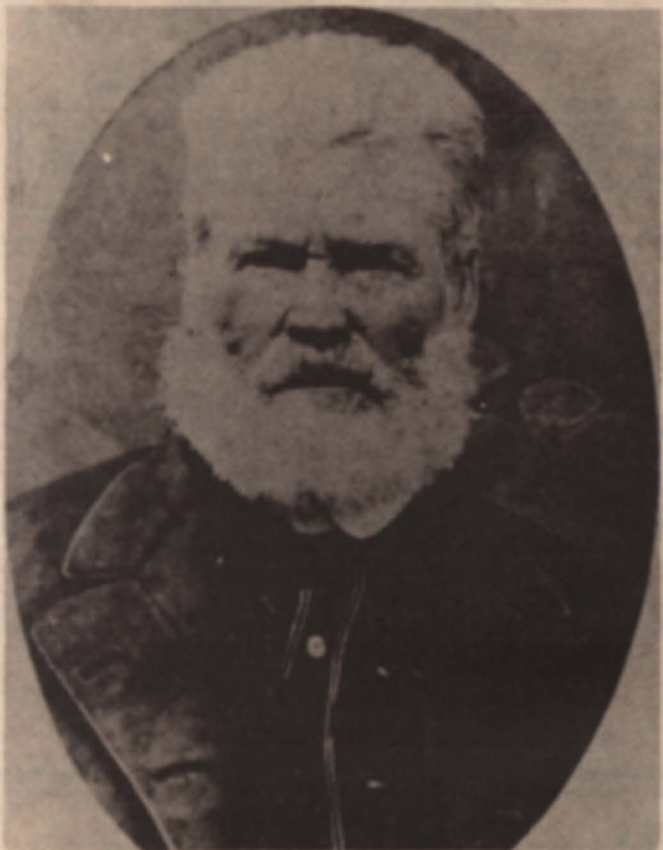


# The Sawyers family—one of Willits' earliest

*Willits News February 12 - 1975*



The Sawyers family, one of the first to settle in Little Lake Valley in the days before there was a town of Willits, is another example of those hardy first families whose children and grandchildren married offspring of other first families, making a complex family structure involving the names of most of the area's pioneers including Simonsen, Whited, Hall, Case, Cook and Bahn.

John Sawyers, the great great grandfather of the present day Sawyers, lived in Kentucky and was a close friend and hunting companion of Daniel Boone, and his wife was a sister of Kit Carson's wife. John fathered nine children, the sixth of whom was named Thomas.

In 1854, Thomas sold his farm and cabinet shop and joined a covered wagon caravan headed for California. Making the trip with him was his second wife Peggy Hay and their two children, three year old Marshall Ney and one year old Martha Ann. Also in the party were Thomas' three older children by his first marriage, Melcena and her husband James Case and their two children, 19 year old Mountjoy and 15 year old Mary Elizabeth.

The trip took four months, with the wagons pulled by oxen teams.

Rivers were crossed by lashing trees to the sides of the wagons and floating them across, and only one stop was made each day when the nightly camp was made.

The wagon train had its share of problems. Once, the 600 head of cattle accompanying the group stampeded, and several of the oxen team stampeded with them. It took days for the scouts and other men in the party to round up the herds and get the train reorganized.

In the second month of the journey, the group was attacked by Indians who encircled the camp in the early morning hours and kept up a steady barrage of gunfire from flintlock muskets for seven hours, and then mysteriously disappeared. Young Mary Elizabeth was wounded during the battle, but survived.

While crossing the 60 miles of desert barren of grass and water, the group traveled only at night and rationed the water supply, which was finally exhausted when the train was

fortunately met by an advance scout with replenishments of staples and water.

Years later, Mountjoy Sawyers would write of the last section of the incredible journey: "About 10 o'clock at night we started across the last six miles of desert through deep sand. About daylight we came to the Truckee River, a beautiful clear stream. There we rested for awhile then started across the Sierra Mountains and made it over alright, and arrived in a little valley called Pleasant Valley, Nevada County, the third day of September, 1854, after a long four months of travel."

That is the only reference made to what must have been a nightmare of effort in getting the cumbersome wagons, oxen and herd of cattle over the Sierra Nevadas.

The family settled down in a small mining community called Rough and Ready, where Tom and Peggy's third child, David Leander, was born in 1855 and 16 year old Mary Elizabeth married a miner named Sam Swan the same year. The men of the family put in a hard two years of work trying to make a strike, but were unsuccessful although gold was being found all around them.

In the spring of 1856, Melcena and her husband Jim Chase and two children struck out on their own and ended up in the Petaluma area. In the fall of that year, Peggy and Tom gave up their dreams of finding gold and followed Melcena to Petaluma with the rest of the family.

Mary and Sam Swan, with their baby daughter, chose instead to return to Sam's home back East, and sailed by boat around the Horn. The boat went down in the Carribean, with loss of all men on board. Mary and her baby were saved after drifting for eight days in a lifeboat. Later, she married George Cook in Pennsylvania, and in 1877 they returned with their seven children to California. One of their sons, David, would marry Bertha Beattie.

Tom purchased 400 acres of land near Petaluma, planning to raise crops and cattle, but there were legal complications with the purchase which turned out to be the site of a Spanish land grant.

While Tom was making a fight to save his land, and Peggy

Thomas and Peggy Sawyers, great grandparents of Thelma and Harvey Sawyers, as they looked at the time they were living in Little Lake Valley during the days it was first being settled. Peggy was the third woman to move into the valley, preceded by Mary Broadus and her daughter Mary Ann who married William James.



was busy having another child, Fanny, their son Mountjoy took off on his own for an exploratory trip of Northern California and discovered the new and thriving little farm community known as Little Lake Valley. Families by the names of Baechtel, Rowlinson, Daughtery, James, Broadus and Willits had already moved into the area, cleared land and planted crops.

Greatly enthused, Mountjoy rode horseback back to Petaluma and convinced his father to give up the losing battle for his land there and come to Little Lake Valley instead. So, in 1858, the entire family moved north and Tom staked out a claim to a 160 acre homestead along both sides of the road now called East Hill Road. Later, he was to add several hundred more acres to his claim. Peggy was the third woman to settle in the area.

Neighbors pitched in to help the Sawyers build a home beside the road, the house in which old Tom Sawyers was to spend the rest of his life, and where three more sons were born.

**To be continued**

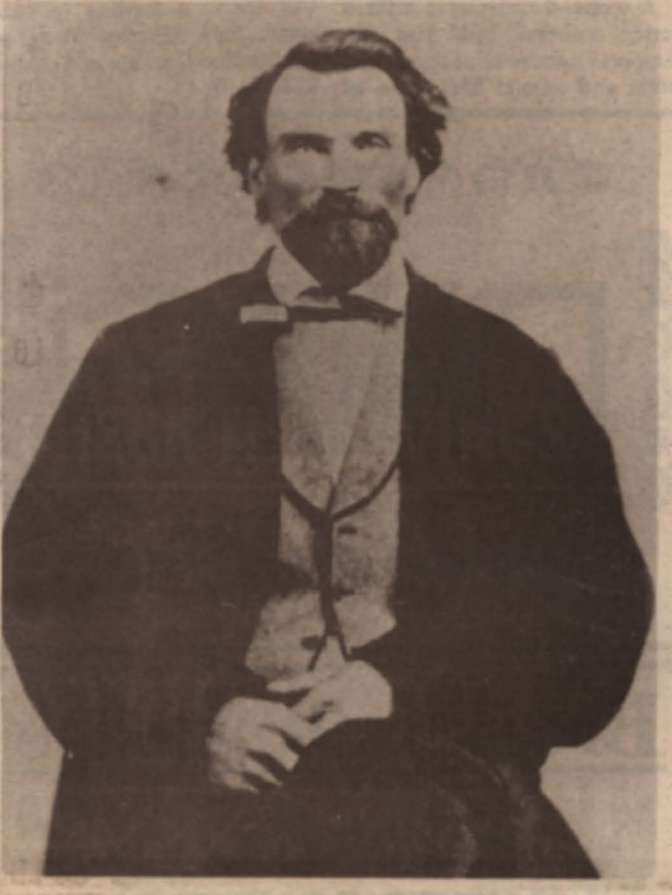


# The Sawyers family settles into the early

*Willits News*

*February 19, 1973*

*Pictures →*



When Tom and Peggy Sawyers moved into Little Lake Valley in 1858, their property adjoined that of three other first families of the time. To the west of them were the Baechtel brothers, to the east of them were the Masts, and to the north of them were the Whiteds.

