



## **Life in Ventura County**

History begins at home. It is the family stories where we hear about hopes, dreams, disappointments and joys that impact our lives. Our shared experiences help to shape not only our personal lives, but that of our community. Today we are presenting a family history. It paints extraordinary details into the portrait of life in Ventura County.

Research Team

Barbara Burrows, Karin Farrin, Beth Miller, Lynn Preiss, Sherry Reynolds

# *Growing Up in Ventura County*

*by*

*Alice Frost Sweetland*

My maternal grandfather, Dale B King, had his oral history recorded in 1979 by the Museum of Ventura County. His impressions of Ventura County, and Fillmore in particular, were vivid. At that time Fillmore had 150-200 residents. Coming from Cedar Rapids, Nebraska on September 5, 1889, my grandfather was 9 years old. His family had lived in a sod house in Nebraska. Life was rough in Nebraska. My great-grandfather had a schoolmate, Mr. C. F. Arundell, who encouraged Grandpa's family to move to Ventura County.

Grandpa was awestruck by the citrus trees in Fillmore. He thought lemons grew on vines. Nebraska had few trees. His parents and 3 siblings moved west at the turn of the century, traveling by train. My great-grandfather bought property in Fillmore and became a citrus rancher. His oldest son, my grandfather homesteaded property in Piru Canyon and became a cattle rancher. Eventually he bought an additional 200 acres for \$1,000, later adding more acreage to his ranch. On the homestead, Grandpa found a Marine layer with remnants of whale bones.

Grandpa's younger brother Morris operated a dairy for a couple of years then was drafted and sent to France to fight in World War I. After the war he also became a rancher, first citrus then cattle. His ranch was also in Piru Canyon. Three of the sisters were able to earn college degrees, attending Los Angeles Normal School which became UCLA. The fourth sister was unable to attend college due to eye problems. The three sisters all became schoolteachers. Aunt Nettie taught at Buckhorn School before she married. Aunt Isabel married a classmate who became a doctor. They traveled around the US to different hospitals where he practiced his specialty, psychiatry. Aunt Sarah became a Methodist Missionary. Aunt Wilma, who did not attend college became a telephone operator in Los Angeles. I believe that's how my grandparents were introduced as my grandmother was also a telephone operator in Los Angeles before her marriage.



**This photo is of my great grandparents William Shank King and Margaret Slinkier King with their four oldest children. It was taken at the time they moved from Nebraska to California. My grandfather is the oldest boy, standing between his parents.**



**This picture was taken in 1918 when my mother was 1 year old. Imagine how delighted Uncle Morris was to come home from World War I and meet his darling little niece. Note the star in the window. It is a service flag that family members of those serving in the United States Armed Forces can display.**

Through the years my grandfather had many unique experiences, met many interesting people and loved his way of life. He became friends with a Native American who lived in an isolated part of Piru Canyon. Juan Fustero, born about 1850 in Temescal in Piru Canyon. Juan was partly of Kitanemuk ancestry and partly Tataviam. Because Juan was an Indian he was not a US citizen. Juan wanted to homestead property so he applied for naturalization. When he went to the courthouse in Ventura he was asked "what is your name?" He replied "Juan." He was asked "what is your other name?" He answered "Jose." What is your father's name?" He answered "Juan." He was then asked "what's his other name?" He answered "Jose." Finally he was asked "What's his last name?" Silence. "What did your father do?" Juan answered "Fustero - saddle maker."

Thus Juan Jose became Juan Jose Fustero. Grandpa said: "Juan was one of the finest vaqueros in the country to make reatas and he was one of the best cowpokes you could want. He was a natural." Juan Fustero's life and been studied and documented by anthropologists studying Ventura County Indians. My grandfather's oral history has filled some gaps in those studies and added some color to his story. Juan's son Joe was my grandfather's age. He worked for my grandfather and attended school for a period of time. He went overseas in World War I. When Juan died his children came to my grandfather for his assistance. He helped bury Juan in the Piru Canyon. When Lake Piru was created Juan's grave was displaced. As a tribute to Juan a large rock was placed on a big mound, and a plaque was placed with Juan's name. It has been vandalized numerous times. The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act was not signed until 1990. After Juan's death one or two of his sons would drop in to say hello to my grandfather. None of Juan's children had families of their own, so the family died out.



