

MEMORIES OF ROCKLIN

BY

HAZEL JUNE WILLARD

The day I was born, my father, George Chester Willard, was driving oxen at the Delano Granite Quarry on Rocklin Road, Rocklin, California. It was June 28, 1888. This was long before concrete put granite out of business and the heavy granite slabs were hauled by carts pulled by oxen.

The oxen were faithful creatures. They turned left and right according to the holler of Gee and Haw. They moved them along with a sharp brad in the end of a stick which our Dad was able to use.

One time the cart backed too far and went into the quarry hole and Mother said the oxen just dug their feet into the ground and held with all their might until the men could get braces enough to pull it up from the ledge. She said that they were so dumb-looking but realized the danger. Once, one suddenly dropped dead and when they opened it to see the reason, they found a darning needle right through its heart. It had probably gotten in through the hay it had eaten.

They always gave Dad a day off to buy the oxen since they had such confidence in his judgment in animals. The horns of the oxen were usually sawed off and brass clamps put over them so they couldn't hook anyone.

Mother said Dad would spend most of his Sunday currying and brushing the old oxen who never looked any better when he finished.

Our neighbors included Mrs. Moore, who came with her husband during the 49er gold rush. They took up a section of land in the wilderness so remote that it took Mr. Moore two days to reach Sutter's Fort for provisions. During these times, she was left alone with only two dogs for protection. She lived in a log cabin and once during Mr. Moore's absence a rattle snake came onto the clearing. She had to kill it with an axe for if she had not it might have gone under the house and come up through the logs in the floor.

In those early days Mrs. Moore had kept the bags of gold for the miners since there were no safes or banks.

The Moores owned all the property around the quarry which the Delanos operated for them on a percentage per carload bases.

As the Moores became older and Mr. Moore died, her brother, Mr. Rice, came to live with her to help keep up the place. Then still later a niece to this brother and sister, Miss Marion Rice, came from the east to take care of them. Her brother Judd Rice cared for his father and mother until they died, then he came out to live with Miss Rice who had been willed all the Moore property. Mrs. Moore always wore a sun bonnet and Mother and made her many as it was the only gift we could give this very old lady who never told her age. Mrs. Moore had chickens and guinea hens running around. The guinea hens were peculiar fowls and quite useless, but my mind's eye recalls the stone cellar where the milk and fresh butter were kept, which we bought from her, and the ten gallon jar of vinegar setting on the porch in the sun since they had to make their own. I remember the long porch around the house, the wildflowers that grew so prevalent in her yard and the two large buckets of fresh water containing a tin dipper which sat just outside her door. Henry, her hired man, carried the water from the well every day on each end of a wooden pole carried on his shoulders Chinese fashion.

Another neighbor was Mr. Fletcher, an old man, who had his house on Rocklin Road. He used to buy granite from the quarries and cut it, then sell it in San Francisco. He was known to cut stone all night in order to get money to send to his son Henry who was in medical school. Henry was our family doctor until his death.

Mr. Fletcher used to buy milk from us and visit with my brother, Alf, a lot. We never saw big boxes of matches as we have them today and in those days they came in blocks and we pulled short stems off the blocks. Everyone used them. Mr. Fletcher got some like we use today and since they were very new Alf asked many questions about them, so Mr. Fletcher gave him a box. I thought it so nice of him, but Mother said to Miss Rice, "The very idea of a man giving a kid matches!"

When his son Henry came, he used to give us nickels and dimes. I remember Dad telling Mother that when he settled up for the doctor bill he tried to return some of the money given to us kids, but Doc wouldn't hear of it.

Across the road from the Finn Hall, you can see a huge piece of granite. I remember that Mr. Fletcher hauled it there with a team and a funny little wagon he had made himself. It was quite the talk of the town since no-one knew just why he hauled it there, and worse still they don't know yet. But the rock is still there.

Before my brother, Alfred Hinkley Willard, was born, I was such a lonely little girl of five years roaming around a five acre field with no other children around for miles, or so it seemed to me. For pleasure I used to rush all my dolls to the window and set them in chairs, take my drum and watch engines go by to the quarry to get granite for big buildings. My dad said that I had played around every stone that was put into the Stockton court house.

Every morning around ten, I used to take about two quarts of coffee and a piece of cake through the field to the quarry to Dad. Once I became afraid of a cow and another time the horses bothered me. I chatted it over with Mrs. Moore and I can still see that old lady with a cane telling me they wouldn't hurt me and laughing all the while we talked.

A little brother was born dead and on the rarest of occasions Mother would let me open the little trunk which sat in the corner of the bedroom and let me unfold and look at all the lovely baby things all laid so beautifully away. No one could sew more beautifully than my mother and she would tell me all about each of the little things.

In those days they certainly dressed babies differently than they do today. They all wore belly-bands of flannel about six inches wide wrapped very tightly and pinned with four safety pins. Then came a shirt and three cornered diapers, often times booties, and a long pinning blanket was folded up over the feet. The pinning blanket was on a band and fastened around the waist with four safety pins. Then came a flannel skirt and then a white skirt, then a long white dress. The white skirt and dress were always elaborate with tucks and embroidery and lace. Then perhaps they put on a sack or a jacket. Of course by the time the baby got on the entire rig he was all worn out and screaming. Who wouldn't? And think of the washing!

