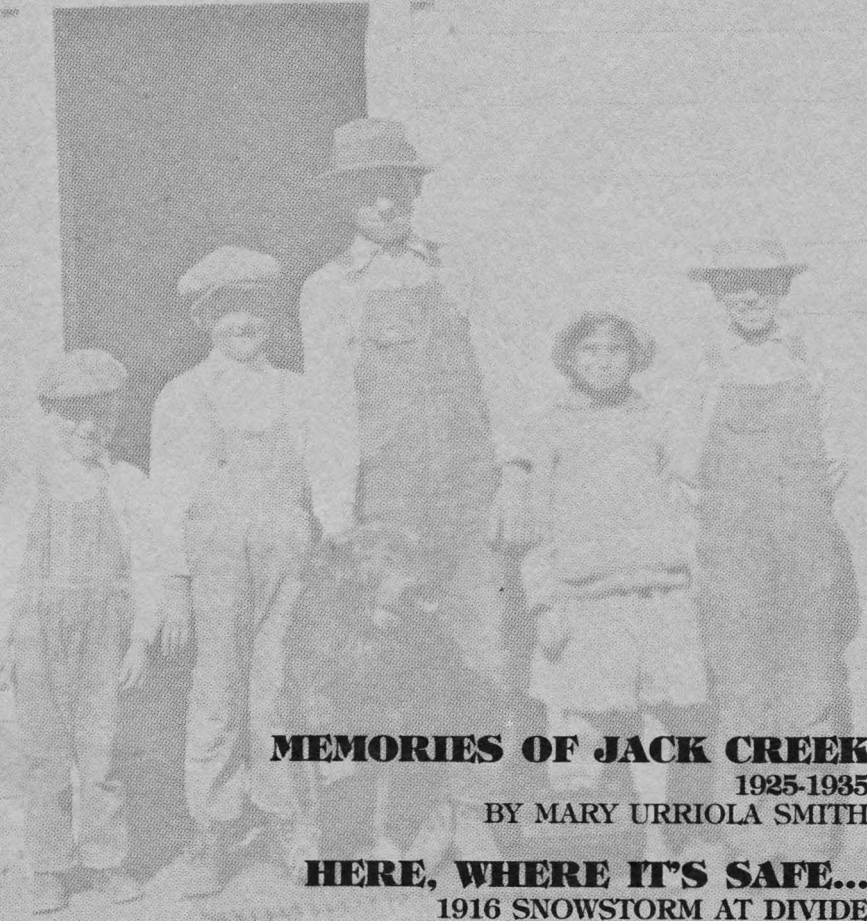


NORTHEASTERN NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

QUARTERLY



MEMORIES OF JACK CREEK

1925-1935

BY MARY URRIOLA SMITH

HERE, WHERE IT'S SAFE...

1916 SNOWSTORM AT DIVIDE

BY SHYRLE E. HACKER

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AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Urriola children, left to right: Louis, Steve, Joe, Mary, John and the ever-present dog, Reno.

MEMORIES OF JACK CREEK

1925-1935

BY MARY URRIOLA SMITH

Ysidro Urriola's family moved to Jack Creek during the late summer of 1925. A bachelor ranch worker lived in the main house, on the location of the present Jack Creek Resort. Our family moved into a two-story house across the road and southwest of the main house.

This house had been the home of one of the Woodward families who owned the ranch before it was sold to Joe Saval-the owner at that time.

The house had four bedrooms, two up and two down. There was a large living room and a spacious kitchen. One small room, probably designed for a bathroom, had no plumbing at all. To our delight, we found there was a dumb waiter which served the upper floor. To our dismay, the basement contained three to four feet of water constantly. The source of this water was a mystery. I suspect the house was built on a spring. There was no water plumbed into the kitchen either. All household water was carried from Jack Creek, across the road.

