

Pioneer Memories of the Santa Ana Valley

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Volume IV

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PIONEER MEMORIES OF THE SANTA ANA VALLEY

VOLUME IV

GEORGE KEY OF PLACENTIA
FARMER, WRITER AND GENTLEMAN

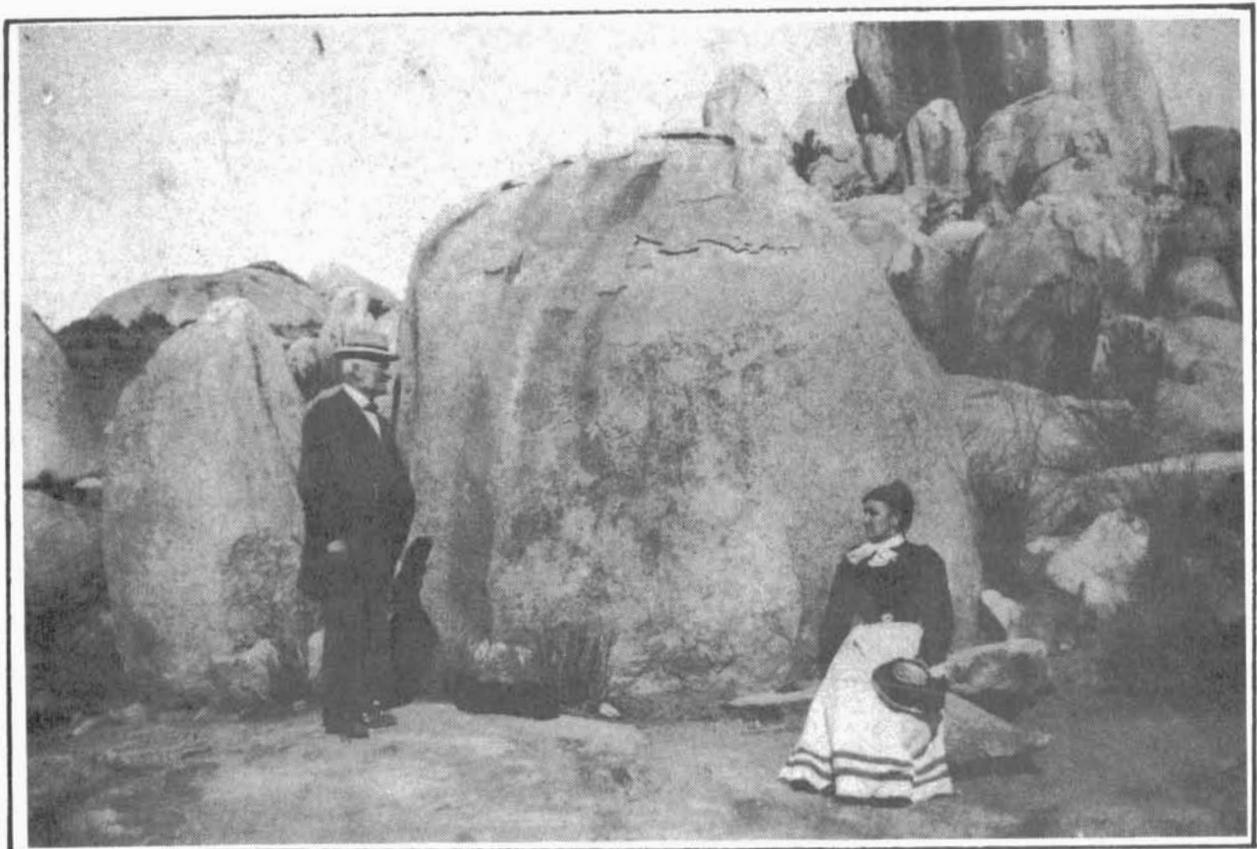
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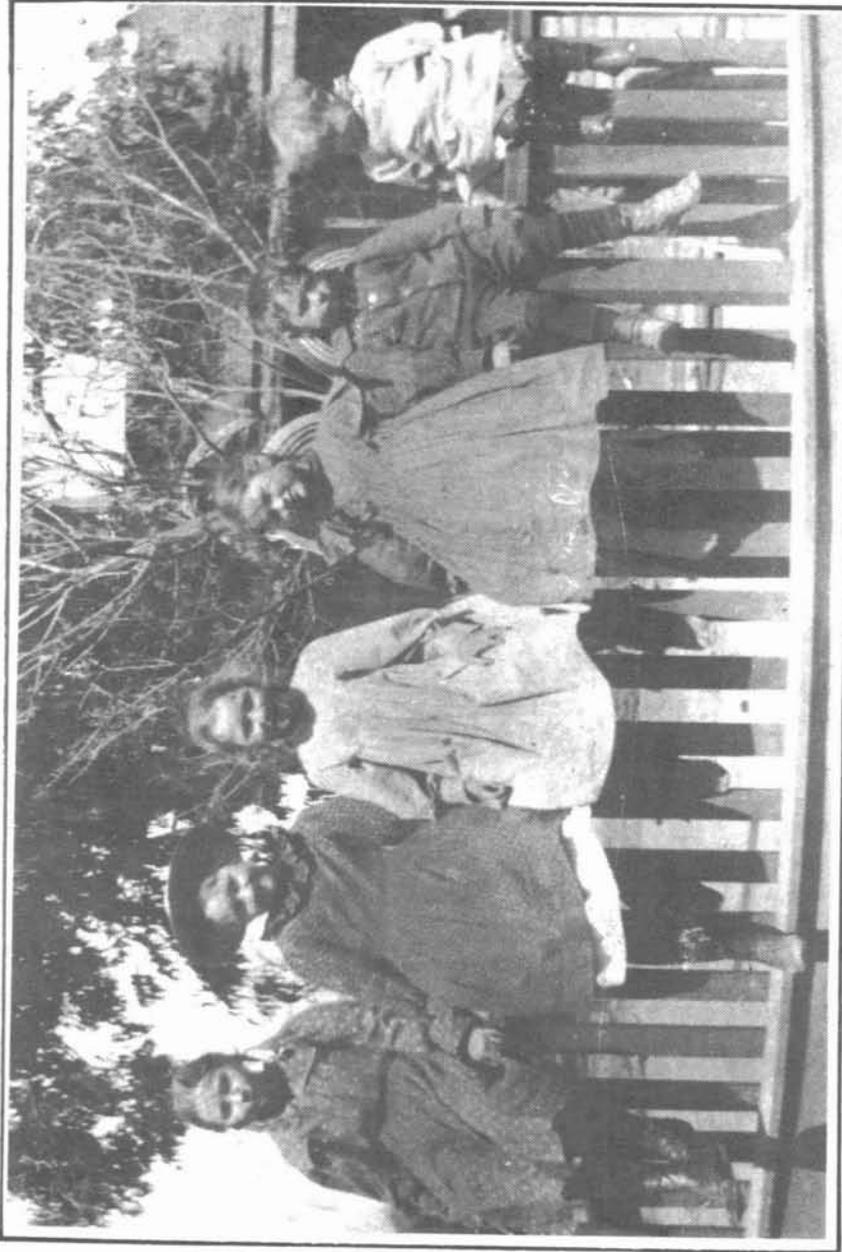
Ebell Society of the Santa Ana Valley

