched hat. His appearance reminded me of the "feather merchants" in the comic strip, "Snuffy Smif". He was probably a good looking man, but he hid all this with a handle bar mustache. He was at the lookout only about half the time, leaving early in the morning and not returning until evening. I think that we were mostly afraid of him, since he didn't give us much time and was very gruff in his manner. Sometimes he would leave in the model T. Ford, and if he was

hauling wood for someone, he would hitch the team to the spring wagon and trot off. He had a good three hundred acre ranch on Cedar Mountain, but never seemed to work it himself. It was practically inaccessible to schools and collecting the rent was easier. Sometimes he was employed and sometimes he did odd jobs at the lumberyard or on ranches.

One time when he was gone we needed milk. I was the only one who could milk the old cow that always hung around waiting for a free handout. She belonged to the Helm Family that owned the land surrounding us, had a calf and was gentle enough to bring into the yard where she was fed while being robbed of her milk. Her calf stayed outside the fence and complained bitterly all the time that "mama" was giving away his favorite juice. On this occasion the cow was brought in and fed, and I was given a low pan to milk into. Everything was going as well as it could with "Bossy" stepping all over the place to reach the feed, when over the hill the model T. Ford was spotted making its way toward us. I was told to hurry up because nobody was supposed to milk the cow but "Papa". I had about a panful, but when the excitement started I jumped up and made for the house, spilling half of the panful on the way. Nothing was ever said about this episode, but I am sure that Mr. Middlestall couldn't help seeing what was going on.

Jack and Charlie, my friends, the twins, were not at all alike.

Jack was rather tall and stout, interested in hunting and mountain life, while Charlie was skinny and short, had a squeaky voice and was the typical scholar for his age. At ten years of age, of course we all liked to do "kid" things and enjoyed our games and hikes and the stories that Mrs. Middlestall would relate to us. Jack had blond hair and light complexion, while Charlie was sandy haired and darker. Not at all identical twins, nor were they always in agreement since they had different interests. This was an interesting family to be with and an entirely different experience from anything that I had known.



The Water Supply

Before arriving, I think that I had expected to see running water in the house, water pumped from a well or a spring. Nothing fancy, you understand, but available water if you turned on a faucet. This is not the way it was! Good old Jenny was the pump. That very evening, about five o'clock, it was time to go to the spring and bring back a load of water. This was a chore that had to be done twice a day, not more often because the spring didn't flow that much and we had had a series of dry years. Well, Jenny was brought up from the barn, bulking every step of the way, and tied up at the screen porch. She was outfitted with a moth eaten pack saddle, blowing up her belly at the right time so that the cinch wouldn't be so tight. It was a real trick to tighten the cinch just as Jenny exhaled and most of the time we were not too successful.

Loading up the pack saddle was also a very meticulous and scientific job. All the water containers had to be put in the right place so that they would be balanced with equal weight on each side. This part seemed ridiculous, but as I learned later, when everything was filled with water the load weighed about as much as Jenny and we had better not flop her over and break some of the jugs. The first thing to be loaded was a fifteen gallon barrel laid between the cross pieces of the saddle. Then several canteens and canvass water bags were tied on with about eight water jugs of gallon size. Finally, with a little reluctance from Jenny, we set out for the spring, looking like junk



The Water Supply

peddlers that were too poor to have a wagon.

Jack had told me that it was a quarter of a mile to the spring, but he didn't say what kind of a quarter mile. As we approached the edge of the dome-like hill and saw the trail, I thought that I was looking down a cliff. The way was straight down, and as we began to descend, Jenny took little steps of about three inches so as not to fall headlong. It didn't take long before I found that she had the right idea. One long step would send you rolling to the bottom.

The spring at the bottom was situated in a small level place, fenced in so the cattle wouldn't get into the precious water. The spring itself was boxed in with a metal drum, about four feet deep with a wood cover over the top to keep out dirt and bugs. As we lifted the cover, all I could see was a thick sheet of drowned grasshoppers completely covering the surface of the water. It was a good ten minute task to skim off this collection before the water was visible. And this was the water supply!

