

RUSSELL AND KATHERINE SPAINHOWER – LONE PINE

By Catherine Joy Anderson

In 1886, Katie Walter, born July 3, 1884, in Greenville, Plumas County, California, came with her parents to Inyo County.

Years earlier, Sarah Catherine Harvey, a young girl with big black eyes and long curls, had journeyed from Mine Hill, New Jersey. She became Katie's mother, and those who remembered spoke always of two things - her love for animals and a talent which enabled her to pick up almost any musical instrument and coax a tune out of it. Letters from her mother, Katherine Van Ness Harvey, expressed fear that her daughter might not have enough to eat during the deep snows of this terrifying western land.

Katie's father, Charles Walter, was of an English family, some of whom had settled near Fairfield, California. It was there that he and Catherine Harvey were married. They left Northern California to homestead in a new land - at Black Rock, in the Aberdeen District, south of Big Pine. Along with other families they developed fields of alfalfa, while the father worked also at Independence in the newspaper and Land Offices.

Kindergarten being unknown in this time and place, Katie often found companionship with Paiute children, learning a few of their words and an elementary form of basket weaving. Riding bareback of necessity, because she couldn't afford a saddle, she sometimes swam her horse across the Owens River (at flood time a frightening stream in those days for one who couldn't swim) to exchange it for one in the pasture on the other side. Ambitious and eager for learning as she grew older, she took her books with her and studied her lessons while she herded sheep. Because there was no "Normal School" available, Katie studied with a tutor for the "County Examination." Of the three who took the test, she scored highest and began a teaching career which lasted more than thirty years in the elementary schools of Ceres, Keeler, George's Creek, Lone Pine and Owenyo. In 1903, a boy named Russell, born September 16, 1890, near Winston-Salem, North Carolina, arrived in Gardena, California, with his father, Oliver Calvin Spainhower, his elder brother and two younger sisters. Within a few years the father and two daughters returned to North Carolina, while the two boys remained in California. Young as they were, the brothers, Oscar and Russell, found jobs in the area, working for the telephone company and on ranches which were part of the Dominguez land grant. In 1909 Russ came to the Owens Valley and found a job on the aqueduct, under construction at that time. According to his brother, Russ at one time drove a team of mules, acting as "chauffeur" for Harvey Van Norman, superintendent of the northern division.

Kate and Russ were married on August 3, 1913. For many years after, they lived on the Lucas Ranch, owned by "the City", where Russ managed alfalfa and other crops as well as pigs and cattle. During those years he drove cattle for summer grazing into the Tyndall Creek country - more rugged than most areas used for that purpose.

Two daughters were born (Catherine Joy, November 26, 1918; and Emma Jean, October 15, 1920). Neighbors on the "old city ranch" were Charles and Carmenlita Southey and Claude and Blanche Van Norman. Both families eventually moved to Independence, but even then the custom of sharing holiday dinners among Mrs. Mary Curtis, Emma (her daughter) and George Reinhakle, the Van Normans and the Spainhowers continued.

There was a time when another industry flourished in Lone Pine. Beginning about 1920 with Mary Pickford and Fatty Arbuckle, newly-formed picture companies brought their stars to Lone Pine. Among the earlier ones were Jack Hoxie, Buck Jones, Hoot Gibson, Tom Mix and Ken Maynard. Later came Bill Boyd, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. However, the Sierra and Alabama Hills were background not only for "Westerns", but for such films as "Lives of a Bengal Lancer", "Tycoon", "King of the Khyber Rifles", and "Gunga Din." Franchot Tone, Cary Grant, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Rita Hayworth, Joan Fontaine, Tyrone Power, Errol Flynn and Humphrey Bogart caused very little excitement if they were seen on the streets of Lone Pine. Russ became busy, as the local contact man for the film companies, arranging for locations, wranglers, extras, horses, cattle and wagons. In addition to his collection of wagons and other equipment, in a joint venture with RKO Studios, Russ bought the lumber from the three "Gunga Din" sets and on his property the studio constructed the kind of set it wanted; it served over the years as different missions, haciendas, and even as a Chinese orphanage. Too late, as it turned out, Russ and Rudie Henderson formed a partnership in the construction of Anchorville, a handsome western street to the east of the hacienda set. It was used briefly, but because of labor union regulations and developing television, Hollywood was looking for cheaper locations nearer the studios. Within a few years Anchorville had succumbed to vandals and the weather.

Russ's interest in mules and wagons led to another activity. In preparation for a California Centennial Celebration in Death Valley, he used his ore wagons, helping Bruce Morgan train mules accustomed to a single-file pack train, to twenty-mule teamwork. Russ bought a lead team, Maude, and Blue, the jerk-line mule. In November of 1949, a caravan of wagons, automobiles, "chuck wagon", plus the Borax Wagons and twenty-mule team made the trek to Death Valley. Mules and wagons were trucked down the steep road into Panamint Springs, but across Panamint Valley, through Wildrose Canyon and into Death Valley they made it on their own.

Russ later drove the twenty-mule team in Las Vegas and in the Hollywood Bowl for the "California Story".

During the years when the city was buying so much land in Inyo County, Kate and Russ had an opportunity to buy also. South of Lone Pine was the ranch belonging to David Holland and his wife Gwendolyn, and Jim Holland. The brothers' stepfather, Teuben Van Dyke, had owned the land since the 1870's. When he died "intestate on or about October 26, 1898", the property was left to his widow, Mary. Her son, David, was administrator of the estate and for many years the 320 acres were known as the Holland Ranch.

Even though surrounding acreages were being sold to "The City", Dave and Jim wanted a different buyer, and Kate and Russ were eager to own land of their own. Russ, thinking of the years of work and privation ahead, wondered how they could manage. Kate's reply was, "We have to." Her land in Aberdeen was sold to the City and money from that sale was used for the down-payment on the Holland Ranch, later to become the Anchor Ranch because of the brand that Kate had acquired years earlier. What Kate was later to term a "hunch" turned out to be a stroke of good fortune. She was reluctant to put her money from the sale into the local bank; at the same time, because of the land sales, many stock brokers were passing through with all kinds of opportunities for investment. Kate was thankful that she had bought stock in Southern California Edison, when the news came that the Watterson banks had closed.

Much has been said and written about the Owens Valley - a land so young, strangled before it had a chance to grow. One who, for the past forty years, has walked these fields around Lone Pine, cannot help noting the changes. Looking at the dead tree-tumbleweed desolation, one finds it hard to remember when last the apple and pear trees, grapes and lilacs bloomed in the dooryard of the Miller house.

Besides the skeleton of the grapevine, all that remains is a mute monument in concrete, a dry "pool" with pillars topped by rounded granite rocks. True enough, Mrs. Edwards, the A. T. Smiths, the Millers "sold out" because there were no children - no one concerned enough to whom to leave their land. Kate and Russ wanted to give their ranch to their grandchildren. The grandchildren want to keep it. Will they find a way?

The grandchildren: Thomas Russell Noland, b. May 12, 1950,
Catherine Carroll Anderson, b. October 17, 1950, d. July 12, 1975,
Jean Gay Anderson Fogarty, b. April 22, 1953,
John Patrick Noland, b. June 30, 1954,
Jerre Katherine Noland Olin, b. December 30, 1956.