

THE THOMAS TATE FAMILY

By Clarice Tate Uhlmeyer

Thomas Tate, my father, was born in Ontario, Canada in 1847, and came west in 1867. He traveled by ship to Panama, crossed the Isthmus by train, then took ship to San Francisco. For several years he worked in Virginia City, then the opportunity arose to take some subcontracts for carrying mail in central Nevada. He established stage routes to Battle Mountain, Austin, Eureka, Grantsville, Ione, Belmont and much later to Tonopah and Manhattan.

Out in Big Smokey Valley he met and married Esther Ann Chrysler, who was also from Canada. They had four children. One of Mother's greatest concerns was for the education of her children. Having had only one year of formal education herself, she was determined that her family should have their opportunities. So it was with education in mind that we came to Big Pine in 1901.

Father brought us to Sodaville from Smokey Valley in a big wagon with our furniture, where we boarded the narrow gauge train that plied between there and Keeler, in the lower Owens Valley. Alvord was our destination, as that was the station for Big Pine. That train trip was one of the thrills of my life. The track wound back and forth up one side of the White Mountains and down the other, into the valley. My sister and I ran from one side of the little coach to the other, to watch the engine chugging its way along.

It was fall when we arrived and the orchards were loaded with luscious peaches, pears, plums, and apples, and the arbors hung heavy with ripening grapes. The creeks were running full, even so late in the year, and nearly every yard had an icy stream diverted from the main ditch. Some people used this water for domestic purposes, others had pumps beside the kitchen doors.

There was a good elementary school with two teachers, and Mother was able to put Myrtle, who was ready for high school, into a class of teenagers whose parents were hiring a private teacher. The next year she was sent to Oakland to attend a regular high school.



Tom and Esther Tate. 1880

Father had returned to Smokey Valley to carry on the stage business until we could become established in Big Pine and he could sell his business with a profit. It was not long until Mother found a ranch for sale at a reasonable price. She wired Father for the money and he sent it. There was no house on the ranch, but they also bought a place in town for us to live. So, as soon as he could Father came to Big Pine and thereafter carried on his ranching business by riding back and forth on horseback, or with horse and buggy.

My brother Perl went into business with Ed Stout in a livery stable. They not only rented out horses, but also kept animals over night, or for longer periods, for travelers. In 1905 he married Alice Jones.

By 1908 there were three teachers in the elementary school, and that year the school board allowed the seventh and eighth grade teacher to include ninth grade classes. Several students took advantage of this, but the mothers were beginning to feel the great need of a full high school. That year they formed a Parent and Teacher organization to look into the possibility of acquiring one. Mother and Mrs. W. G. Dixon went to Mamie Clark, the Superintendent of Schools for the County about this and she gave them the necessary information to begin. Her visits to Big Pine were rare, as she lived in Bishop, so she deputized Mother so that during her absences the work could be carried on. So, with the cooperation of many people of the town, Mother took to her horse and buggy and went to every home and ranch in the district with a petition to have the question put to a vote. The district included Fish Springs and as far south as Aberdeen. Many of the ranchers held back because of the extra tax, but in the end she got enough signatures, and when the vote was counted, Big Pine would have its high school. Women's signatures did not count, nor could they vote, as this was long before women were given the franchise.

An all man board was elected and they selected a Miss Orel! E. McCrosky as the first teacher and classes began in the fall of 1909. The upstairs room of the elementary school was used and the enrollment for that first semester was about fifteen, with only freshmen and sophomores. The first class graduated in the spring of 1912, and by that time there was a full course of study offered for four years, with three teachers.

Although Father had been a Commissioner in Nye County, Nevada, he never entered politics in California. However, he and Mother always attended the town meetings and once they drove as far south as Darwin with a span of horses and a light rig, to arouse interest in getting the county seat moved to Big Pine.

Elva married Roy Willis in 1916, and I married Ira Uhlmeier in 1920. None of the children of these unions live in the valley, but they love it and come back as often as possible. Myrtle married Jack Myles, a Nevadan, and has always lived in her native state. Father died in 1930 and Mother lived until 1947.