

Memories of Rocklin

Gary Day

Based on an interview of Ilona Osella by Alfred Corral



This is Victor Wickman's Quarry ca. 1912. Victor is second from left in the dark vest. Victor's brother Anders is at the right rear. Multiple quarry owner Matt Ruhkala is at the far right. Anders Wickman owned the ranch at the west end of Rocklin Road that later became Johnson Springview Park

Rocklin's granite industry flourished in late 19th and early 20th centuries. But competition from cement-based concrete and labor strife in the quarries in 1915 attenuated the production of granite products and depopulated Rocklin by 35 percent between 1910 and 1920.

Finnish immigrant Victor Wickman persevered in the business, operating a successful quarry in Rocklin until the early 1940s.

On November 9, 2009 Rocklin historian Alfred Corral interviewed Victor's daughter, ninety-two year old Ilona Osella about her life growing

up in early 20th century Rocklin.

My father, Victor Wickman, emigrated from Finland in 1901, following his older brother Anders Wickman who had emigrated here in the late 1880s. Anders had Americanized the family name to "Wickman" when he saw that the immigration clerk couldn't pronounce Ylilammi, Ander's Finnish family name.

My father bought our house on High Street in 1906 from an Irish family. Most of Rocklin's early quarrymen were Irish. I was born in that house in 1917. I am the youngest of my parents' six children. I still live on the property.

My mother, Margagreta Otilia Wickman, came from Finland, unmarried, at the turn of the century intending to live in Rocklin with her sister. She was disoriented as she left the train here so a patron of one of Rocklin's many saloons escorted my mother to her sister's house.

The early immigrant Finns spoke Finnish at home, but their children spoke English at school and a combination language called Finnliska evolved. Finnish and Finnliska are seldom heard among Rocklin's Finnish descendents nowadays. I learned from my father to write in Finnish so I could communicate by mail with my grandmother in Finland. She lived to be 100.

My father's quarry was Rocklin's deepest. It produced granite for buildings in San Francisco and Sacramento. As construction projects dried up it produced riprap for reclamation projects and gravestones for shipment to Nevada and Sacramento. During high school I worked as a secretary for that quarry while the men made granite blocks for construction of the Main Post Office in Sacramento.

At Christmas our family stacked presents around a Christmas tree lit by candles. Finn families gathered at Finn Hall during the Christmas season where Santa passed out gifts including candy and fresh oranges and apples .

Moon's Grocery Store was in today's granite city-hall building. My mother often sent me there for a dime's worth of bologna. Adolf Moon knew me as Ilona Bologna.

I attended Rocklin Grade School on Pacific Street. The Finns and the Spanish and the Japanese families associated mainly among themselves but we mixed at school and became good friends. I and twelve classmates graduated eighth grade in a ceremony at Finn hall in 1930.

I rode the train to Roseville High School but most kids were poor and had to bum rides. Few kids could afford school clothes during the early years of the Great Depression so we wore black and white uniforms. On Saturday nights we danced the Schottische and the Polka at Finn Hall until 11 pm, and then we headed for Allen's Dance Hall near Folsom where we danced until 3 am. After a few hours sleep and church on Sunday morning we went to Rattlesnake Bar where we swam all day.

I don't remember any of the kids drinking alcohol during our high school years.

I met my husband, Pete, at Rocklin's roller skating rink on Pacific Street. He became a seventeen-cents per hour railroad apprentice so we were able to travel by train for free to the 1939 World's Fair in San Francisco. We married in 1941 before the war started. We have three children.

Nick Alexson was once my father's business partner. He fell to his death in 1927 while clearing brush from the quarry's edge.

My father died in 1954 at age 76. His lungs were clogged with granite dust.

My best friend at work in downtown Sacramento in 1941 was Japanese. She cried with me when bad news came from Hawaii on December 7th. I never saw her again after that day.