**Juan Jose Fustero**

Grandpa was asked about the St. Francis Dam disaster in 1928. He said the first he knew of the dam breaking was when a Temescal School teacher came to him and asked if she could take the day off because of the disaster. My grandfather was on the school board so I suppose he had to give her permission. He wasn't aware there was a dam. His cattle ranch was deep in Piru Canyon and he never heard any noise from the flood but his friend told him it was the worse flood he had ever seen. It wiped the whole canyon out from wall to wall.

Fortunately his family in Fillmore was safe. I remember my mother, who was 9 years old when the dam broke, said it was so sad when she eventually went back to school after the flood and there were many empty desks, at least nine fellow students had perished in the flood.

My grandfather had many talents and interests. He was a simple man, but very well read, always learning new information. He enjoyed reading National Geographic from cover to cover. His oldest sister, Sarah, became a missionary in Southern Rhodesia, Africa (now Zimbabwe), living there for 35 years. He had great interest in her adventure on the other side of the world. Being a cattle rancher wasn't always lucrative and he supplemented the family income by working in the oil fields occasionally.

He also was a beekeeper. He had an aviary next to the house, a house he built himself. We loved chewing on the honeycombs he would give us when he was bottling his honey. He understood the cattle business. He raised mostly white-face cattle, but discovered by mixing his herd with Brahma cattle the cattle were better able to thrive on the range like his. He said scientific breeding of cattle doesn't work out on his range. He used his observations to figure out the best outcome. During the war my grandparents raised turkeys. They were very successful, and the man who supplied feed for the turkeys thought perhaps my grandparents' turkeys were better than most because of the water in Reasoner Creek the turkeys drank. It was full of minerals. Grandpa said his little calves also did better on this water. They also raised guinea hens. Grandpa loved having one or two peacocks on the ranch. I have no idea what good they were to the ranch, but they were good at terrifying we grandchildren. Peacocks can be very mean.

My grandfather's youngest sister Isabel shared many family stories with me shortly before she died at 106 years of age. She was sharp as a tack at her advanced age. She told me about the house she grew up in, which had no electricity or running water. Around 1915 my grandfather wired the house for electricity and installed plumbing so they had an indoor bathroom. It is amazing to me that with no engineering degree or training my grandfather could accomplish such an ambitious task. I'm sure he read all about how the new fangled conveniences and was able to make a huge difference in their home. Aunt Isabel told me one of the most exciting things that she can remember experiencing was in 1919 when they received a telegram from Hoboken New Jersey saying "I'm back in the US, I will be home soon". This was from her brother Morris, who was coming home from France after serving in World War I. He was safe, and he was coming home.



**This picture is of my maternal grandparents, Dale and Vernie King. They were married Oct. 26, 1916, so this picture was taken in 1966. They celebrated their fiftieth anniversary at the Piru Methodist Church Hall. My paternal grandparents were James and Caroline Frost. They were married in 1909 I think, and they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary as well at the Ojai Grange Hall.**

