

HENRY LENBECK FAMILY - MANZANAR

By Martha L. Mills

Henry Lenbek, a native son of California, and a resident of Inyo County for fifty-four years, was born in San Jose in 1866. He spent his youth on his father's ranch there, and, before coming to Eastern California, lived several years around San Francisco. He made the acquaintance of James Corbett, the prizefighter, and did some boxing with him, giving Corbett a good workout. In the early '90's, Henry drove a stagecoach from Mojave to Indian Wells. At one time, Wyatt Earp and his wife were two of his passengers.

Henry came to Lone Pine in 1894, and became widely known throughout the Valley. At that time he worked for different ranchers, among them, Mrs. Mary Curtis, the mother of Mrs. Emma Reinhakle. Their ranch was on the east side of the aqueduct and just north of George's Creek. During those years he met John Lubken, a well-known rancher and County Supervisor, and they became life-long friends.

In June of 1911, Henry took his wife and two small sons, Sam and Pat, ages two and one, to visit his family in Livermore, California. They travelled in a buckboard pulled by two young mules with a spare horse tied to the back. While there Henry became ill with malaria and was late in leaving to return home. A daughter, Lena, was born in Livermore at the end of August. Henry brought his brother, Fred, back with them, and hurried home ahead of the winter storms over Donner Pass, arriving safely in late October.

In 1913, Henry purchased several acres of land in the newly established town of Manzanar. He also owned eighty acres of grazing land at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, known as the Marianno Ranch. He and his wife, Mamie, lived in Manzanar and raised their family of six children.

They, along with all the property owners in Manzanar, sold their land and water rights to the City of Los Angeles in 1924 and 1926. Even after Henry sold his cattle, branded with the Lazy J. to Russell



Manzanar School, 1918: *1st Row:* Martha Lenbeck, Lena Lenbeck, Gladys Graham, Neva Graham, Nina Graham, Ralph Capps, Sam Lenbeck, Junior Tinsley. *2nd Row:* Carl Metzcer, Benton, Herbert Metzcer, George Tinsley, Lester Bandhauer, Margaret Hillman, Dorothy Capps, Sam Lafon, Nellie Lafon. *3rd Row:* Martha Hillman, Rosa Lafon, Nina Banta, Harold Bandhauer, Jack Smith, Lucille Metzger, Minnie Metzger, Irene Nail, Mary V. Bandhauer, Minnie Hillman, Fern.

Spainhower, owner of the Anchor Ranch in Lone Pine, the family continued to live in Manzanar until 1934, when all the residents had to leave.

The home ranch was composed of corrals, small fields, fruit orchard and a large vegetable garden. People came from Keeler, Owenyo and Lone Pine to purchase the fruit and vegetables raised by Mrs. Lenbek. Henry was a rancher, spending most of his time working cattle for himself and neighboring ranchers. He would drive his cattle with only the help of his young son, Sam, to Stokes Stringer Meadows, near Big Whitney, a distance of about forty miles.

During the years when Manzanar was a small thriving town, Henry was known as an honest, generous and hard-working man. Often when he butchered a beef, part of it would be given away to neighbors. During the years of World War I, he helped ranchers when their sons went off to war. One in particular was John Lacey, when his sons, Mark and Tom, volunteered to serve their country. Henry was known throughout the Valley as "Stokes", and many knew him only by this name.

Mrs. Mamie Lenbek, a native of Cartago, California, besides taking care of the fruit and vegetables, irrigating the corn fields, milking the cow, shearing some fifteen sheep, and sewing most of the children's school clothes, still found time to do intricate embroidery and crochet work. She loved the out-of-doors, often taking her family on long walks on the hills towards the Sierras, teaching them about the flowers and plants.

Manzanar was a very happy and pleasant place to live during those years, with its peach, pear, and apple orchards, alfalfa fields, tree-lined country lanes, meadows and cornfields. There was adequate water from Shepherd and Bair Creeks, and George's Creek supplied water for the larger ranches on the south. Some of these were the Lacey, Albers, Hayes, McGovern, Strohmeier and Glade ranches. Farmers and ranchers came here with only a little cash and soon were doing well, raising chickens, pigs and dairy products to sell, after supplying their own needs. Those with larger orchards sold their fruit to markets in Los Angeles.

On the social side there were Farm Bureau meetings, dances, baseball games with neighboring towns, Sunday School and church, a library, picnics at the Cottonwood Grove, swimming in "John's Dam" for the kids, Ladies Aid meetings, and gatherings at homes and ranches. At all of these doings, everyone would attend, coming in their wagons and buggies.

There were about fifty children attending the elementary school in the early 1920's. At first only one teacher taught all eight grades, and later another teacher was hired. In 1918, Miss Flora Merkel came here from Minnesota. She was a talented and devoted teacher and later married John Rotharmel. The high school students were taken by bus to Independence. Each year at Christmas, Henry would take his buckboard, pulled by two mules, six miles to the Marianno Ranch to cut the large pinon tree for the annual school program.

Despite the hardships brought on by the loss of the money from the sale of his ranch and cattle, when the Inyo County banks went broke, Henry Lenbek continued in the work he knew and loved. He and his family moved to Lone Pine, and most of them remained there. In the 1930's, he worked for the City of Los Angeles, the Forest Service, and tended the Spainhower cattle at Monachee. He and his two sons were the own-ers and operators of a talc mine near Keeler. Henry died in 1948, at the age of eighty-two. Sam preceded his mother in death in 1961 and Mamie in 1963.

Pat Lenbek served his country well during WW 2, entering the Army in 1942. He left for three years service soon after with the 41st Infantry. He spent time in both New Guinea and Australia and

participated in the Hollandia and Biak Cam-paigns. Later on, he saw service in the Philippines, where he took part in two landings, that of Palawan and Zamboango. Among his service ribbons are the Two-Star Asiatic Pacific Ribbon, Good Conduct Ribbon, Philippines Liberation Ribbon, American Defense Ribbon, Combat Infantry Badge, Purple Heart and six overseas service bars. He died in 1972.

All were buried in Mt. Whitney Cemetery, Lone Pine. Two daughters, Martha Mills and Grace Romero still live in Lone Pine. Lena Sluyter lives in Independence, and Fay Hirst in La Mirada, California.