1984



1

William Key and daughter, Mary Slingsby, about 1902 at Rocky Point, Corona Del Mar



George B. Key Children - Barbara, Sarah, Mary, Margaret, William and George Gilman Key
About 1897 at Southern California Semi-Tropical Fruit Co. Ranch

ten years later architect Frederick Eley of Los Angeles remodeled it extensively adding a new wing to the south, an enormous porch, trellis and balconies as well as interior improvements.

As a matter of interest, Mr. Eley later became one of Santa Ana's most prominent architects. The Ebell Clubhouse is an example of his design as are the Santa Ana YMCA building and the octagonal Exhibit Hall at Irvine Park.

George B. Key, George G.'s father, planted twelve acres of valencia oranges in 1893. Three of those original trees are still producing. They were budded to sweet root stock so that the Key orange trees didn't suffer from the Quick Decline disease that hit the area in the 40's and 50's. Trees that were budded to a sour root stock really suffered. About 1956 our little four acre grove in North Tustin lost forty trees in one year.

We learned that the first Valencia orange grown commercially in California was planted in 1880 at the present site of Cal State University at Fullerton. Then the property belonged to the Southern California Semi-Tropical Fruit Company. The first superintendent was Richard Gilman who was admired by George B. Key and the source of George G.'s middle name. Mr. Gilman married Helen Wright, a sister of George B.'s wife, Hannah.