Indians were still living in the area at that time and most of the families had one or more Indians who lived and worked on the ranches. The Sawyers had an Indian boy known only as Sawyer's Ben. He was young Dave Sawyers' boyhood playmate and Aletha Sutton, Dave Sawyers' granddaughter, recalls hearing many stories about the pair.

One concerned a hunting trip back into the hills when the Indian boy shot and killed a cougar just as it was crouched to spring on the unsuspecting Dave. On another occasion, Ben taught his young friend the Indian trick of building a fire over a wasp's nest in the ground, thereby roasting the wasps which were then eaten with relish.

The first home the Sawyers built was a large one room structure, which was added on to as the years went by until it was finally a sizeable two-story home. Moving in to that first home with Tom and Peggy were their children Mountjoy, Marshall Ney, Martha Ann, David and Fannie.

The Baechtel boys were not yet married, but the Mast family had children and of course old Doc Henderson Whited and his wife Sarah had a very large family, and the children of the neighboring families all became close friends.

Mountjoy Sawyers was in his 20's when his family moved here and he worked along with his father to clear all the land, plant the fields of grain and vegetables and build the necessary shelters for the stock. Tom continued with his trade of cabinetmaker, building much of the family's furniture and helping with the building of other homes.

One of his finest pieces of work was a coffin made of curly redwood, a type of wood he had never seen before moving here. No one knows why he built it, and it was not used even at the time of his own death, but would be used many years later

for the burial of Mountjoy.

In 1859 the families of Little Lake Valley gathered for the first Fourth of July celebration, which was held on the Baechtel ranch and which was the forerunner of today's Willits Frontier Days.

The village known as Little Lake was beginning to spring up along the road now called Baechtel Lane, where the first saloon was opened by a man named Shreve around the time of the first Fourth of July gathering, followed by a town hall which was built in the following year.

In 1860 Tom's daughter Melcena and her husband Jim Case and their children rejoined the Sawyers family, purchasing their own tract of land to the south of Tom's, which ran up along what is now known as Hilltop Drive. The many Cases who live in the Valley today are descendants of this pair.

In 1862 the first church was formed, the Little Lake Baptist Church, with the Whiteds and Sawyers as first members. The minister, or Elder, was J.N. Burroughs of Kelsey Creek (Kelseyville), who rode on horseback to conduct services for the group.

In 1865 the first general merchandise store in Little Lake was opened by W.C. James near the town hall where the famous Coates-Frost shootout took place later that same year. None of the Sawyers family were in the vicinity of the shootout, but heard the gunfire from their ranch.

In 1870 the Upper Little Lake School District was formed and James Case donated one acre of his land for the school building. No one is sure just where that first school was located, and no one knows why that and the two later schools for the area were all called Sawyers School, except for the fact that old Tom Sawyers was a first trustee, along with Charles Endicott.

Mountjoy through these years was courting Hester Ann Whited and on March 1, 1871 they were married and moved up on a large parcel of land to the southeast which Mountjoy had homesteaded and which was called Deer Ridge Ranch. The property adjoined that of the James family, which would later be bought by Dan Southard.



# Little Lake Valley community

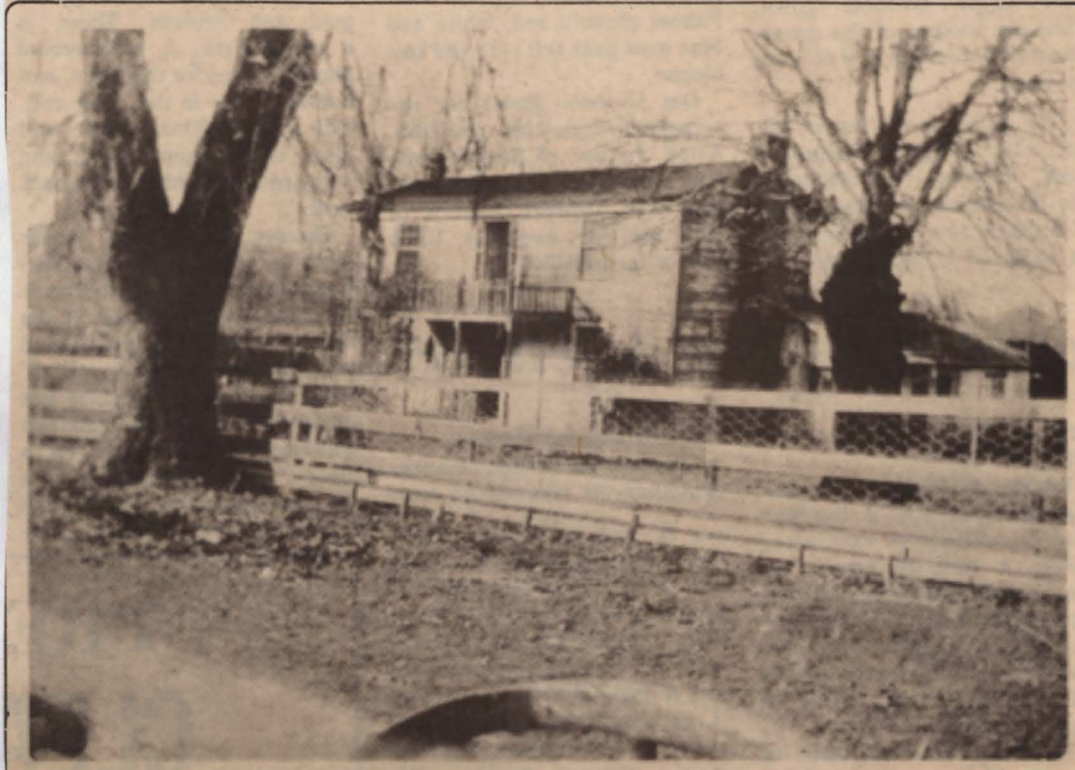
The day after Mountjoy was married, there was another wedding in the Sawyers family when young Martha Ann married Ole Simonson and went to live in the fine home Ole had built a few miles north of Little Lake.

Ole and his brother Zacharias had just split their 160 acres on the site of the present Willits High School and Zack had bought another section in the south end of Little Lake Valley, now owned by the Schmidbauer family.

Far left: Hester Ann Whited after her marriage to Mountjoy Sawyers [below her]. The pictures were taken in 1871 when Mountjoy was 36 years old. Hester was a sister of Man Whited, author of the Whited Journals.

Above right: Doc Henderson and Sarah Whited, parents of the extensive Whited clan including three girls who married Sawyers brothers.

Right below: The Sawyers homestead on East Hill Road. The first section of the house was built by Tom Sawyers and his sons in 1858. The house was located across the road from the entrance to Little Lake Cemetery and one of the oak trees in this picture is still standing. The house burned in 1920.





# Hester and Joy Sawyers at Deer Ridge Ranch

*Valley News - February 26, 1975*

*Pictures - 7*

Later in the same year in which Mountjoy Sawyers married Hester Whited and Martha Ann married Ole Simonson, Tom and Peggy's youngest daughter Fannie married Tom Hicks just five days before her 14th birthday. The young couple then moved to Southern California where that branch of the family has remained.

Not many people remain who have memories of Deer Ridge Ranch where Joy (as Mountjoy was known) and Hester lived. Roberta Cook, who lives in Eureka and is a granddaughter of Joy and Hester, recalls visiting the place as a young child and remembers a handsome staircase leading up to the second floor. There was a large garden with fruit trees, and the usual milk cows, horses and chickens.