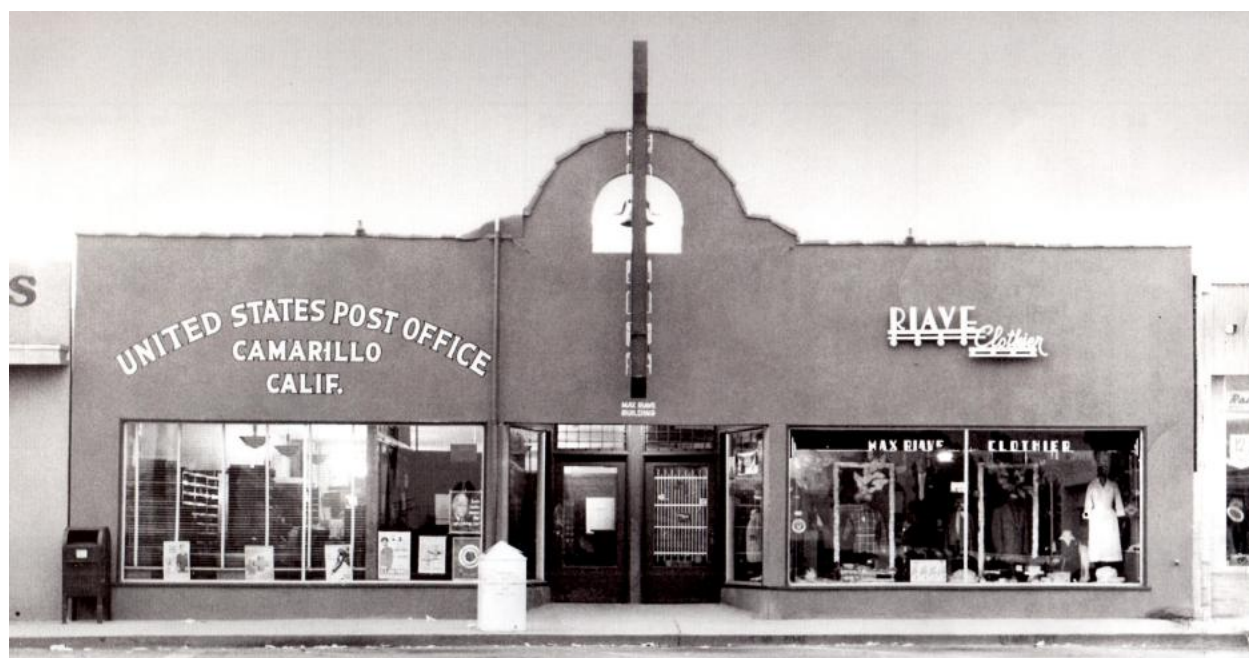
There is so much more, his reflection on the Chinese that built the railroad and lived in the Fillmore area. The Mexicans and Californios, all adding to the fabric of the area. Grandpa learned from them, had his opinions about them and appreciated their contribution to the world he lived in.

My paternal grandfather worked for British American Oil Company. He traveled around Southern California working, exploring and drilling on oil sites from Orange County to Ventura County, only staying at each site for 2-3 years. About 1931 he and his family moved to a site on Mt. Baldy in Piru to work on an oil site. My father, one of 4 children, was about 14 years old. The nearest high school was in Fillmore, but there was no bus that traveled to Piru Canyon. So, the high school made an agreement with my father's parents that would make my father the bus driver for the remote area. He was granted a driver's license at 14 years of age. At the bottom of Mt. Baldy was my mother's parents' ranch. My father and his younger brother would leave very early each morning, stop at the bottom of the mountain and pick up my mother and her brother, then stop down the road and pick up my mother's cousin Bob and off to school they went. Eventually a romance between my parents blossomed. My paternal grandfather later moved his family to Oxnard to work on an oil site. This was the second time he had worked the oil wells in Oxnard, so when my father graduated from high school he decided to stay in Oxnard to work on the Maulhardt Ranch.

My parents married in 1938 and lived on the Maulhardt Ranch till the end of World War II. My father did not go into the military during World War II as his job in agriculture was considered essential to the home front. His two brothers both served in the Navy and were in the South Pacific for the duration of the war. In 1945 my parents bought a house on an acre of land on Las Posas Road in Camarillo. Camarillo was a very small town of only 1,500-2,000 people.

Max Riave owned a business on Ventura Blvd in early Camarillo days, next door to the post office, called Max Riave Clothiers. Max was Jewish, and a very good merchant. His was one of the few businesses that one could purchase clothes in the young town of Camarillo. Most families had to go to Oxnard or Ventura for clothes and shoes. Earl Joseph Shoes opened in the late 1950's, so we could then buy shoes in Camarillo. Max was a very interesting person. His daughter, Candy, was a year behind me in school. She graduated from Camarillo High School in 1962.

Max has a couple of much older children as well. Max Riave and my great Uncle Morris served in the same US Army unit in World War I. Max was the person who initiated reunions of his unit and they met regularly throughout the years. He and Uncle Morris stayed connected on a regular basis.