As the orange trees grew, blossomed and produced, the pioneer growers in the Fullerton/Placentia area organized in 1893 as the Placentia Orange Growers Ass., a cooperative venture composed of thirty-six independent ranchers.

Everyone has heard of "Sunkist" oranges. They're the tops. Yes, only the best grades can boast this label which became the trademark of the California Fruit Growers Exchange organized in 1907. Each local association had several brands for their fruit but only their best oranges could wear the "Sunkist" wrapper. The State Ass.

was basically the sales agent for the local associations.

The Valencia variety became the most popular, a juicy summer orange. However, citrus farmers did have problems, such as insect pests and spider mites, many different molds, fungus, root rots, tree diseases, mineral deficiencies, the "dry" Santa Ana winds and recurrent frosts. Fortunately modern technology helped but today with the increase in property value and labor costs houses have replaced most of the citrus trees in Orange County.

After taking several pictures including the one of George G. Key and Lucy Lockett appearing in this book, we started our tour.

First, we saw the kitchen and bedroom exhibits which are housed in an unique structure made from three separate old buildings. It consisted of the girls' and boys' bathrooms from the old Placentia Grammar School (1905) plus the blacksmith shop (pre 1903) from the Wilshire Ranch, a neighbor to the south.

What an array of old things! Items we'd forgotten about and others that were older than we are!

Out in the yard were many, many pieces of old farm machinery. I climbed up on an alfalfa hay mower. Harriet Butler took my picture. I felt right at home. I remember helping my father when I was a girl at our Fairview Ranch near Costa Mesa, but I don't think I ever drove the mower. I did pitch hay, though. I'm really a farmer at heart.

Really interesting and unusual was the collection in the workshop shed. Items such as the squirrel and gopher smoker, corn sheller, drill press and avocado picker as well as the usual tools.

The old shed containing the carpenter tools and the

blacksmith equipment was so orderly, yet filled with useful items all so necessary to keep the ranch working and producing. Ranchers had to be self-sufficient. Especially interesting was the equipment used for packaging oranges.

Before leaving we also had the opportunity to tour the interior of the house. Its large livingroom was nicely furnished with a cool gracious look. The dining room had a lovely hand crocheted lace tablecloth. The kitchen had been modernized and there was inside plumbing of course.

The upstairs rooms were crammed with memorabilia collections - books, pictures, nicknacs, vintage clothes, sheet music, an organ, pictures, etc. What a treasure storehouse! Each item with a history of its own.

I had mentioned to Mr. Key that I would like to interview him at a later date so that I could write up his story for our "Pioneer Memories of the Santa Ana Valley" series and that I also would like to do an article for the Orange County California Genealogy Society Quarterly under my byline, "People Behind Places." Mr. Key was agreeable.

In warm September we made a date and I spent a delightful afternoon interviewing him and talking about this and that. Early in the afternoon I told him how fortunate I had been to have the opportunity to use his interesting and historical material. Also I said that I felt I'd had some help from the man upstairs in finding such a wealth of material for my projects.

Mr. Key showed me his Family Notebook. A voluminous record of pictures, printed material and genealogical charts. It was inspiring to learn that he had prepared this masterpiece in duplicate for his grandchildren, six copies! Every picture was labeled. What a labor of love. What a gift! He told me I could use any of

the material I chose. He loaned me copies of several things to duplicate. Thank you, Mr. Key.

Mr. Key's ancestors were real pioneers in Southern California. Fortunately he knows quite a lot about them, so here are some of the highlights.

The Key Family came from Cockermouth, England. John Key, who died in 1769 was the father of Robert who had a son, John who was born in 1754. George G. Key has a Psalm Book written by this ancestor in 1775 in Harrington, England. This John had a son, John, who was born in 1791 whose son, George came to Ontario, Canada in 1844 with his wife, Barbara (Benn) Banks Key and their seven children. Barbara's first husband was Mr. Banks; they had a son, Joseph Banks. George Key died in 1849 and Barbara in 1874. They are buried in a small cemetery in Oakland, Ontario. Their farm of 400 acres was nearby. Their son, William, who was born in 1826 married Mary Jane Thompson.