We filled all of our containers, which emptied the spring to the very bottom, loaded them systematically back onto Jenny, making sure that there was no more weight on one side than there was on the other, and started to ascend the almost straight up trail. Jenny was still taking little steps, but this time very slowly. I'm sure that the load was pretty heavy and the uphill grade was as steep as you could get without having to chop out steps to climb on. The ascent took us about a

half hour, taking a rest about four times before we reached the top. Sometimes we had to give Jenny a push to get her going again and sometimes we had a rope that we put around her rear end so that we could pull from each side and give her a little assistance in the steep climb. Finally, back at the cabin, we unloaded the precious water, hanging the canteens and canvass bags on the screen porch where they would be cool. The rest was just laid on the floor somewhere out of the way. The canteens and bags were for drinking water and the rest was for washing hands and face, cooking, doing dishes, etc. There was nothing left over for a bath, real nice when you are ten years old! There was a fifty gallon barrel outside and any extra water was put in there to be saved for the washing of clothes. If there was enough we might have a bath in a wash tub. That took place about every six weeks if the spring produced enough. We also had to share a little water with the chickens, cats and dogs, Jenny and the horses had a watering trough about a mile away, so they were taken care of. At first, drinking the water was not an easy task, since I had seen the sanitary conditions at the spring. But it wasn't long before all that was forgotten and the water tasted very good. Besides, skimming off the grasshoppers was a twice daily chore and the whole thing became routine and accepted.

Visitors and Entertainment

One would think that life on the top of this mountain would become boring and uneventful in a very short time, but it didn't. At the time it was least expected somebody would arrive for a visit and stay a while to give us the news from the town and talk about the events of the mountain people who were miles apart, but led very colorful lives. The most frequent visitors were Roy Schutzfest and Jimmy Kilgore. Roy was with the County Fire Patrol under old John McGlinchey and his job was to see that the telephone line was in working order at all times. He always arrived in the morning in time for a cup of coffee made from our precious water.

Sometimes he came in a truck and sometimes on horseback. He had all the news from downtown and it usually took about two hours to catch up on the local gossip. He didn't bother to tell much about East Avenue and Tesla Road people because us kids were always listening in on the conversation on the party line. The lookout was outfitted with a telephone, one that you turned the crank, and there were from twelve to fourteen parties connected, with the lookout being the last on the line on the top of Crane Ridge. Sometimes, when a fire occurred, it was necessary to ask the persons using the phone to hang up so that the fire could be reported. And then the curious ones would listen and cause a bad connection and they would have to be asked to please hang up. Two ladies on Tesla Road called each

other every day in the morning and talked for hours. About all they had to say was that they had washed the dishes and made the beds. For the mountain people this was the nearest telephone at their disposal and they would often come to use the phone for business or family messages.

For us kids, the favorite visitor was Jimmy Kilgore. He was the state trapper at that time and used a dashing horse to ride the range and check the traps. Those days there were bounties on coyotes, mountain lions and some other predators which would attack the cattle herds and Jimmy always had some interesting stories to tell about his experiences. He was the neat and clean cowboy, shaved every morning and his clothes always looked new. His horse was always well groomed and the saddle and trappings were shined. To add to his attractiveness, he carried a pistol in a holster on the saddle, just in case a rattlesnake happened to be coiled in his path. These were the days of Tom Mix and Buck Jones in the movies and we always thought of Jimmy as their equal.

At that time the lookout was probably not a very old institution and people from town would take the trouble to drive the winding, narrow mountain road to the top of Crane Ridge just to have a look. This brought a lot of company and was always interesting to hear the people's reaction to the view from this elevation. Hardly a day passed that someone didn't stop in for a rest and a chat. One evening, just as the sun was about to disappear behind the western ridge of the Coast

Range, we had a special visitor.

