

Granddaughter of early RM pioneers dies at 96



Photo courtesy to the Citizen
Mary Anita Granlees Macklin, pictured here at a family wedding in July 2006, died on Jan. 7 in Paso Robles. The 96-year-old was the granddaughter of early pioneers who settled Rancho Murieta and surrounding areas.

By Naida West - Special to the Citizen Elk Grove Citizen On Line, Feb 8, 2008

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On Jan. 19, friends and family gathered at the Granlees plot in Rancho Murieta's historic Live Oak Cemetery (aka Michigan Bar) for the interment service of Mary Anita Granlees Macklin. Born Nov. 17, 1911, Mrs. Macklin, 96, passed away on Jan. 7 in Paso Robles.

Mrs. Macklin, her parents and grandparents span the entire history of the state of California. In 1844, the Mexican governor granted maternal grandfather Jared Sheldon 18,661 acres along the Cosumnes River from Highway 99 to beyond Sloughouse.

He named it Rancho Omuchumne, the Western boundary being the length of Grant Line Road. Sheldon married Catherine Rhoads and their descendants became pillars of the Sloughouse area.

Mrs. Macklin's paternal grandfather, John Driscoll came from Ireland in 1853, originally in search of gold. He married, settled on the north side of the Cosumnes River in Bridge House (now Rancho Murieta), acquired land

from departing miners and farmed until his death in 1906. Mary, his only surviving child, wed to Robert Granlees and continued to consolidate 2,600 acres of the land on both sides of the river. Three sons of Mary and Robert Granlees would later sell all but 12.5 acres to Rancho Murieta developers.

J.D. "Jack" Granlees, the eldest son, married Polly Sheldon of Sloughouse. Polly moved into the Driscoll homestead with two generations of in-laws. Soon a third generation arrived, including Anita.

Behind the house the stone-lined 1853 dugout, which had been John Driscoll's crude miner's abode, served as the cheese-house, a place for cool food storage in summer. A photo of the ranch house hangs in the hallway of the Rancho Murieta Clubhouse, with two Granlees cousins in front, one on horseback. Developers later removed that house, but the historic cheese-house remains today (behind the Rancho Murieta Administration building) in need of protection.

Outgrowing the ranch house, the Granlees family acquired the adjacent homestead on Jackson Road, which became the home of Jack and Polly and their children, including Anita. Across the bridge (now yellow) and down Jackson Road a bit, stood the little frame church surrounded by the graveyard within which Anita now rests.

Before the Gold Rush, the land south of the river was owned by Mexican citizen William E. Hartnell, though he never lived on it. In 1850, his widow, Teresa Noriega Hartnell, upon viewing her property, felt sorry for the Irish miners working hard without the comfort of a church.

A devout Catholic, she donated an acre of land, stipulating that a church be built on it. Anita's Driscoll grandfather and other Irish miners built that church and dedicated it to St. Joseph (no Diocese existed as yet to receive it, and California was not yet a state). Granlees family members served as overseers of the church, procuring priests from Sutter Creek and elsewhere to provide services until 1919. At that time, the new St. Joseph's Church was completed in Elk Grove and the Granlees' men tore down the rickety old building. The graveyard remained by itself.

In 1970, the extended Granlees family sold all but 12.5 acres of their property to developers. In 2002, the Catholic Diocese assumed ownership of the newly named St. Vincent de Paul Cemetery.

Mrs. Macklin attended primary school at Hill Top School near Michigan Bar and, when sufficient pupils enrolled, Stone House School at the corner of Jackson and Stonehouse roads (now a telephone substation).

She graduated from Placerville High School, boarding there with friends. She then studied at St. Francis Convent in Sacramento and in Mills College of Oakland. At 19, she married William P. Macklin, who was working on the Granlees ranch.

Mr. Macklin worked as a prison guard at Folsom Prison in the 1930s and '40s, and at San Quentin in the 1950s. Later, he also worked at other state prisons. Meanwhile, Mrs. Macklin raised five children. Then a widow in her 90s she moved to Paso Robles to be near her eldest son.

Sharp of mind, she was always brimming with stories when an interviewer phoned to ask about life along the Cosumnes River in the early part of the 20th century.

Cousin Jesse Saner, 95, of Ione, who attended the service remembers, "When we were girls, Anita and I loved riding horseback together. We rode all along those many little dirt roads" (Rancho Murieta back country).

Son Walter Macklin, 76, said, "In life, my mother set a good example. When we moved to Folsom she saw to it that we attended St. John's Church. In 70 years, I've never missed a Sunday's service."

After the graveside service, family members made a pilgrimage to the sites of the two homesteads of Mrs. Macklin's youth. They also viewed the photographic display of the Granlees family and ranch in the Rancho Murieta Clubhouse.

Mrs. Macklin is survived by all of her children, Walter Macklin of Paso Robles, Mary Anita Beverly Montgomery of Kingsburg, Wilma Hedley of Fresno, William P. Macklin Jr. of Phoenix, Ariz., and Celeste Macklin of Sedona, Ariz. She is also survived by 22 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren, and cousins Hilda Granlees of Elk Grove, Jesse Saner of Ione, and Ellen Rosa of Wilton.

Naida West is a writer and local historian who lives in Rancho Murieta. Her novels include "Eye of the Bear," "River of Red Gold" and the forthcoming "Rest for the Wicked," all set in the River Valley area.

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