Mary Jane Thompson was born in Scotland in 1825. Her father, George, had come to Canada via a few years in England.

William and Mary Jane Key raised six children. They had a farm in Richwood, Ontario. In later years they moved to Paris, Ontario and William was in the insurance business. This couple and their daughter, Barbara, who never married are buried in the Richwood Cemetery. The other children eventually came to the Placentia/Fullerton area including George Benn Key, the father of George Gilman Key. George B. married Mary Frances Wright in 1886 after coming to Southern California in 1882. He settled in Placentia in 1893 as superintendent of the Southern California Semi-Tropical Fruit Co. It was at this time that he bought the Bastanchury property.

The family of Mary Frances Wright came to the United States from Wales. It is known that George G.'s great

grandfather, Amos Wright, Sr., was born about 1797 and that he moved from Tennessee to Missouri where he was married to Elizabeth Wilson in 1820. Her family had come from Virginia. After their marriage this couple went by horseback carrying all their belongings to Arkansas where they took up a homestead of 420 acres. They had a family of fourteen children. Their seventh was Amos, Jr., born in 1838. He married Sarah Elizabeth Nash of Rocky Comfort, Arkansas in 1859. Her family had founded Nashville, Tennessee. Sarah's parents were Helen and Hamilton Nash.

During the Civil War three of Amos Wright Jr.'s sisters lost their husbands in the Civil War. The family and many of their relatives were really destitute after the war. In 1869 a group of about 100 relatives made the decision to come to California. What a trek! Around thirty ox-drawn wagons started out but when they ran out of money many stopped along the way, some turned back, but Amos and his wagon train were able to borrow money and so they reached Compo, San Diego Co., on December 1, 1869, after eight months of danger, hardships and sorrow.

Amos Wright had brought his wife and four daughters ranging in age from one to ten years and his three widowed sisters and their nine children safely to the promised land.

After spending several years at Jamul, San Diego Co., raising cattle and dry farming, Amos bought a ranch in Anaheim where he dammed the stream so that he could have a pond and raise ducks and geese. He also did some dry farming but the flood of 1877 destroyed his dam so he sought other means for making a living.

For awhile the family lived in an old Yorba adobe located on a knoll north of Orangethorpe and west of Imperial Avenues. Next, Amos worked on the Charles C. Chapman Ranch and lived there, then to Alhambra

and finally Amos Wright purchased ten acres on the southwest corner of Fair Oaks and Mountain Avenues in Pasadena. He built a house and in 1886, did dry farming, had a dairy and dealt in real estate. Later he subdivided, sold the house and built a new home on Mountain Ave. In 1905 he moved to a five acre citrus ranch on Valencia Ave. in Placentia.

In Placentia Amos and Sarah were surrounded by citrus ranches belonging to their children: Pauline and Edwin Ames, Lulu and Edwin Brewer. Mary Frances and George Benn Key, Elizabeth and Richard Gilman, and Lillie (Andrews) and David Wright.

George Gilman Key, son of George B. and Mary Frances (Wright) Key, born in 1896, married Hannah Ipsen. Her ancestors came from Denmark. Her father, Andrew, was born in 1871 in Helleweddt, the son of Chris and Hannah (Kjer) Ipsen. Her mother was (Anna) Christine Schmidt, born in 1871, the daughter of Mathias and Maren (Due) Schmidt. Maren's parents were Andrew and Anna Christine Due.

At the age of fifteen Andrew Ipsen left home and went to Lygumkloster to work as a clerk and later to Beftoft and Toftland. During this time Germany had taken over this section of Denmark and so the young Danish men were put into the army. As Andrew had almost reached the conscription age he decided to leave the country as did many other young men.

He left Denmark in the fall of 1893. His ship unloaded its passengers in Quebec instead of New York because of an epidemic in New York. Andrew Ipsen arrived in Placentia on October 26, 1893. He went to work on the Charles C. Chapman Ranch.

In 1895 Andrew married (Anna) Christine Schmidt. She had left Denmark on the same ship as Andrew. Her sister, Lena, had come to Placentia several years earlier. Lena's husband, Thyge Anderson, was superintendent on the S. Littlefield Ranch that was bought by Mr. Chap-

man in 1904.