We were just getting ready to prepare our supper when we heard a knock at the screen door and someone saying, "hallo, hallo". It was none other than the old Frenchman from Camp Repose across the Mocho Canyon. He didn't come, as he usually did, with the six horses and the lumber wagon. Some kind soul, who liked him better alive than dead, had driven him in a car. As always, he had been sampling his home made wine for most of the day and was now well under the influence of alcohol. He asked if he could use the telephone because he had to call his cousin in San Francisco about a business matter. Mrs. Middlestall invited him in, and since we had no spirits in the house, she offered him a cup of coffee which he refused as though he had been offered poison. She then took him to the room where the telephone was and gave us strict instructions to be quiet so that he could hear his call. We were quiet alright, with ears glued to the telephone conversation. Some was in English, we thought, and some in French, interspersed with some very colorful words in both languages, which came out loud and clear. At this point we were told to button our ears and go about our business. As he finished his call and left, he expressed a thousand thanks and appreciation (a little alcoholic), inviting us all down to Camp Repose, no doubt, to have some good (sour) wine made from his own grapes. Since it was about as far to town as it was to the lookout, we wondered why he used this phone, but then

decided that he was afraid that Dotemore and his police force of three might put him in jail for being drunk.

Entertaining ourselves seemed to be something that came easy up on this mountain top. We had games that we played on the kitchen table as we looked out over the valley below. Sitting there seemed to make you feel above everyone else and out of reach of the encumbrances of every day society. We did things that we wanted to do without any one being able to see or know what we were doing. Sometimes we played cards, old maid, go fish, etc. Outside, it was no use to play ball. The ball, after one throw or hit, would always end up at the bottom of Corral Hollow or in the Mocho Canyon. When we got tired of listening to the Ladies washing their dishes on the telephone, we made our own phone system with two tin cans and some old string. By holding the string taut between the two cans, we imagined that our voices carried over the string. Frankly, all I could hear was the roar of the wind and the kid at the other end getting some good exercise for lungs and vocal chords.

One afternoon Charlie got the bright idea that we should play radio station, put on a skit and announce the news. This seemed like an interesting thought, so we began to set up a studio on the west side of the house. It was decided that we would mark our stations at imaginary microphones with rocks, but after searching the hill, we found only one rock about six inches across. How to mark the stations! Necessity being the mother of invention, we found the material that would be satisfactory.

During the spring, when the feed was green and soft, Helms' cattle had literally plastered the hill with nice, flat cow flops, very juicy when fresh and nicely flattened and spread! We gathered what we needed and set up the studio. The next thing was to write the script. We decided to have a skit and announce the news to our audience in the valley below, who, fortunately could neither see nor hear us. Back at the kitchen table, we began our work on the skit. Charlie had already made up the news cast which he would do by himself. Each one of us would have a part and must write his script in conjunction with the whole company. After completion, we decided that Jack's was unacceptable, due to choice of words, (Jack's vocabulary was quite extensive), and after much argument and being kicked out of the house, we had a two man skit. The news cast we had to review before broadcasting so that we all might add some item of importance, (the ladies on the phone washing their dishes). After many suggestions from Jack, (all not acceptable), we repaired to the studio and began our very unique and professional broadcasting. After about two minutes of standing and shuffling at the microphone, the markings of our stations began to pulverize, so we sent Jack through the fence, grumbling with each step, to gather some more manure. (Jack, being a bit of a practical joker, brought back a cow flop that was not completely dry and put it at Charlie's station, causing what might have been considered the fight of the year.) Charlie was enchanted with idea of news broadcasting and I thought that he would never be finished. There were

such items as what fires had occurred in the season, what might be expected of new fires, who just got married in Livermore, what person ran away with another's wife, etc., and etc. Today, Charlie has reached a high peak in journalism. The last I have heard, he was teaching the subject at California Polytechnic School of Engineering in San Luis Obispo. I wonder if he remembers how he started his career?