The rules for all babies were: Never lift a new baby without a blanket over its head. Never lift a baby without your hand on its back. Never touch the soft spot on its head. The soft spot was guarded very gingerly for it was believed that if it were touched the child would probably die. At about six months the baby went into short dresses and the pinning blanket was abandoned.

From Short dresses the little boys went into kilts. The boys were three years old or, perhaps a little older, when they wore their first real short pants. The clothes were made by our mother who had learned the dressmaking trade as a young girl.

During the winter evenings, Dad would take two pieces of wood and pretend to play the violin as we walked back and forth going through the popular quadrilles of the day. Sometimes neighbors would come in and watch us.

Something that we looked forward to was Mother and Dad taking us to town to hear political speeches. They would have a big fire in the middle of the street and the town would rush there to hear the talks. On other occasions, there was a photographer who came to town and he had a tent where the little school stands today. There was straw on the bare ground and this one chair. I remember feeling very beautiful because my hair was hanging loosely as all the rest of the time I had to wear it in braids.. We had to wait for good weather to get the picture developed as they had no artificial light. If it were a good day you got your pictures quickly otherwise we waited for the sun's bidding. I recall seeing the little glass frames sitting all around the outside of the tent containing the pictures being developed in the sun.

The Fourth of July celebration was the big occasion of our childhood days. We all had to be outfitted for the races at the track. Then is when I got my new summer hat. The boys had blouses tucked with lace collars like little Lord Fauntleroy. It was the event of the town. We could drink water out of a tin cup at a barrel, buy soda and candy. Then everyone would scream for their horses. After months of preparation a good time was always had by all. In the evening they had the "Horribles". That's when Dad took the prize with his face blackened and his moustache shaved off he rode our

horse, Mollie, and pulled a float taking off the towns people....
"Dr. Woodbridge-would-be-if-he-could-be" They had what appeared to be an operation with the roots of a palm tree painted red. All in horrible masks, it certainly was a great laugh.

Dad got up dances for the old folks of the town. I think he named it the North Wind Dance. They served refreshments and had lots of fun. Dad being the leader of all good times in which no liquor was ever thought of, because everyone had so much fun without it.

When automobiles came in they were a great joy to our Dad. He never minded going fast, in fact he rather liked it, but most of all he could get where he wanted to go without worrying about tiring a horse. (Incidentally, I was about fourteen before I ever saw a car and then we ran for miles to see one going down the road. It wasn't until I was twenty-one that I had a ride in one.)

In 1906, our house burned. There were many fires in Rocklin at this time. Dad had made a water trough that led from the water tank up to the house as we had no other means of getting water. The water emptied into a barrel sunk half-way into the ground. After work Dad would pump water into the tank which came along the trough into the water barrel. Later he built a windlass. He used to hitch the horse and walk him around and around to pump the water. We thought it a godsend when we got city water at last, but the water system had just been completed when the house burned and no one knew where the hydrants were at the time of the fire so it was of no use.

After the house burned and the furniture was scattered all over the field, Dad slept out in the field to watch over it. He was terribly discouraged, but our stalwart Mother said, "It's summer and we can stay right here until we can get another house". So, they cleaned out the barn and we slept there. I remember coyotes howling

at night and the beautiful full moon that smiled in on us. But we weren't on a camping trip. Everything had to be clean.

Mother cooked in the wood shed and we ate under the old oak tree. Everyone in town offered to help us to get another house. Bill Thomas so unselfishly did the dirtiest work of tearing out the burned wood and thereby saving the foundation for us, for which we owed him much in gratitude. The boss of the round-house let all the carpenters he had in the round-house come and help. The men from the quarry did all the rough work on our house. They didn't need a real carpenter. They worked Sundays and after working in the quarry all day until dark and not one of them would even eat a meal with us.

When the new house was nearly finished before the partitions were put in the folks decided to have a housewarming. They asked the Anabal family to play, she played the little organ and he played the violin. They played all evening, had quadrilles and everyone had such a happy time. When it came time to serve dinner Mother got so embarrassed because she didn't have enough plated or hadn't borrowed enough...but Dad went out and gathered the new clean shingles and served on them. Everyone thought it was such a cute idea that they forgot to mention the good food Mother served.

Right from the beginning our house became a home built on unselfishness, good will and love.

There were many chores to do in those days. One of our tasks was to keep the lamps clean. The chimneys had to be washed and wiped without streaks until they shone...then they were filled with coal oil. On wash day we all had our job to do. Everyone had to rise early for the occasion. First the water was carried, then the clothes were washed on a board with soap, then put in a boiler of soap and boiled. The clothes were then put into rinse water and then put through a hand turned wringer. I've seen all the lines filled and all the way

round the fence covered with overalls and long heavy under drawers.

Often we would be playing in the yard and look up on the porch to see Mother with a big chunk of pull candy to surprise us. We often had our own little chunks to pull. It was particularly delicious.

It was wonderful growing up in Rocklin, California.

**Donated from Laura Woods written by our Aunt during W.W.II
To Laverne Splan
for the museum's use.**