Before her marriage Christine had taken a job with Harry Chandler of the Los Angeles Times caring for his two small children. Mrs. Chandler had died but one of the grandmothers lived in the house. Here Christine learned English and spent a happy nine months.

Andrew and Christine Ipsen were the parents of eight children. Their daughter, Hannah, born in 1897, married George G. Key.

Andrew Ipsen held a variety of jobs including: foreman on a cattle ranch, workman for the Southern California Semi-Fruit Co. Ranch, clerk at the Placentia store of Stern and Googman and citrus farmer. In later years he was owner of the Peoples Store in Placentia which sold groceries, hardware, yardage, work clothes, and animal feed. This store was very popular because it provided home delivery.

Mr. Ipsen was very active in the Placentia Presbyterian Church having served as Elder, Trustee and Sunday School superintendent. He also served on the City Council and was active in the Foresters Lodge. He died in 1932. His wife died in 1966.

George Gilman Key was one of eight children. His father had planted a vineyard, olive trees, deciduous and banana trees and some eucalyptus (blue gum) trees. Next he planted twelve acres of flat land to Valencia oranges. The orange trees grew very tall (some were over thirty feet) and although they were planted thirty feet apart some grew to where they touched each other. Some of the trees produced over forty field boxes of fruit each year.

About 1918 George G. planted six more acres of citrus. Because there was no irrigation system these trees were watered by an unique way. Hannah drove the

team for the wagon and George dipped water from barrels to fill the basins around each tree.

In 1945 after buying out the interest of the other heirs to the Ranch, George G. and Hannah did some remodeling of the old home. They enjoyed entertaining family and friends. One family gathering numbered over one hundred people.

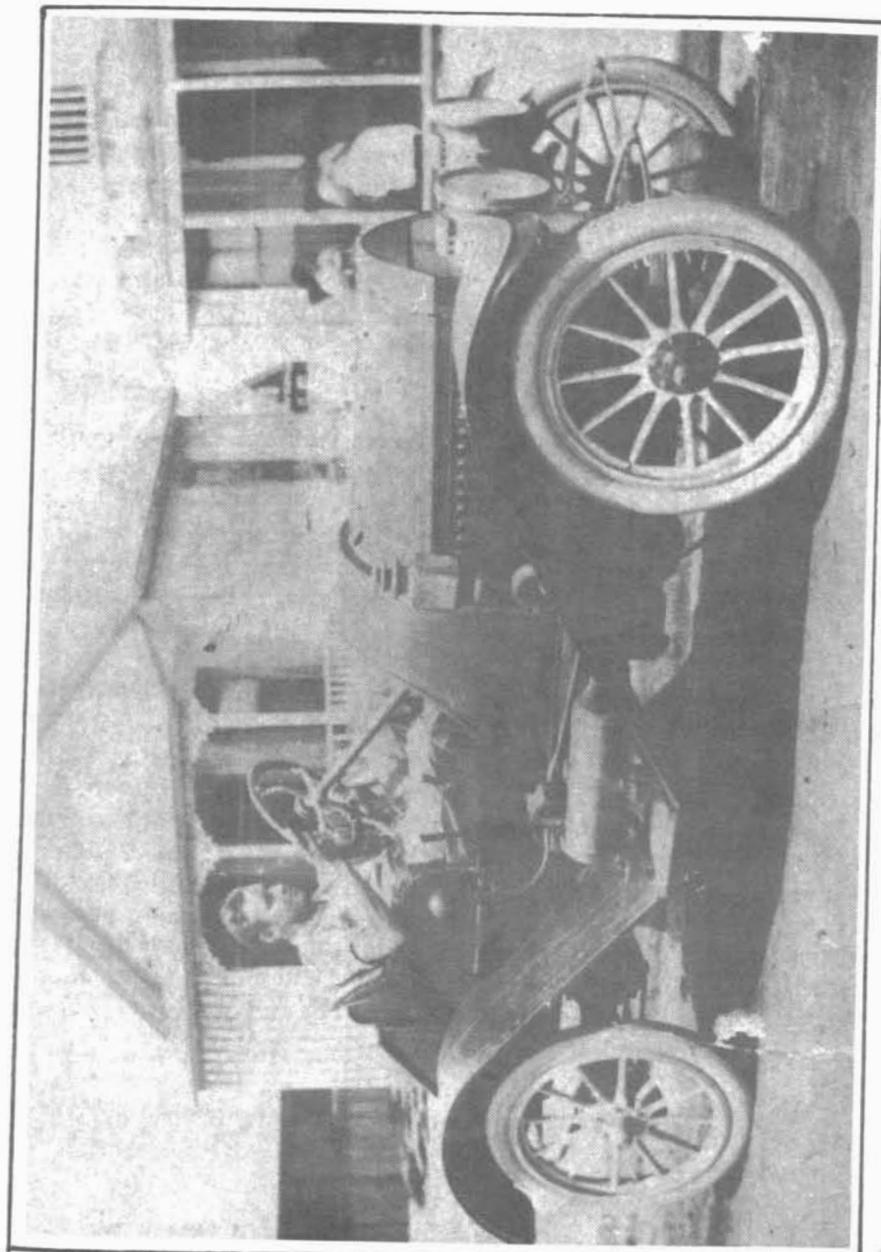
The Keys raised two children, Dorothy Irene Key who was born in 1919 and married R. Merrill Jensen and George Gilman Key, Jr. who was born in 1921 and married Olena Morris.