Hop vines surrounded the front porch. The living room walls were covered half with green burlap and partially with floral wallpaper. The ceilings were of decorative metal squares. (These would be an antique dealer's joy today). There were hardwood floors throughout. The front dormer window upstairs looked out over an expanse of the ranch.

I was only four years old when we lived there. Although we were poor in creature comforts, the only deprivation we felt was that our dad was away so much. He worked as a camp tender for several sheep bands on the range. When he came home it was a celebration. He would tell us about his travels and the people he saw. I'm sure my mother had much to tell him, too, of making a home for three lively children-four, six and seven.

Our bachelor friend from the big house across the road finally left. He might have been encouraged by three mischievous children who thought it fun to mix his salt and sugar, to put vinegar in his milk and many other naughty pranks. He knew who was responsible, but did not tell our mother.

When the main house was available, we moved there. My dad had leased the ranch. He put up the hay and fed it to Joe Saval's cattle in the winter. He wanted most of all to be with his family. To augment their income, my parents opened a small general merchandise store. Stock consisted of men's work clothing, canned foods, basic staple groceries, and some household needs. Bootlegger whiskey and home-brewed beer were sold over the bar. My mother rented the upstairs rooms to travelers. Our new house had four bedrooms upstairs and two down.

My mother prepared meals for the roomers and passers-by. I remember she prepared and served meals for a survey crew of 20 men for several weeks. They placed elevation markers in the area. They were embedded in concrete and are still there.

My mother was famous for her fried chicken, jelly rolls, and cream puffs. She prepared and served meals for visitors at the Spanish Ranch and Tuscarora.



Woodward house in the summer.

Out front, next to the bunkhouse, my dad installed a gasoline pump. It was the type of pump which showed ten gallons of gasoline in a glass cylinder at the top. After a sale, it was refilled by rocking a lever back and forth. Motor oil, tire patches and boots for tires were also for sale.

My parents learned to be merchants and business people the hard way. Having known hard times, they were suckers for a hard luck story and were cheated many times. They finally did learn to get cash up front in order to survive the Great Depression.

Once, they heard that an individual who owed them money was leaving the area. My mother urged my dad to get what he could from them by approaching them face to face. My dad came home with a chagrined expression, a saddle blanket, a lariat, and a German Shepard puppy named Reno.

As time went on, none of the family felt anything but well-paid, as Reno grew up to be our buddy and playmate. He was a superb watchdog and warned us of someone approaching long before they were seen. He was also an excellent cattle dog and my dad often remarked that Reno was as good as two other riders in cutting cattle and rounding up strays. Our milk cows were used to him and sometimes would move too slowly to suit him so he bit their tails. We had bobtailed cows to milk, which was not all that bad if you have ever been tail-switched while milking.

My older brother, Joe, started school in Independence Valley. He had difficulty learning to speak English and master the three R's. My mother, with a tenth grade education from Spain, also attended school to learn to speak English.

At Jack Creek, the school was a mile away toward the south. It was a one-room school, with one teacher and all grades. Joe started second grade and John began as a first-grader. The following year I attended school for the first time. This made nine students, which made the school board happy and, I suspect, created a monumental challenge for the teacher.

This brave lady's name was Miss Cahallen. I don't remember much about her except that she went away for the Christmas holidays and brought us the red measles. She was quite ill, but continued to teach part of the time. Every child in the school had the measles at the same time. Home remedies were shared via the party line telephone.

Jack Creek was isolated, especially in the winter. Because of the remoteness, we were not exposed to the communicable diseases most common with school children. However, we three, along with our cousins, Steve and Louis, had whooping cough that first winter in Jack Creek. Our aunt was in Elko undergoing medical treatment, so the cousins were staying with us.

Della Van Norman's mother, Mrs. Pattani, was a good friend of my mother's. To cheer a bunch of sick kids, she sent her sons, Joe and Jules, to play their guitars for us. They wore Halloween masks, which made quite an impression once our fear wore off. It was an unforgettable experience for a four year old!