The entrance to the ranch was out the old road to Ukiah (now known as Holland Lane,) and then down a sideroad back into the hills just past where Stan and Doris DeLong now live. The original James ranch with its waterwheel grist mill adjoined the Sawyers'.

When the first child, Murvin, was born in 1872, Hester came back to the home of Tom and Peggy in Little Lake Valley for the birth. There is no record of any doctor at the time, so it is believed that the women living

in the Valley assisted at all the births during those first years.

In 1873, a second child, Thomas Harvey, was born probably up on the ranch. In that same year, Joy was ordained as an Elder in the Baptist Church and was to remain active in the church the rest of his life. His ministry covered a wide area, and he took frequent trips by buggy and horse to tend to his flock in Redwood Valley, out the Hearst Road, and up Sherwood.

In 1874, Dora Luzena was born, followed by Daisy May in 1876 and Sarah Ann in 1877. It was the following year that the big diptheria epidemic hit, and Hester joined the other women in the area in moving from ranch to ranch to aid in care of the sick and dying.

The Angle Ranch, now known as Ridgewood Ranch, was one of the ranches where Hester journeyed on horseback to help. The Angles were good friends of the Sawyers and the two families frequently visited back and forth. Six of the Angle children died of diptheria, and Hester and Joy's own children also came down with the dread disease but all survived.

The Sawyers children all attended Whitcomb School, which was located beside the creek directly across today's Highway 101 from the Colonial Motel. The schoolyard was

traversed by a road and a bridge which still stands today, leading back to the Tison and Schmidbauer properties. At the time the school was there, however, the bridge led back to Zack Simonson's ranch.

The fact that the school was there during the 1870's, leads to speculation that this was the land donated for a school by James and Melcena Case in 1870 even though it appears to be some distance from the land where the Cases lived.

It was not until 1887 that George Youde donated an acre of land near the junction of East Hill Road and Hilltop Drive for the first Sawyers School, which was replaced in 1898 by the second Sawyers School on land donated by George Mast, just to the side of the house where Bertha Cook and Veva Pearson live today.

The first day that Joy Sawyers took his children down to school in a horse and buggy, the children were terrified at the prospect of being left at the school all day. By the time Joy got back up to Deer Ridge Ranch with the buggy, all the children were back at home, having taken a shortcut across the wooded hills to return home. No one knows what Joy's reaction was, but the children were delivered a second time to

school, and this time they remained.

Meanwhile, back at Tom and Peggy's ranch in the Valley, Joy's younger brothers were growing up. In 1872, Marshall Ney married another Whited girl, Thursa, and in 1876 David married Sarah Whited. Old Tom was now in his late 70's, and David and Sarah stayed on in the homestead to help with the running of the ranch.

Three years later Tom died, and Peggy went to live with her daughter Martha and Ole Simonson on their ranch north of town, where she would live until her death in 1914.

Dave and Sarah continued to operate the Sawyers place for a few years, but Dave was branching out into another pursuit—the building of roads throughout the fast growing community. During the period they remained on the homestead, two children were born there—Fannie Belle in 1877 and Louis David in 1880.

A few years later, Dave and Sarah leased a large section of the Baechtel Ranch and moved into the Sam Baechtel home which still stands at the curve of Baechtel Lane. The Sawyers homestead was then taken over by the three youngest Sawyers boys, Wade, George and Robert, who were all born there.

**To be continued**



The third Sawyers School which was located on East Hill Road just past the house where Bertha Cook and Veva Pearson live now. The teacher, seated in the middle, was Jenny Hensley. On either side of her, dressed alike, are the Saxon twins, Hazel and Helen. Standing next to one of the Saxon twins is Walter Moore. In the window on the left are Una Smart and Alta Smith. In the window on the right are Leta Smart and Cleo Winans.





**Dave Sayers and Sarah Whited, on their wedding day in 1876. Dave was 21 years old and Sarah was 19. They were married by Joy Sawyers in the Whited homestead, and went to live with Tom and Peggy Sawyers on East Hill Road.**



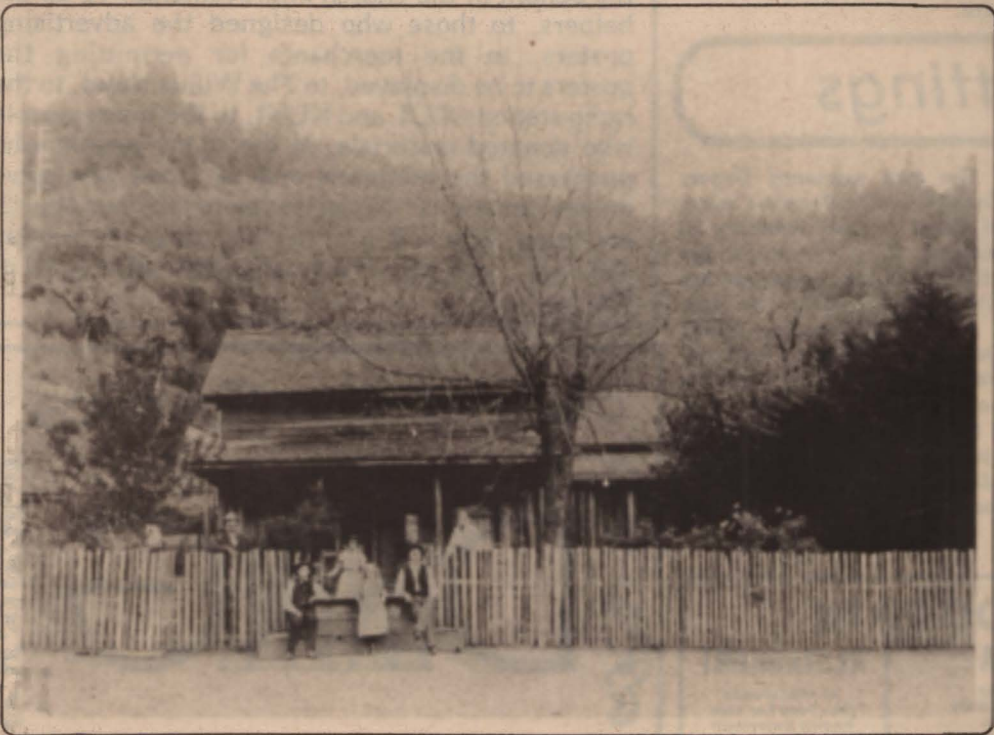
**The Sam Baechtel ranch home as it looked at the time that David and Sarah Sawyers were living there. The Sawyers leased 160 acres of the ranch and raised cattle and grain. The house still stands, at the curve in Baechtel Road.**



*Sawyers Family*



Travelers Home Hotel in about 1902, when Murvin and Millie Sawyers were operating the Sawyers Post Office there. It was located on the Hearst Road at the junction with the old Potter Valley Road, which is now the entrance to the Walter Camp property.



The original Fred Bahn homestead on Hearst Road, where Millie Bahn was born and where Millie and Murvin Sawyers were married in 1898. Othel Sawyers was also born in this house, which was torn down in 1903 and a new house built. Remains of the second house are still standing on the property, owned today by Jack Candee.



# Continuing the saga of the Sawyers family

Joy and Hester Sawyers lived on Deer Ridge Ranch for approximately 30 years, raising their five children to adulthood there. Their two sons, Murvin and Tom Harvey, helped with the running of the ranch and also hired out to other ranch families in the area.

Many new people moved in during the years the Sawyers lived on Deer Ridge. The old original James property was broken up and portions of it were bought by families named Allen, Clow, Jones, Southard and Haehl. It is difficult to tell now just which sections of land each of those families secured, but it appears that their lands adjoined in the order in which they are listed above.

The Allen place was the small house still standing just past the railroad overpass on the old highway south of town.

The Haehl Ranch was at the beginning of what is now called Holland Lane, and the other families lived in between.