The Jensens have two daughters. Donna Claire Jensen married Meredith Moshauer; their son, Wayne Allen, was born in 1966 and their daughter, Lisa Rae in 1969. Diane Elaine Jensen married Terrence Oppold. Their children are named Camille Rochelle, born 1973, and Carlene Renee born in 1976.

George G., Jr. and Olena have three children. Susan Carol Key married Gilbert Dean Jenji; their sons are Gilbert Colin, born 1967, and Joel Derek born in 1970. Thomas Allen Key married Lynette Rice; their sons are Joel Ray, born 1981, and Darren Thomas, born 1983. Mary Lou Key married Ronald Lewis Eroen; their daughter, born 1979 is named Emily Faith, and their son, born 1982, is named Benjamin Luke Eroen.

Today, because Mr. Key has donated his collections to Orange County and the County has bought the homeplace for a public museum it is possible to step backward in time, to enjoy the museum, to ponder about many things and to have a glimpse into the life of yesteryear.

As life becomes more sophisticated and seemingly complex, how nice it is that future generations will be able to see for themselves some of the treasures of the "good old days" through a visit to the Key Ranch at 625 Bastanchury Road, Placentia.



George G. Key at the wheel of his Dad's 1912 Jackson Roadster
in front of cottage at Newport Beach

No, that isn't the end of the this story.

When I was interviewing Mr. Key, I casually mentioned that my mother had lived some of her life in Placentia. Mr. Key asked her name and I said, "Alice Goetz." He said, "I knew her." I said, "She was quite dramatic; I've always thought I took after her in that respect." Mr. Key didn't comment and left the room. I resumed by reading and notetaking from his notebook.

A little while later Mr. Key returned with the 1916 Yearbook of Fullerton High School. He showed me the picture of my mother, Alice Goetz, and right below it was the smiling face of George G. Key! Next, he repeated a line from a play. He said, "That was my only speaking part in the play, but your mother had a major role in it."

Before the afternoon was over he'd shown me a picture of his dad's 1912 Jackson roadster, the very car he'd driven Alice Goetz to play practice in, sixty-eight years ago!

Mr. Key also found a platt map of Placentia which showed where the Goetz farm was located.

Also in his collection was a 1910 photograph of the Placentia Grammar School's seventh and eighth grade class. Among the members were George Key, Alice Goetz and Edward Goetz. Edward was my uncle, an uncle I'd never known because he died the night I was born of injuries he'd received in World War I.

Yes, "Our Heritage" is very interesting and sometimes really filled with surprises!

Thank you, Mr. Key.

LITTLE THOUGHTS

by George G. Key

As raindrops fall from a heavy sky, so tears from a heavy heart. We can do nothing about the first, but we can the latter.

* * * * *

As a wagon wheel gathers mud, so does an evil mind.

* * * * *

Stay young while you are growing old and you will never know when you get there.

* * * * *

Some people walking through a garden see only thorns, while others see flowers . . . Tis so in life.