My second year in school, the new teacher, Imogene Warder, came to board and room at our house. She was a beautiful, vivacious blonde. She and a young brunette teacher from the Spanish Ranch school kept things lively in Jack Creek.

Miss Warder was an excellent teacher. She taught the extras as well and insisted that all of her students learn good penmanship. During the long winter months we all did simple embroidery. (I still have towels my brothers and I stitched.) She gave us our first real religious training. This worked out well, as all the families were Catholic. That spring, several of us made our First Communion.

Miss Warder led an adventurous life, touring Spain and several other European



Teacher Imogene Warder.

countries. She also wrote books about these experiences. *On Foot Through Andorra* is one. While my brothers and I were attending Elko County High School, she appeared as part of a lecture tour doing assemblies in high schools. It was an exciting time for all the Urriolas to have a happy reunion with her. We have kept in touch with her these sixty-plus years. She now lives in Lafayette, Indiana, and is writing about her life in Jack Creek.

Whenever I hear from Miss Warder, she mentions the dances. We had a windup phonograph which had record storage underneath and was a good-looking piece of furniture. The dances were usually held in our large living-dining room. We had the records "Lights Out March," "Under the Double Eagle March," Strauss Waltzes and a fox-trot entitled "Just a Little Bit Bad." The latter was a favorite and became badly worn. Food was a necessity and the midnight feeds were enjoyed by all. Then the dancing went on for a couple of hours longer.

Thomas Equilior played accordion by ear. He made many social gatherings special with his lively tunes. For dances, he never appeared to tire, sometimes playing for four to five hours into the small hours of the morning.

Not all of our teachers loved to dance. Miss Schutt lived with us, too. Dancing was against her religion, so she boycotted them. Later on, she moved a chair into the middle of the dance floor and just sat there. This did not bother the dancers. They just danced around her. Miss Schutt was a good teacher and later married a college professor in Oregon.

Several of our resident teachers married local men. One was Florence Meyers who married George Meyers from Midas. Mary Divine, after a tempestuous courtship, married a local man, Joe Machado. Helena Achabal had already married Pio Achabal before she taught in Jack Creek.

Rose Sherman was a favorite of mine. She also boarded and roomed with us and had a steady beau, George Hansen. The local people tried to get them married off all year, but it didn't happen until the term was over. She was well-versed in Indian lore and history of Owyhee and Mountain City. I believe she still lives in the area.

The reason the teachers played such a special role in the life in Jack Creek was that the population changed very little and these special ladies brought some of the outside world into our midst. They enriched our lives in many ways and helped these shy Basque children to become productive citizens.

Winters came early at that 6500 foot elevation. Often, we were snowed in by Thanksgiving. Some winters, fence posts were completely covered with snow. We had one pair of skis and my brothers took turns skiing the downward slope toward school. My older brother also climbed to the top of the mountain behind our house and skied down. He only did it once. He was lucky no bones were broken. In fact, we were a healthy bunch and, in spite of all the things we did, never had a broken bone.

When the snow was extremely deep, my dad would hitch a team to a sleigh that carried us and our teacher to the school. Once road tracks were established, we all walked to and from school. Some of the children rode horses. None of them had more than three miles to go to school.

Getting the mail through was a big project in winter. In summer, we had daily mail, except Sunday. The schedule was three times a week in winter. Often, my dad helped out with fresh teams when the driver got stuck on the Chicken Creek Summit. There were no snow plows. If a snow drift was in the way a shovel was used. The stage driver had to be a hearty man. In one way or another, he did get the mail and passengers through.



Ysidro hitching up buckrake.

The Snider brothers, Bill and Abe, and their father, Ben, were from Missouri. They were unusual characters who drove the stage from Elko to Deep Creek for many years. The Mountain City stage met them there for the exchange of the mail bags. The Sniders then picked up mail along the way back by way of Tuscarora where our post office was. The Sniders, like their slow draws, were never in a hurry, but were quite dependable.