Supply Trip to the Bailey Place

No one in this world has ever been able to live on the top of a bare mountain without having some supplies from the civilized world. Salt and flour are probably the most essential things needed. Needless to say, the occupants of the lookout were not different. Once a week the mail truck for the Star Route came up Mines Road and it was possible to have the driver carry needed supplies along with the mail and leave items needed and ordered at the stores and businesses in Livermore at the Bailey Place, which was owned by the Helm Family and was a part of the land on which the lookout was situated. And once a week, I think it was Wednesday, we went with Jenny to the Bailey Place to haul the supplies and mail home to the lookout. This was a momentous occasion since we felt that we were being in contact with civilization.

The trip was something like four miles on foot, because Jenny had to haul a heavy load. Papa Middlestall was usually on hand to make this trek because there were some items that were quite heavy and required more than the strength of ten year olds to lift. The trail was not like going to the spring. It followed the top of a ridge of hills and was not very steep, just long. Half way, there was a watering trough that always had polywogs in it and a place where we could get a drink of water. At the time of each one of these excursions I was asked if I would like to go along and, of course, I said yes.

Once again, it was getting Jenny from the barn and putting on the pack saddle with the usual swelling of belly and timing of the tightening of the cinch. Jenny went down empty, but on the return trip the load was heavy. Knowing that we could get some polywogs from the half way point, we begged for a jar and got it. So one morning, in midweek, we set off to get the mail and supplies, a weekly chore. The day was pleasant and the trail all downhill. We stopped for a drink but didn't fill our jar until the return trip. On arriving at the Bailey Place after what seemed to be a two hour walk, we rested and ate lunch that had been packed for us.

The Bailey Place was on Mines Road. After lunch we went to the barn to check what Mr. Gebertstag, the mail driver, had left for us. There was a bale of hay for Jenny, a sack of flour, sack of potatoes, some fresh apples in a bag, about ten pounds of beans, rice, a side of bacon, a sack of chicken feed, a large bag of canned goods, and, last but not least, two dozen eggs. All of this was for dear old Jenny to carry. The mail, and there was quite a lot, we kids carried in a paper bag, along with our jar for the polywogs. We also had a week of the San Francisco Examiner and the Livermore Herald. With all of this it took about an hour to pack Jenny and get everything loaded so as to have an even balance. There was a lot of weight, but much more bulk, making Jenny look like a mountain. If she didn't have such big ears, we wouldn't know that she was a burro.

Not only did she have to carry our supplies, but also her own feed. One thing, she got special alfalfa hay, something that the horses didn't get. It seemed a little strange that eggs were among the supplies received, since there was a flock of chickens at the lookout. On good days we got as many as two dozen eggs from the old hens, but sometimes there were only five or six to be found in the hay bales, etc. What really happened was that some varmint came at night and made off with the precious hen fruit, even though Jack said that the chickens ate something in the bottom recesses of the "little house" that didn't agree with them. So, about once a month, Jenny carried some eggs, a delicate process on the rough mountain trail on the back of a reluctant, long eared donkey. Amazing though it may seem, the eggs arrived at the summit without being broken.

The return trip, though uphill, was pleasant. Leaving the Bailey Place we walked under some wonderful shady oaks, almost until we reached the half way point where the water trough was. Here we stopped for a rest and a drink of water, not to mention that we also got some polywogs out of the trough and into the jar, filled with green water (algae). With all of the bundles we had to carry, a jar of polywogs was no easy matter to transport, but we did reach the lookout with everything in tact. Our polywogs had to have their water changed every day in the jar they were kept in and this caused a little concern since it was one more quart of water that had to be carried from the spring every day.

They lasted about a week, but that didn't matter since we would be back to the Bailey Place for mail and supplies anyway and could get more at the watering trough as we passed on the return trip. I am sure that we were quite a sight as we trekked along the mountain trail with our overloaded jack ass, but kids are oblivious as to what they look like and besides, there wasn't anybody to see us way up on Crane Ridge.