* * * * *

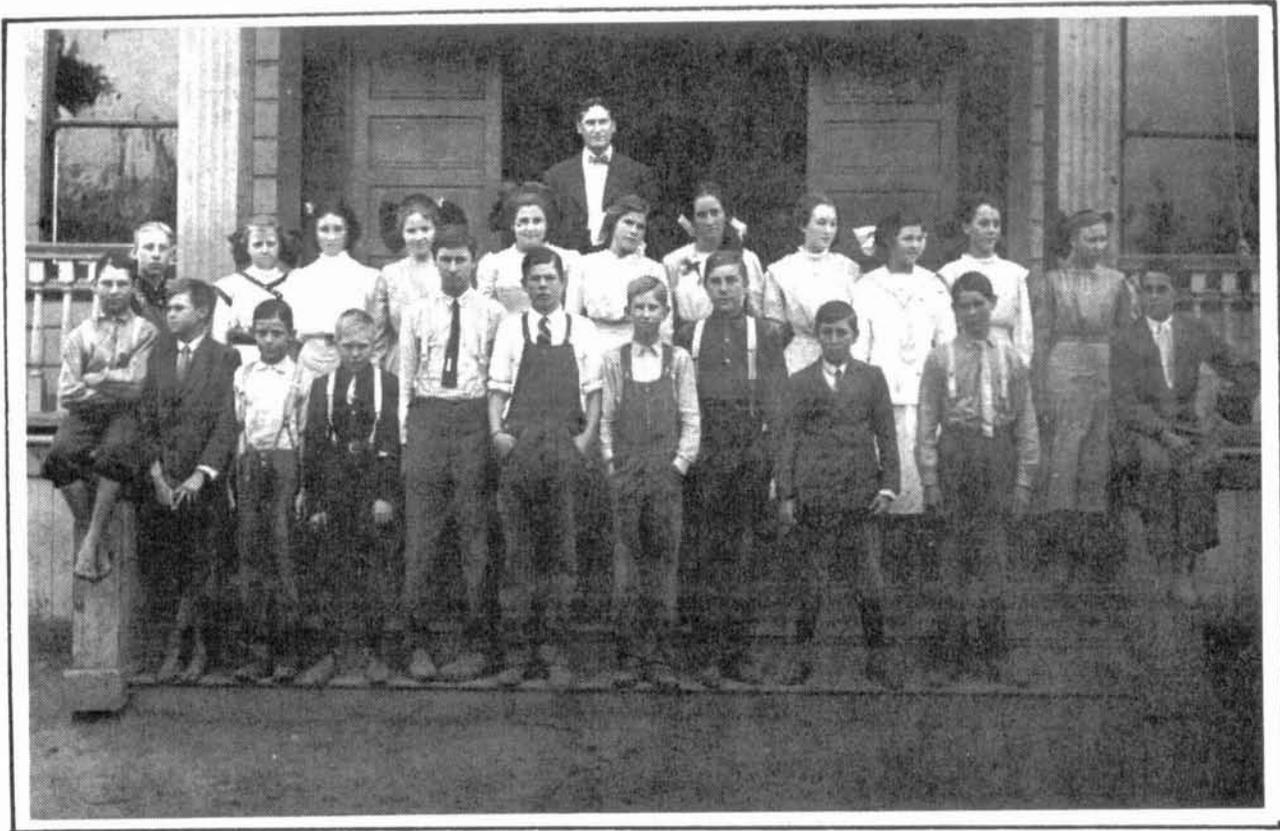
That which I have given to others is mine forever, a richness that can never be taken away.

* * * * *

Stumbling blocks for one are stepping stones for another. It all depends on what you do with your feet.

* * * * *

I will never grow old . . . I haven't time for such foolishness.



Seventh and Eighth Grade

PLACENTIA GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Seventh and Eighth Grade
10/10/1910

Teacher - O. J. Harvey

Front Row - L to R

Back Row - L to R

1 Emil Wetzel
2 Kenneth Wright
3 Charles Taylor
4 Harry Zimmer
5 George Key
6 Ed Goetz
7 Emil Carlson
8 Raymond Johnson
9 Leo Porter
10 Rudolph Wetzel
11 Gilbert Kraemer

1 Oscar Carlson
2 Hannah Ipsen
3 Helen Conde
4 Etelka Berkenstock
5 Bertha Schaller
6 Alice Goetz
7 Marie Porter
8 Merle Woodward
9 Margaret Chapman
10 Bessie Schumacker
11 Minnie Ipsen