North of the Haehl place was the Muir ranch, founded by Presley Muir in 1868.

The Angles sold their ranch not long after the loss of their children in the diphtheria epidemic to a family named Gilbert, who went in for a large scale cattle and sheep operation. At that time, the place was generally called the Walker Valley Ranch. Many young men of the time hired out as "riders" on the ranch to keep track of the far-roaming stock and among these were the sons of Joy and Hester, and a young man named Robert Cook.

At the time, there was a cabin called "Martin's place," located in the general area where Mark Walker lives today, on the ridge just this side of Ridgewood. The cabin was used as an overnight stopping place for the riders on the Walker Valley Ranch. Bear and cougar were in the area in great abundance and the riders all carried guns to

bring down the game and frequently enjoyed bear steaks in Martin's cabin.

The Walker Valley Ranch at the time the Gilberts owned it also included Reeves Canyon and the water powered sawmill which Mark Walker's grandfather had built there. Robert Cook, and possibly the Sawyers boys, not only worked as a rider for the Gilberts, but frequently worked at the sawmill as well.

Dora Luzena was the first of Joy's and Hester's children to marry. In 1892 she married Sam Winans and moved with him to a section of land up what is now called Hilltop Drive, off East Hill Road.

In 1896, Daisy May married Robert Cook. Their first home was probably someplace on the Walker ranch, as Robert continued working there. Later, they were to live in the Jones' house which was along the old road to Ukiah, somewhere in the area of Holland Lane.

Also working on the Walker Ranch were members of the Bahn family from Rock Tree, out on the road to Hearst. Gabe Thompson, who was married to Josie Hardwick, was a rider, and Josie's niece, Millie Bahn, was a cook for the Gilbert family and the ranch hands.

In 1898, Murvin Sawyers married Millie Bahn in the Bahn homestead at Rock Tree, with Joy officiating. The Bahn home was decorated with large Woodwardia ferns which had been gathered on the Walker Ranch and transported by wagon for the occasion.

Millie and Murvin Sawyers' first home was the Travelers Home stage coach stop, which had been built by George White on Hearst Road at the junction with the road to Potter Valley, the main stage line at that time.

Travelers Home was a stopping place for the Fast Freight line, operating between Ukiah and Covelo. The line also carried passengers, who would be given board and overnight lodging, before continuing up through Hearst and Eden Valley to Covelo.

After Murvin took over the place, he petitioned to have a post office established there, and this was done late in 1898 under the name of Sawyers Post Office. Murvin's youngest sister, Sarah, moved in to help run the post office while Millie took care of the stage line passengers.

In 1899, Millie moved into Willits to await the birth of her first child at her aunt Josie Thompson's home on Raymond Avenue. It was there that Thelma was born, in the house she was later to purchase and where she lives today.

In 1902, the second child, Othel, was born in the Bahn homestead at Rock Tree where Millie herself had been born in 1873.

Millie's parents were Nancy Hardwick and Frederick Bahn, who had homesteaded in the Rock Tree area in the 1860's. Their family of three boys and four girls were all born in the homestead, which was torn down not long after the birth of Othel, and rebuilt by Frederick, his sons and a man named Rider with lumber from the Jeff Dickens mill on Tomki Creek.

The Bahn property was bought by Allen Sacry in 1942, who built a new house next to the old one, using part of the lumber from the latter. A portion of it still stands today and is owned by Jack Candee.





Murvin Sawyers in 1895 on the old road to Ukiah when it ran through the Walker Valley Ranch. The big rock is the one at Ridgewood commonly called "Black Bart Rock," although the real Black Bart Rock was located further down the road and is not on today's Highway 101.



This picture was taken at Walker Valley Ranch [formerly the Angle Ranch] in the 1890's. At the far left is Charley Thomas, ranch manager, an unidentified boy, Millie Bahn, Millie's Aunt Josie and her husband Gabe Thompson, unidentified boy, and Mr. Gilbert, owner of the ranch after the Angles left.



# The Sawyers t



Three year old Thelma Sawyers stands on the stagecoach loading platform at Travelers Home Hotel on Hearst Road just before the family left for Mariposa County in 1903. Stagecoach passengers disembarked directly from the stage onto this platform.



Thelma with her two younger brothers shortly after the family returned to Little Lake Valley in 1905. In the middle is Lloyd Mountjoy, the baby born prematurely in Mariposa County, and on the left is Othel. In those days, baby boys not only wore dresses, they wore hair ribbons, too!

Murvin and Millie Sawyers operated the Travelers Home Hotel and the Sawyers Post Office for five years. In addition to serving the stage coach trade on the run from Ukiah to Covelo, Murvin also ran a blacksmith shop in connection with the hotel, and served as a guide for hunting parties.

In 1903, when Thelma Sawyers was three years old and her brother Othel still a baby, the Sawyers family made a major decision. It was prompted largely by Frank Standlee, who had married Murvin's sister Sarah in 1901.

Frank was convinced that there was still plenty of wealth to be found in the gold fields of California, and kept reminding the aging Joy of the dream old Tom Sawyers had when the family first came to California in the 50's seeking gold. After months of discussion, the decision was made. Joy and Murvin would join forces with Standlee, the families of all three would form a wagon train and travel together to seek their fortunes.

Joy and Hester sold Deer Ridge Ranch and everything they owned except a wagon and a team of horses and a few articles of furniture. Along with Sarah and Frank Standlee, and Murvin and Millie with their children, Thelma and Othel, the group set out for Mariposa County in the Sierra foothills, traveling south to the Bay Area and then across San Francisco Bay by ferry boat, an experience that spooked all the horses and nearly brought an end to the journey right there.

Thelma has only vague recollections of the journey, but in later years she heard her mother talk of the hardships on the women and children during the many weeks the journey took.

The roads were primitive and a large portion of the trip was uphill after they reached the foothills, over rocky terrain that the wagons could cover only if everyone got out and went on foot to ease the load. Nights, of course, were spent alongside the road. At long last they reached the

Sierras and the small mining town of Mount Bullion, where they were to live for the next two years.

Housing was scarce, but the men in the party managed to get two wooden houses put together before the first snows came. The winters were severely cold, and life was hard for all of them. Millie was pregnant with her third child and in the middle of the first winter, in December of 1903, Lloyd Mountjoy was born.

The baby was premature, and there was no doctor in the area. Murvin fashioned an incubator out of a cracker box lined with clean soft bits of blanket, which was kept warm beside the wood burning stove that the family took turns stoking around the clock for weeks on end.

By such loving and devoted care, the baby was kept alive and eventually lived to the age of 64. Sometime during the year after his birth, Millie made the trip home to Little Lake Valley with her three children, traveling by stage coach. Roberta Cook remembers that visit, and Millie's remarks that she never could have made the trip without all the help she received from the other stage coach passengers.

It is not clear whether she returned to Mount Bullion, or stayed on here. Things were not going well back at the mines. Joy and Hester were getting too old for the hard life they were all enduring, and they were all homesick for the rest of the family. In 1905, the quest for gold was forsaken, and the weary group made the long journey back home.

Joy was now 70 years old. All the proceeds from the sale of Deer Ridge Ranch had gone into the ill-fated Mariposa venture, but the personal faith of both Joy and Hester was still strong, and they pitched in with the help of their children to start a new life.

With the help of his sons, Joy built a cabin home of hand-hewn logs on the property owned by Dora and her husband, Sam Winans, in the area of today's Hilltop Drive. Murvin and Millie set up a tent near the cabin in which to live while they made negotia-



# Travel to the gold country

tions to lease the old original Mast homestead which was nearby and had long been unoccupied, the Masts having moved on to East Hill Road.

They were all living on Hilltop at the time of the 1906 earthquake. Thelma remembers being awakened by the noise, and her mother's call to father Murvin to "stop shaking the tent."