Grub and Such

One might think that life on the top of a mountain would not be bountiful in food, balanced diet, and nourishment. This is really not so! With the paltry amount of water from the spring, it was impossible to grow any fresh vegetables, of course. This might throw off somebody's idea of a balanced diet, such as some of my mother's friends who always had to have lettuce on the table, and I hated it. Any fresh fruit or produce we had was brought to us by some good soul who came to visit and made us a gift of fresh produce that they brought with them.

There was no way to keep things like this without refrigeration or ice and we certainly couldn't waste water on anything so frivolous. However, food was certainly plentiful. Good old red, (the rusty stove), always put out with tasty meals when properly stoked and managed by a good cook who knew the eccentricities of the old monster. On Sundays we usually had a real gourmet meal of chicken and dumplings, the best that I ever ate. Running around the hill with the old hens were about two dozen big, fat roosters, a mixture of Rhode Island Reds and Plymouth Rocks. Just like the hens, they ate grasshoppers, the grain that we fed them, and made their daily explorations and digs in the lower recesses of the "little house". Fat and sassy they were, especially after "old red" got through with the cooking of them in the hot, dark recesses of the oven. (Mrs. Middlestall was a very good cook and could do marvels with the old wood burning cook stove and what lit-



tle else she had available).

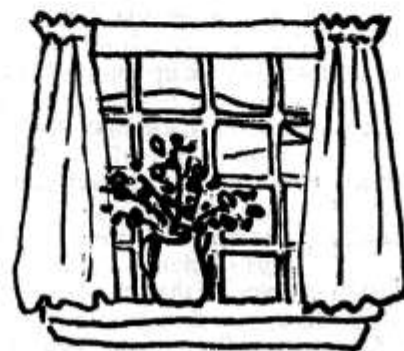
On Saturday night we had the chore of going down to the barn after dark with a flashlight and snatching a big rooster off his perch somewhere on the rafters. We were all quite expert at blinding the chicken with the light and then grabbing him by his feet. With enough squawking to wake the dead, we carried him up side down to the yard and the chopping block that was a piece of wood for the stove that hadn't been split yet. With one swipe of the axe, Mr. Rooster's head went rolling. The cats, who had been circling nervously around us, made a lunge for it and there ensued a grand cat fight, until one smart kitty made off with the head behind the wood pile, where he could gnaw on it in privacy. The rest of the cats followed us to the house under our feet. Here, we dunked the rooster in a bucket of hot water and removed the feathers. Mrs. Middlestall cleaned the bird, saving the liver, heart and gizzard. The rest we threw down the hill for the cats and by morning it had been devoured.

Sunday dinner usually included some guests who just happened to arrive, people from town who were having a Sunday excursion to the mountain. Breakfast on top of the mountain was always bacon and eggs, cooked cereal, toast and coffee. Sometimes we had a special treat of hot cakes and home made syrup. This was the usual time for Roy Schutzfest and Jimmy Kilgore to show up, and after breakfast, to sit around the table and visit. The noon meal was often beans, (mountain chicken), a good, nourishing meal if you didn't have

to eat the same thing every day. Sometimes, when we were alone, we would just have a sandwich and a glass of milk, from our favorite cow who made her daily visit to get a tasty tidbit. The evening supper was always enjoyable. Because of checking for smoke in the daylight, we always ate supper after dark with the lamp burning on the table. It made a nice glow in the old kitchen and usually brought out a good story from Mrs. Middlestall. The fare was varied, hominy grits, a roast on Wednesday night with meat brought on the mail truck and sometimes, corn fritters. We ate very well!

Something different to drink was always thought of as a good idea. One day, while rummaging around, we found a bottle capping machine. Mrs. Middlestall just happened to have a recipe for making soda water, so the next time we went to the Bailey Place, we brought home the ingredients which had been ordered at Beck and Beede's. We immediately mixed the brew in a wash tub that was used for laundry and bath, using a good deal of precious water. This was let stand over night and the next day we bottled! We searched everywhere for bottles that would take the caps and came up with a motley collection, but enough to do the job. After a week in the bottle, the soda water was ready to consume. It had a nice bubble, just like champagne. Without ice or refrigeration we couldn't cool it very well, but it was most enjoyable on a warm afternoon when you felt like a drink of something.

