

William W. Bramlette Family

In 1877 William "Bill" Bramlette was born at Downey, a suburb of Los Angeles, California, to Andrew and Susan Bramlette. On April 8, 1903 Bill married Elvira Gurdy and purchased a home in Bell, also near Los Angeles, a home they continued to keep all their lifetime.

They had three children, Wales G. of Benton, California, Lucille E. Callaway of Chico, California, and Tom of Salmon, Idaho. In 1915 Bill bought the business of Little Lake from Charles Whittock. The only buildings on the property at that time were the hotel, saloon and a few outbuildings. Being a very ambitious man he began immediately to erect a store building, later a garage, hotel, service station and other smaller buildings. This was the beginning of the growth of Little Lake, providing the tourist trade with needed services.

As I mentioned earlier, Bill became Postmaster in 1916 and kept busy with all his other interests such as race car driving, well drilling, and a small scale pack station. Little by little Bill acquired more and more land, and local population grew along with the business. Bill had acquired Henry Urquhart's 160 acres in 1930, and later patented 240 acres under the Desert Land Entry program. He also bought 160 acres south of his business area from Earl Standard, and inherited 40 acres from his parents Andrew and Susan. Eventually he owned 1200 acres which formed the Little Lake Ranch. Son Tom operated this for several years before selling it to John Morehart Land Company.

Springs were numerous northeast of the hotel and contained many tule beds. Bill put in a dam and formed a shallow 200 acre farm pond. Eliminating the tules was the next project, this was solved by importing muskrats from Colorado River which ate the growth. Interested in how muskrats would accomplish this, I talked to Game Warden Vern Burandt of Lone Pine. He told me it was the balance of nature. "The muskrats eat the tule and multiply, finally they have eaten themselves out of enough food to sustain their population and die out, giving time for new tule growth. This cycle provides a proper natural balance."

In later years Tom Bramlette built the present ranch house, moved the café into the hotel, added a service station and made many other improvements. The lake was used for summer camping and fishing, then leased in the winter by a private duck club, called the Little Lake Duck Club, who still hunt the lake today during duck season. Some of today's members have been with the club since it was formed.

Wales Bramlette of Benton has quite a large collection of arrow points he found here over the years. The collection can be seen at the Old Benton Store, once owned by his father Bill. Lucille's husband operated the Little Lake Café before going into business for himself at Olancho.

After the hotel was finished it became a Saturday night gathering place for the community. Many hoe-downs and other occasions made for frequent lively and relaxing times. Little Lake has not changed too much from the days of Bill and his son Tom's time here, we will have a hotel, café, and service station and post office. We are looking to the future for more development as California progresses in population and the potential at China Lake and Ridgecrest seems to indicate a continuing pattern of regional growth.

Bill passed away in December 1940 at age 63, followed by Elvira in November 1943 also at age 63, both suffered a coronary attack. They left the progress of Little Lake as their heritage.