One other family recollection of that event is of Dave and Sarah Sawyers, who were living in the Baechtel home at the time. Dave had arisen early to go out and feed the stock. He set a lighted lantern on the kitchen table, and just as he started out the door something prompted him to turn back and move the lamp to a more central location on the table. He was down in the stock yard when the tremblor hit, and hurried back to the house to find that the lamp was still burning, but was standing on the very edge of the table.

To be continued.



Hester Sawyers [Joy's wife] with three of her grandchildren in a photo taken in 1897. In her lap is Roberta Cook, daughter of Daisy Mae and Robert Cook. Seated at her side is Adele Winans and standing is Cleo Winans, the daughters of Dora and Sam Winans.



The log cabin built by Joy Sawyers and his sons in 1905 after the family returned from Mariposa County. Joy and Hester were living here at the time of the 1906 earthquake. The location was in the area of Hilltop Drive just off East Hill Road.





This fine old picture of Dave Sawyers standing on the right with his hand on the shoulder of his wife, Sarah, also includes two other Whited sisters. On the far left is Hester Ann, Mountjoy Sawyers' wife, and in the rocking chair is Amny Whited, who married Jake Haehl. The little girl and woman in the center are unidentified, as is the house where the picture was taken.



Murvin Sawyers with his team of horses, plowing one of the many fields which Murvin planted in grains on the old Haehl Ranch. This was somewhere along today's Highway 101 below Bob Harrah's home.



# Murvin and Millie Sawyers move to the

## Farm Bureau

Murvin and Millie Sawyer's fourth child, Harvey, was born in the old Mast home on East Hill Road in 1906. The following year, the family leased the Haehl Ranch south of town, where they were to live for the next five years.

The original Haehl home in which the Sawyers lived had been built by Jake Haehl, Henry Haehl's father, after his marriage to Amny Whited, Hester's sister. It was located south of Willits on the road to Ukiah, the section now known as Holland Lane. It was also close to the old road that turned off and went back in the hills to the Deer Ridge Ranch on which Murvin Sawyers lived as a boy, so it was all familiar and well loved land.

On a recent drive to the site, Thelma Sawyers recognized an ancient pear tree in the front yard as one that was thriving there during her childhood, and also spotted the old well from which her family drew their water in the days they lived there. The original house in which the Sawyers lived is no longer there having burned down several years ago, but another house was built in front of the original one in 1913, and that house is now the home of Stan and Doris DeLong.

The nearest neighbors to the Sawyers were the Dan Southards, whose two-story home to the south of the Haehl place was a landmark for many years. When old Dan Southard lived there, he hung a large number of deer horns on a wooden arch over the entrance gate and so the place became popularly known as Buckhorn Ranch, which it is still called today although the gate and the home have been gone for many years. Gene Holder lives on the property today, in the house that was built in later years.

Other families who lived on the Southard place included the George Wheelers (he married a Southard girl), the Cravens and the Paul Delsols. But the Southard family was living there during the time the Sawyers family were ranching the Haehl property, and Thelma remembers them as a gay, happy family of many children who were always playing card games and eating homemade candy.

The years on the Haehl ranch were among the happiest for the Sawyers family. Murvin was doing what he liked best—working a large tract of land which covered the present Bob Harrah property all the way over to the railroad, and which he planted in large fields of grain for his stock. The hills surrounding the house were covered with manzanita which he grubbed out and burned in huge piles, planting large gardens of vegetables in their place. Thelma remembers especially the big cabbage and potatoe patches which the children were assigned to keep weeded.

Haehl Creek ran through the property offering endless hours of exploration or fishing for trout for the family's supper. The children attended Whitcomb School, the same school father Murvin had attended years before, along with the Jennings girls, the Albees and Hoppers. Their teacher was Lottie Hatch.

During those years, Murvin's brother Tom Harvey and sister Daisey May and her husband Robert Cook were all living at Northwestern where the men were working in the mill. Later the Cooks moved to Irmulco, but their daughter Roberta was a frequent visitor at the Haehl Ranch.

She recalls one evening they were all seated around the fireplace eating popcorn,

when suddenly there was a series of explosions that frightened all the children so badly they dived under furniture or disappeared through doorways in a few seconds flat. It turned out that a batch of homemade root beer which Millie had stored in the pantry had set off a chain reaction of popping bottles. Millie never tired of telling the story in later years.

Another time when Roberta was visiting the Sawyers, she and Thelma took off on one of the ranch horses to go visit Grandma Whited at the Whited Ranch in the Valley.

When Roberta reached Grandma's, she discovered Thelma was no longer with her. Turning back to search for the missing cousin, Roberta finally found her seated in the middle of the dusty road crying, having slid off the back end of the horse.

During this time, Dave and Sadie Sawyers were still living on the old Sam Baechtel Ranch. Dave was now a well established road contractor assisted by his son Louis, and was busy building roads from Sherwood to Fort Bragg, from Hardy to Juan Creek, 23 miles along the Eel River for the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, and sections of the state highway (101) as it opened up to the north.

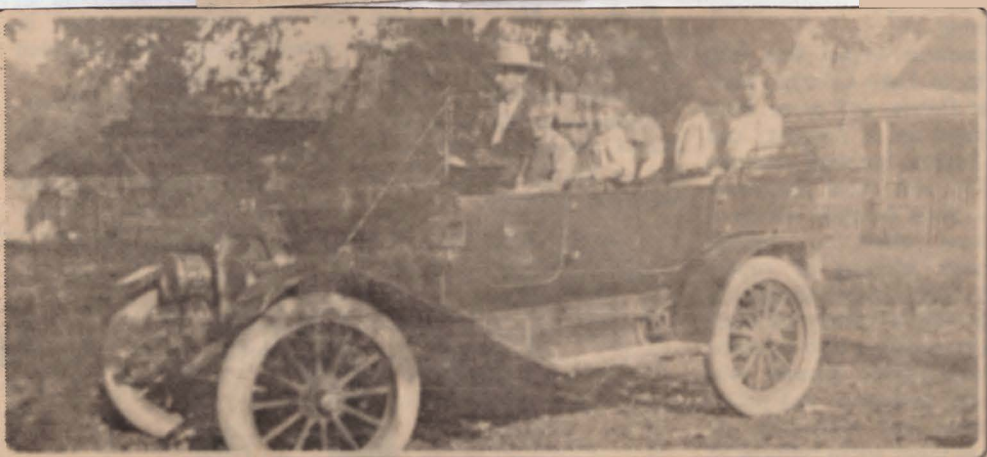
Dave and Sadie's daughter Fannie Belle had married Vane William Rogers, and in 1905 their daughter Aletha was born in the house in which they lived on McKinley Street, next door to the old Luther Baechtel home which was moved last year.

In 1910, when Dave bought the lot on Redwood Avenue next to Will Whited and built a home there, Fannie Belle and her husband and baby moved to the Baechtel place to continue running the ranch for Dave.





**Thelma Sawyers with her cousin Roberta Cook during the time the Sawyers family lived on the Haehl Ranch. The girls are playing in Haehl Creek, which ran through the property.**



**Murvin Sawyers and all the little Sawyers pose happily in a seldom seen passenger touring car, which had been left on the Sawyers place by a group of hunters for safekeeping.**



# The Sawyers years on the Haehl Ranch

*Willits Newspaper 9-1975*

Prior to the time the Sawyers moved into their Haehl ranch home, it had been the home of Robert and Lillian Smalley, who raised stock on the place and had a small son, Bob, who grew up to be Willits' own Dr. Bob Smalley.

At the time the Smalleys moved, Robert sold his disk plow to Murvin Sawyers, and Lillian sold her Singer sewing machine to Millie, a machine that is still in use today by Thelma Sawyers.

The Smalleys pointed out to the Sawyers the places in the house chimneys which had

been repaired after they were cracked in the 1906 earthquake. During the repairs, four year old Bob Smalley kept a constant watch on the operations, afraid that the workmen would make the chimney opening too small for Santa Claus to make it through.