Such was life at the top of Crane Ridge in the 1930's. Not many dull moments and there was always some interesting project to undertake. If you felt tired, it was always nice to just look out at the scenery and day dream a little.



Return Trip

As all good things must come to an end, my vacation at the lookout drew to a close and I had to prepare for the return home. This was done with reluctance, since, in spite of living conditions, isolation, and various sundry chores that I joined in doing, I had had a very good time. The return trip was slated for Tuesday, since the mail truck would be going on that day from the San Antone Valley, (Mr. Gebertstag's home), to town to pick up mail and supplies for delivery on Wednesday. A deal had been made that this would be my transportation. Mrs. Middlestall was determined that I would go home clean, and since enough water had been saved in the fifty gallon barrel for a bath, the first in six weeks, the schedule for bath night was set for Monday night. About ten gallons of that beautiful, precious water, free of grasshoppers, I think, was set on the top of "old red" in all the pots we could find for heating. When the water was ready, we brought the wash tub, the one that we had made soda water in, into the bedroom and here I took a bath, scrubbing off six weeks of Crane Ridge dirt. I imagined that I was having a bath in soda water, a delicious thought! We went to bed early that night because it was a long trek to Mines Road at the Bailey Place next morning and the mail truck would be there about ten. That gave only about an hour of lamplight on this last night on the top of "Bald Mountain".

The next morning we were all up bright and early to have

breakfast and get my gear packed. Jenny was brought from the barn, my luggage tied onto her with ropes, since we didn't put on the pack saddle. This time, as a special privilege, I was to ride Jenny instead of walking the long trail to the Bailey Place. It was a sad moment when we all said good bye at the screen porch and I had a lump in my throat as we went through the "Portegy gate", had a last look at the ramshackle buildings that comprised the Alameda County Lookout on the top of Crane Ridge and hit the trail for Mines Road.

On the trail, Charlie and Jack walked in front with Jenny and me on her back, in tow. The trip to the road was uneventful with little conversation, everybody being a bit gloomy because we would be apart until we were all back in school again. Once at the Bailey Place, we had about a fifteen minute wait before Mr. Gebertstag and his mail truck stopped to pick up a passenger. I waved goodbye to Jenny and the boys and off we sped in the old truck down the grade.

Mr. Gebertstag was a big, barrel chested Swiss, very talkative. He lived on a piece of land in the San Antone Valley, which had been given to him by Mr. Gherber, who owned most of the entire valley himself. The truck was his and he used it to haul the mail on the Star Route once a week, along with any supplies that people along the way asked him to bring to them. As we twisted down the Wilson Grade, he asked me a lot of questions, all about the ranch at home, the family and neighbors. I did my best to answer him politely, but since he knew all about everybody in the hills and around Livermore, I knew

that he already knew all the answers. Being good natured, he tried to make the trip pleasant and I did enjoy having a ride on the mail truck.

When we got to town we pulled up in front of Beck-Beede's Del Valle Mercantile business, which was near the Post Office, and there, parked almost in front of the door, was J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company's long sedan waiting to take me home. And so ended the 1931 vacation on the wilderness top of Crane Ridge. It seemed a little strange not to have Jack and Charlie around and I wouldn't see them until the fire season was over and they came back to town and back to school. During the time that they missed a part of the school year, their mother gave them their lessons, so that they would be ready to enter their classes in about October. I was to return to the lookout about three or four more times during the long summer months, each time as enjoyable as the last and always something new to learn. As I look back on these experiences I realize that, no matter how primitive life was in that remote place, I had had a privilege that very few could know. Charlie, as mentioned before, has become a well known journalist, now residing in San Luis Obispo. Jack still lives in town as one of our good citizens, and on occasions of public gatherings, we meet and remember the old days.