**1950 Riave Clothier Store and Post Office  
Ventura Blvd. Camarillo, CA**



My two brothers and I had a great childhood growing up in Camarillo Heights. We went to Pleasant Valley School, which was the only school in Camarillo, where we made many life-long friends. We had wonderful teachers and our principal soon to be superintendent was Mrs. Onorinda Jones. Mrs. Jones visited each classroom weekly to teach penmanship. She had beautiful handwriting and I vividly remember the drills she put us through to polish our cursive writing.

If I remember correctly, my mother was the first president of the PTA at Pleasant Valley School. She obviously was proud of her time with PTA as she kept her pin, and I kept it after her passing. My mother was very supportive of all our activities. She was a Cub Scout Den mother, and later Boy Scout Leader, a Brownie leader and a 4H leader as well. I believe she taught sewing. When we moved on to high school both my parents were involved with our activities.



**Alice and her mother at Brownie-Girl Scout camp 1949-50**



PTA pin



4H pin

My father helped with the Future Farmers of America program. My mother helped with the Future Business Leaders of America, Rob and my extracurricular activities. They regularly attended school board meetings and were great supporters of the schools we attended. They set a great example for us when we became parents. Camarillo was very small. Everyone knew most everyone else. If we stepped out of line or needed help there was always an adult in the community to step in and give assistance or a compliment. My high school class of 1961 was the first class to attend Grad Night at Disneyland. My parents were chaperones and I'm not sure who had more fun, them or me.

When it was time for high school my oldest brother Ed was bussed to Oxnard High School as there was no high school in Camarillo. Shortly after that Mr. Camarillo donated land for the new Adolfo Camarillo High School. My brother Rob and I both graduated from Adolfo Camarillo High School. It was a great life. After my marriage, I moved to Oxnard where my husband's family had lived for three generations, but Camarillo will always be home to me.



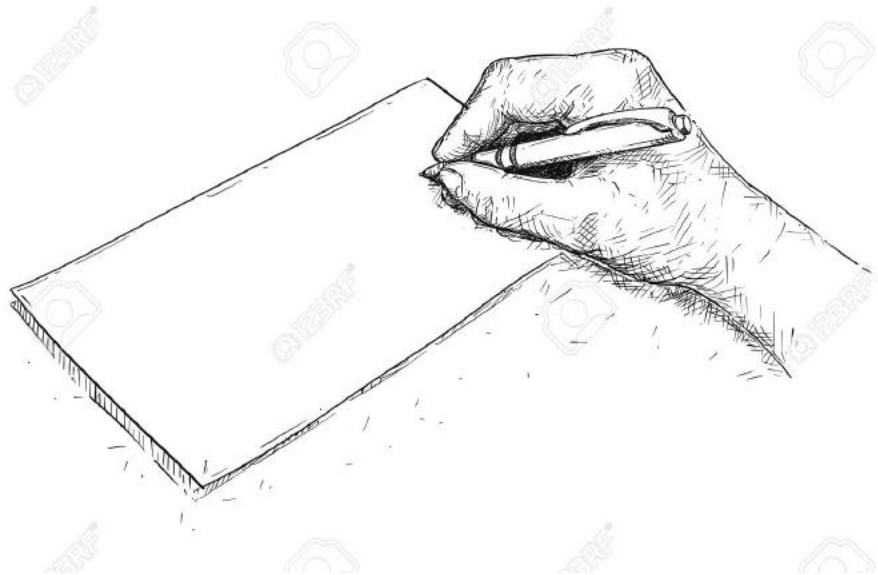
**The Frost Family at their home on Anacapa in Camarillo Heights**  
**Back row; Rob, Alice and Ed      Front row: Parents Norman and Edith Frost**

**Do you have a brief family story about life  
In Old Camarillo or Ventura County that you'd like to share?**

Please contact Karin Farrin!

Thank you!

[kg.farrin@gte.net](mailto:kg.farrin@gte.net)



**We are also looking for your family stories about Adolfo Camarillo!**

Did you, a family member or friend meet Mr. Camarillo? Please tell us about it!

We will need your stories about Adolfo by Friday, October 9.

Please contact Beth Miller!

Thank you!

[HistoryLongAgo@me.com](mailto:HistoryLongAgo@me.com)