About the same time Murvin and Millie moved onto the ranch, old Mountjoy and Hester Ann also moved from their log cabin to a home in Kenwood which had been purchased for them by their daughter Sarah and son Tom Harvey, both of whom were

living and working in Sonoma County. The old folks were not happy there, however, so in about 1909 they moved back to Willits into a house on Coast Street owned by another daughter, Dora Winans. Coast Street at that time was the road to Fort Bragg.

In that same year, Millie and Murvin went through one of their most tragic experiences. Three year old Harvey in a new flannel nightshirt stood too close to an open fire and was enveloped in flames. Murvin was out working with the stock at the time, and Millie beat out the flames as she sent the older children for their father.

The child was horribly burned and for a while they thought he would not live. The entire family suffered with the youngster as he went through the long and painful process of recovery. Thelma remembers taking flight into the orchard to escape the sound of her little brother's screams during the daily changing of the dressings on his legs.

The youngster was attended by the family doctor, Dr. Francis Gunn, who called in Dr. Waller Blodgett to assist him in the 21 separate skin grafts which were performed with chloroform as the only anesthetic.

When the call went out for skin donors, the entire athletic department of Willits High School volunteered. Nine were selected including Jess Duffield (an uncle), Clifford Steele, Allen Sacry, and the Rowe, Roth and Scott brothers.

Visitors to the Sawyers home through those long difficult months recall that Millie was driven by superhuman strength. No one remembers seeing her sleep; she was at her child's bedside around the clock. He eventually recovered of course, and grew up to be County Supervisor Harvey Sawyers.

In 1911 Millie's last child, Goldie, was born at the Haehl Ranch, with Dr. Gunn in attendance. Later all five little Sawyers came down with the whooping cough and once again Dr. Gunn was a daily visitor to the home.

In later years Murvin told how he approached Dr. Gunn after the long battle with Harvey to ask how much the doctor's bill would be. Dr. Dunn's reply was, "Murvin, you haven't got enough money to pay me, so I'm not going to charge you anything. All I want you to do is to bring me some fresh vegetables out of your garden now, and then, and when you butcher, put my name in the pot." For the rest of his life, Murvin did so.

In the same year that Goldie was born, old Mountjoy and Hester Ann moved from the Coast Street house to one on Central Avenue, just down from where the Safeway shopping center is now. At the time, there was nothing but open fields and oak groves all around the house. Today's Safeway parking lot was a pasture full of giant oaks. There were frequent and increasingly larger family gatherings in that house, which is the one the children remember as "grandpa's and grandma's house."

The following year, Murvin and his family were served with the sad news that the Haehl Ranch had been sold. A wealthy Santa Rosan by the name of Thayer bought two large parcels of land here for his daughters—the Henry Muir ranch for a daughter married to a man named Sisson, and the Haehl ranch for one married to a Bill Chappell.

There was no time for the Sawyers to look around for more land, so they moved in with grandma and grandpa in the house on Central Street where they were to live for a little less than a year.

Murvin decided to try his hand at a "salaried job" and went to work for Irvine and Muir as a drayman. It was his first experience at that kind of work, and after working for only a short while he returned from a pickup of merchandise at the railroad station one day loaded down with bills-of-lading and other paperwork. After struggling to put the



Six year old Harvey Sawyers [with hat on] poses near his grandparent's home with neighbor children Lawrence Duffield [a cousin], Irwin Hall and little sister Goldie. This was just after the Sawyers family left the Haehl Ranch.



papers in order, he finally threw them down in disgust and walked off the job.

For the rest of the time they lived on Central Street, Murvin worked at putting in a large vegetable garden in the field behind his parents' house and in tending to a number of public service jobs he held.

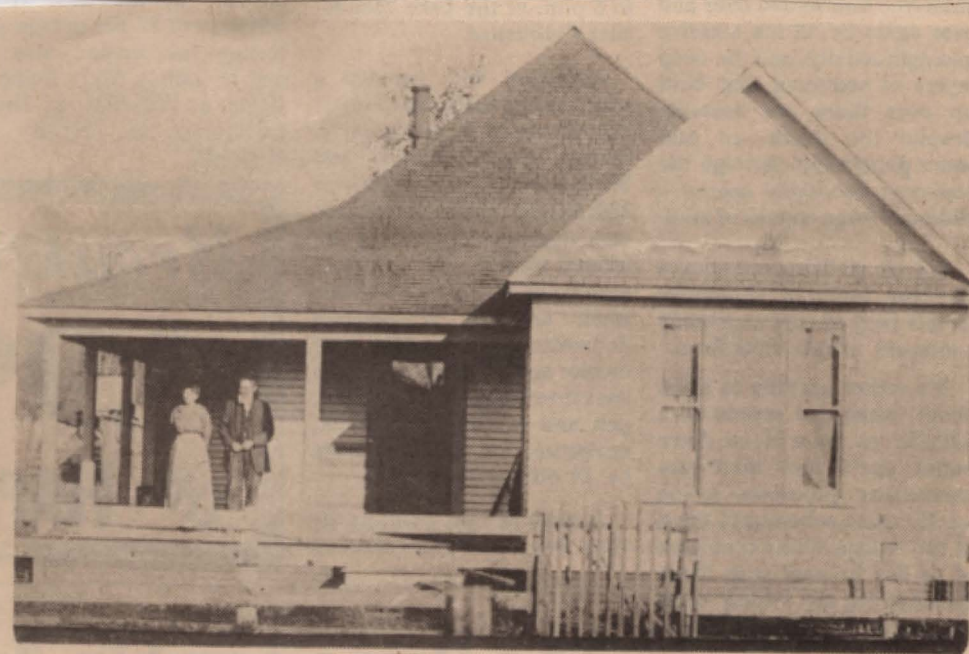
Active in the Baptist Church, as were all the Sawyers, Murvin was also a trustee of the School Board, helped with the organization of the Willits Farm Bureau and served as director of the Farm Bureau Credit Association for many years.

During the brief time the family lived on Central Street, the younger children attended Daughtery School which was where the Walker and Aleck-sick truck yard is located now. Thelma attended the original two story Pine Street Grammar School, located behind the present Grange Hall, where she graduated as an eighth grader under principal Roy Good in June, 1913.

**to be continued**



**The large vegetable garden which Murvin Sawyers planted behind his parents' home on Central Street. The trees in the background were in the area now covered by the Safeway parking lot.** *Willits News Apr. 9-1975*



**Mountjoy and Hester Sawyers on the porch of the house on Central Street in 1912. This was just a block down the street from where Safeway is today.**



# The Sawyers move back to the Valley

At the same time that Murvin and Millie Sawyers and their children moved in with Mountjoy and Hester on Central Street, cousin Roberta Cook also moved in. Daisy May and Robert Cook were living in Irmulco, and it was necessary for Roberta to move to town to go to high school.

In the fall of 1912, Roberta entered the two story high school located at the corner of Pine and Maple Streets, where she was graduated with the class of 1916.

Meanwhile, back at the Haehl Ranch which had been sold to the Chappells, work was going on, building a new house just in front of the old ranch house where the Sawyers had lived. Dave Cook and Mark Walker both worked on the building of that house, which was later the home of Earl Maize and today is the home of Stan and Doris DeLong.

At the same time the old house was remodeled and when the Chappells moved into the new place, Dave and Bertha Cook, along with their children Veva and Dewain, moved into the older house. Dave worked for some time as ranch foreman for the Chappells.

Murvin was growing restive trying to adjust to living in "the city." At last, in the fall of 1913, he made arrangements to lease the original Whited homestead which had been built by Doc Whited in the 1850's, and in October of 1913 Murvin and Millie and the children moved again, this time back onto the land with fields for Murvin to farm. They were to live there the next five years.

Harvey, Lloyd, and Othel entered Sawyers School, the third and last Sawyers School, built on land donated by George Mast adjacent to Bertha Cook's present day home. All three Sawyers brothers, and later their sister Goldie, were graduated from that school.

Thelma was in high school by this time, along with her cousin Roberta. Sometimes she rode horseback to school, but many times she walked, cutting across open fields to the railroad and then following the tracks down to Valley Street and up Valley to Pine. When the weather was stormy, she would move in with her grandparents on Central Street for a few days.

In 1914 Peggy Sawyers, who had made the wagon trip to California with old Tom in 1854, died at the home of Martha and Ole Simonson at the age of 88 years. In addition to her stepson Mountjoy and stepdaughter Mary Elizabeth Cook, both of whom had made the wagon trip with her, Peggy's children still alive at the time of her death were

Martha Ann Simonsen, Marshall Ney of Ukiah, David of Willits, Fannie Belle Hicks of Santa Barbara, Wade Hampton of Fresno, George Edwin of Santa Barbara and Robert Lee of Willits. By that time there were also 27 grandchildren and 35 great grandchildren.

Peggy, who had been a charter member of the first Baptist Church established in Little Lake Valley in 1862, remained an active member until her death. She was buried in what was still known at the time as Sawyers cemetery, later called Little Lake Cemetery, just off East Hill Road.

The original plot of ground consisting of three-quarters of an acre was donated to the people of Little Lake Valley by old Tom Sawyers in the 1860's. The use of the land for burials was free to all and no title was acquired to the land. So, after Tom's death, ownership of the land passed to others.

In 1886 David Smart owned the land and after a public meeting concerning the need of additional land for the cemetery, he agreed to deed two acres to Sam Baechtel, Ole Simonson, Mountjoy Sawyers and their successors, to be held in trust by them. The land was divided up into burial plots, and from then on all plots were sold.

In 1915, Mountjoy began to fail. That was also the year of

the International Exposition in San Francisco. Joy's daughter Dora, whose husband Sam Winans had died in 1904, went to the exposition on a honeymoon following her marriage to Francis Henry.

When they returned they stopped in to see her father and told him of the wonders they had seen at the fair, including a flying machine invented by some brothers named Wright. Old Joy, who read his bible daily to the day of his death, answered, "The bible tells us that the day will come when sermons are delivered through the air. I guess that is how they will do it." At that time, of course, no one dreamed of anything as fantastic as programs beamed through the air by radio.

Joy died in November and his funeral and burial in Sawyers Cemetery was attended by hundreds. People all over the county knew "Brother Sawyers" not only as a long time pastor of the local Baptist Church, but also as a circuit rider back in the days before there was a church.

Luther Baechtel had a new Ford automobile which he drove in the funeral procession, but it spooked the horses

pulling the hearse so it was relegated to the rear end of the procession. The hearse which carried Mountjoy to his final resting place is now on exhibit at the County Museum.

to be continued





The third and last Sawyers School on East Hill Road is shown here. It was entered by the three Sawyers brothers in 1913, and they all were graduated from it, as was their younger sister Goldie. The school was located next to Bertha Cook's home, which was built with timbers from the old school.



The last photo of Mountjoy Sawyers, taken at the Central Street home with all of his children just a couple of months before his death in 1915. Seated are Hester and Joy, and in the back left to right are Sarah Standlee Sidwell, Daisy May Cook, Dora Winans Henry, Thomas Harvey and Murvin Lee.





**Grandma Peggy Sawyers before her death in 1914 with her daughter Martha Ann Simonson, Ida Simonson Beard and Lila Beard [Anderson].**



# The Sawyers and social life in Little Lake

Willits 4-23-75

## Valley

The years that Murvin and Millie Sawyers and their children lived in the old Whited homestead were also happy years for the family.

Murvin not only farmed the land which was planted in grains and vegetables, he also operated a threshing and baling machine which made the rounds of all the farms in the Valley at harvest time, with Millie going along in the cookhouse wagon to feed the crews.

The Valley families were a close-knit, gregarious group. Sunday afternoons after church and the heavy noon meal, families gathered for games of baseball in which all ages participated, and a favorite gathering place was at the old Whited place.

Regulars in these games were the younger Whiteneds, the Duffields, the Sheltons (who lived where the Gary Fords live today, across Davis Creek from Center Valley Road), the Millers (who lived where the Frank Freitags live today at the junction of East Hill Road with Hilltop Drive), the Bredehofts, the Ruelles, the VanBebbers and the Winans (who lived in the house where Vic Guehennec lives today on East Hill Road.)

Another regular in the gatherings were the school teachers who lived with local families, such as Stella Brown who taught at Sawyers School, lived with the Millers and was included in every family gathering.

Sundays were also the day for making the frequent trips out into the countryside for daylong picnics—out Hearst Road to swim in the Eel, out to the Bahn Ranch in Rock Tree Valley, out to Outlet Creek or even on to Laytonville for a baseball match with the families there.

Thelma, who was in high school during those years, was having a separate social life of her own with the young people of the area who, like their parents, socialized primarily through outdoor activities—hiking, picnicking and swim-

ming.

Cousin Roberta Cook was graduated from high school in 1916 and then returned to Irmulco to work for a year as an assistant to the postmistress there, Selma Frederickson. Thelma and other young teenagers used to hike all the way from Willits out to Irmulco to visit the Cooks, spend a weekend in the redwoods and visit the Soda Springs that were a big attraction at the time.

Thelma says they used to follow the railroad tracks out from town to the Horseshoe

Ranch (now the Whittaker place) and cut across from there to the Fort Bragg Highway and down the canyon trail to Irmulco.

Irmulco was still a big lumbering community at that time, and a special sport of the young people was to ride a hand car out the line to where the wood crews were working. Bob Cook was working in the woods at the time and was also an edgerman in the mill.

During those years when the Sawyers lived at the Whited Ranch, Millie had her eye on another house which was located just down the lane. No one recalls now just who built the house originally, but it had been lived in for some time by the family of Harry Mohn, the Willits undertaker. After the Mohns moved out, the lovely old house remained vacant and uncared for. At every chance, Millie would go down there to work on the grounds, clearing out debris, planting flowers, and dreaming of the home she would someday have there.

That dream eventually came true, with the Sawyers buying the place from the owner at that time, Katherine Duncan. Because the property had originally been part of the old Mast homestead when property titles were not handled as carefully as they now are, it took an entire year to clear the title to the place but the Sawyers moved in and started work on it during the year the title search was going on. They were living there when Thelma was graduated from high school in 1917.

The following year Thelma attended Sweet's Business College in Santa Rosa riding the train home on weekends. After finishing her business course, she went to work for the Irvine and Muir Company in Willits with Ed Corbett as her boss there. In two and a half years she saved \$800 and entered Humboldt State College.

At the same time Daisy May and Bob Cook moved from Irmulco to Willits, and bought the Percy Whitcomb home at the corner of Main and Oak Streets where Bert Houx lives today. Bob went to work for H.B. Muir in his tan oak operations.

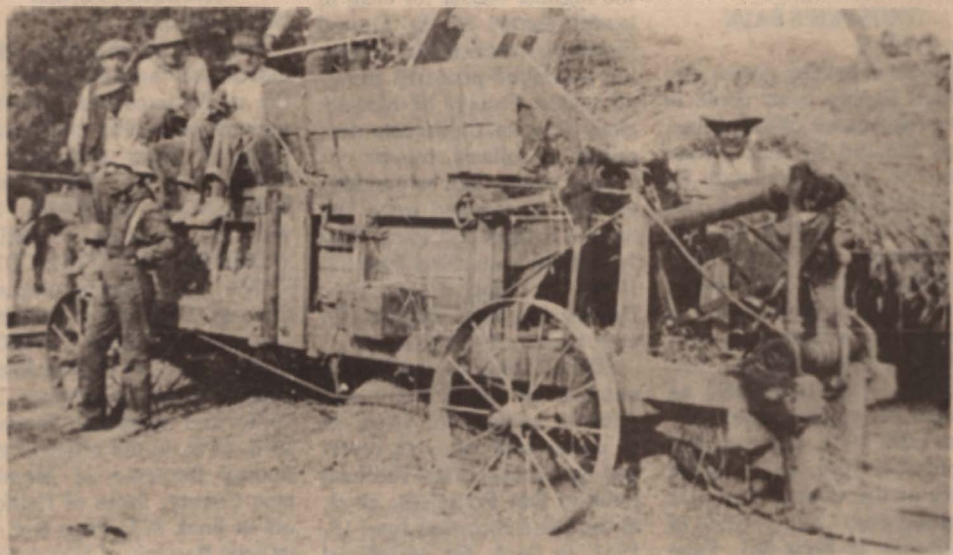
Roberta, in the meantime, had gone to Stanford Hospital and completed nurse's training there, remaining to work in the Stanford Clinic for three years. In 1923, she returned to Willits to work for Dr. Raymond Babcock at the Northwestern Hospital where Aunt Sadie (Sarah Sawyers) Sidwell was the hospital cook.

**To be continued**





**Murvin Saywers' threshing machine [top] and hay baler[bottom], which harvested the Valley grain crops during the teens and twenties.**





Wells News



Millie Sawyers and Stella Brown at the driveway entrance to the property now known as the Sawyers Ranch, which Millie and Murvin bought in 1917 and which today is the home of Harvey Sawyers. Stella was a teacher at Sawyers School.



A typical Sunday afternoon gathering at the old Whited place when the Sawyers were living there. At the far left is Karlene Winans, and across the back are Amy Thompson [Aunt Josie's daughter], Uncle Jess Duffield, Murvin, Josephine Darrow, Veva Duffield, Lawrence Duffield, Bill Duffield, Hallie Case and Doug Whited. In the front row are Violet Miller, Stella Brown with a couple of Duffield children, and Goldie Sawyers. The two small boys in front of Hallie Case are Fred Whited's boys, Lloyd and Francis.



# Concluding chapter of the Sawyers story

1975

Willits News

5/14/1975

1

Thelma Sawyers was graduated from Humboldt College in 1923. Her first teaching assignment was in Arcata, but she returned to Willits in the fall of 1924 to teach at the then brand new Pine Street School (now the Grange Hall) and later at the new Brookside School. Her teaching career in Willits spanned the next 42 years.

After Harvey was graduated from high school in 1924, he went on to earn a degree at the University of California at Davis and then took a position in the School of Agriculture at the University. On one of his frequent trips by train to the Bay Area during the 1930's, he met a pretty young girl from Davis by the name of Muriel Irwin, who was also riding the train, and in 1937 they were married in a garden wedding at the Irwin home. After their marriage, they moved to Woodland where Harvey opened a feed and seed store.

Goldie, the youngest of Millie's and Murvin's children, was graduated from Willits High in 1928 and then went to business college in San Francisco where she eventually married and made her home.

Up until the time of grandmother Hester Ann's death in 1925, family gatherings alternated between the homes she shared with Uncle Harvey on Locust Street, and the Sawyers Ranch home of Millie and Murvin in the Valley.

The ranch was thriving under their care, with the fields planted in grain and a large vegetable garden near the house. As the years went by, all of Millie's early loving care became evident with the luxuriant display of flowers, vines, shrubs and trees which she had planted growing up around the lovely old redwood house.

Also during the 1920's, a number of major events for the City of Willits took place. The last remaining stretch of Main Street was paved; the first Frontier Days celebration was planned as a fund raising event for the new Howard Memorial Hospital built in 1928, and the Women's Im-

provement Club bought the empty lot next to the Library for \$1750 and erected the building which today houses the Justice Court and other City and county offices on the first floor and the new Teen Center on the second.

Cousin Roberta Cook, who had returned to Stanford Hospital as a private nurse during the early 20's, came home to Willits with the opening of Howard Hospital and was head nurse there for the next 19 years. Her parents, Bob and Daisy May Cook, moved to the Clow ranch south of town in the 1930's and lived there with Bob's sister Jane Clow until his death in a gun accident in 1936.

In 1929 Dave Sawyers died, followed by his wife Sadie in 1932. With the later deaths of Wade Sawyers in 1936, Martha Ann Simonson in 1937, Fannie Hicks in 1940 and Robert Lee Sawyers in 1949, all of old Tom Sawyers' children were gone, and the many children and grandchildren were scattered over the state.

The only branch of the family that remained in Willits was that of Mountjoy and Hester Ann. During the 20's and 30's, all of their children were still here—Murvin, Tom Harvey, Dora Luzena Winans Henry, Daisy May Cook and

Sadie Standlee Sidwell. Mrs. Sidwell, who had been a cook at the old Northwestern Hospital for Dr. Raymond Babcock, moved with Doc to the new Howard Memorial Hospital when it opened.

Thelma continued to live on the ranch with her parents after she returned to Willits. The depression years of the 1930's did not affect the Sawyers. They raised all their food on the ranch—pigs, cattle, chickens and milk cows. Murvin did his own butchering, and Millie put up fruits and vegetables and made her own butter. Eggs, cream and butter were sold on a regular basis to the Irvine and Muir store.

In 1933 the government built an Emergency Conservation Camp in Willits, commonly known as a CCC camp, for the purpose of providing work for the unemployed. It was located south of town on the property then owned by Amy Requa Long, on the site of a nine-hole golf course that had been built a few years before by a group of Willits businessmen.

The camp consisted of 21 tent houses, later replaced by wooden dormitories, plus a bath house and mess hall. The rock chimney of the mess hall is still standing in the field below Bob Harrah's house. Over 200 men were housed there and provided with work building roads and fire trails, fighting fires and clearing brush. Uncle Harvey was one of the 110 local men who were accepted into the program during those lean years. It was his last job, as he died in 1939.

It was also during those years that farming in the Valley came to a halt. In 1940, Murvin and Millie sold the ranch to Harvey and Muriel and moved into town with Thelma, who had bought the old home on Raymond Avenue where she had been born and where she still lives today. Two years later Uncle Fred Bahn sold the old Bahn homestead on Hearst Road to the Sacry brothers and he, too, moved into the house on Raymond Avenue.

In 1946 Millie Sawyers died, followed by Murvin in 1951.

Dora Luzena had preceded them in 1943, and sister Daisy May followed in 1957. Sadie Sidwell was the last of the children to go, in 1968.

Today Harvey and Thelma and Harvey's son Douglas are the last of the Sawyers in Little Lake Valley. Harvey and Muriel have two other children, Warren Harvey and Vernlyn, and there are six grandchildren.

After serving for 20 years on the County Board of Supervisors Harvey is now retired, but puts in a full day on the ranch, which is in permanent pasture and on which he is raising Black Angus cattle. For over 20 years the Sawyers Ranch has been the setting for the annual Sawyers Picnic, which began in 1933 as a gathering of former students of the old Sawyers School.

Thelma retired from teaching in 1966, but has a full and busy life. She still keeps house for herself and Uncle Fred, now in his 90's, does all the work in a large garden and is active in the First Baptist Church and a number of service organizations.

The Sawyers have played a vital role in the life of the community from its earliest days and leave a permanent record of achievement in their contributions to the spiritual and educational needs of its people.





Teacher Thelma Sawyers with her third grade class of 1931-32 at the Pine Street School. In the back row left to right, are Bud Sowash, Dorothy Walker, Donna Bray, Jane Farrelly, Thelma, David Jensen, Cornelius Murray, Donald Ford, Welcome Pyle, Ronald Roelle. Middle row: Dennis Quinliven, Armond Wonacott, Arthur Safford, Marian Legg, Evelyn Hinton, Ruth Baker, Earlene Johnson, Laura Evans, Venus Tea. Seated in front: Rene Bello, Randall Clow and Billie Whitney.



Four of the members of Willits' famous crack basketball team pose in a staged photo at the Cliff House in San Francisco in 1924. Left to right are Luther Rupe, Ed Heckendorf, George Rupe and Harvey Sawyers.





**Four Willits High senior classmates gather at the Sawyers Ranch in Little Lake Valley in 1927. In the picture from left to right, are Helen Rupe, Goldie Sawyers, Mary Bedford and Constance Lovett.**