The Deep Creek station was manned by Dick and Lena Young. They were a



AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Saval daughters, July, 1931; left to right, Josephine, Marian, Dolores and author, Mary.

short, rotund couple. Lena spoke with a strong German accent and Dick adored her. My mother tried to visit with Lena on the phone but, with their Basque and German accents, communication was difficult. The Youngs had no children of their own, so they made a big fuss over my brothers and me when we saw them.

Dick's brother, Dean, lived in Independence Valley. He was the proud owner of the first radio in the area. He invited our family to come and listen to it. We took turns with the earphones, listening to some faint voices and an operatic soprano. Dean told us that this was the voice of Madame Schuman-Heink.

My father could hardly wait to get a radio. It was at least two years before he had saved enough to buy an Atwater-Kent. It was placed on a table and attached to a storage battery on the floor. It was good to hear what was going on in the



Mary and John in front of the bunkhouse with store sign.

world. We also enjoyed programs, such as "Amos and Andy." The original soap opera, "Myrt and Marge," was a must. All was fine until the battery went down and then it had to be charged to have reception again.

Winter feeding of stock was a daily job. We always enjoyed the bright sunny winter days when the air was crisp. We rode out on the hay rack on runners to load from the haystack and scatter the hay to the cattle. My dad had to do the job, regardless of the weather-whether in a blizzard or 30 degrees below zero.

Any emergency in winter was handled with careful planning and great stamina against the elements.

One cold winter day we received word, by phone, that Mrs. Garat had died at their ranch at White Rock. Toward evening, the three sons arrived with their mother's body. We gave them sandwiches and coffee after they fed and watered their horses. They especially needed to warm up before continuing the 60 miles to Elko. We children were awed knowing that someone no longer alive was on the sled outside.

The Garat brothers were very sad, but handled everything with utmost, loving dignity. They left with a moon to light their way, carrying their beloved mother to her final resting place. It was well into the second day before they reached Elko.

Unless there was real need, my father made only two trips to Elko each year. Those journeys were in spring and fall, mainly to stock up on merchandise for the store. Most of our shopping was done with Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck catalogs. Many hours were spent dreaming through the pages. I also remember the National Bellas Hess and Alden's as delightful wish books.

Spring usually came late, but was most welcome. Often, it was still muddy from melting snows when school was out. There was a multitude of jobs to do on the ranch-mending fences, shoeing horses, repairing irrigation ditches, and driving the cattle to the high ranges. It wasn't long before irrigating started. There was never time for idleness.

In the spring, large bands of sheep came through headed for the mountains. Herders dropped off the orphan lambs ("leppees") for me to raise. I bottle-fed them until they were turned out to pasture. I loved each one and always had a good cry in the fall when the bands of sheep came our way again to head for wintering on the desert, taking my "babies" with them.

Summers were short, but pleasant, with the many visitors coming through. Indian students came from their high school in the western part of the state, returning to Owyhee and Duck Valley Indian Reservation. In just a few months, they were on their way back to school at Stewart.

I had only one dress. It was bought too large. The second year, it nearly fit, and the third year it was getting too small and practically worn out. For everyday wear and school it was bib overalls for boys and girls alike. My mother did try to make me look more feminine with attractive blouses, but mostly I wore shirts my brothers had outgrown. I never really cared. I played mostly with my brothers and cousins and did not want to be singled out as a girl.

We did many risky things while playing-jumped off sheds and climbed trees. We explored all the nearby hill country.

Once, we found a hot spring where a whiskey still was operating. No one was around. Thousands of yellow jacket wasps swarmed around the corn mash. The jumble of pipes and tubes were turning out the "white lightning" that sold for two to three dollars a gallon. We were afraid to tell what we had seen. Our parents could tell that something was bothering us and eventually it all came out. We were admonished to not go back there or to tell anyone else. It was during Prohibition



Urriola family, 1928.

and distilling spirits was serious business.

We created our own entertainment, usually harmless. Once, however, we swiped some Prince Albert and Bull Durham tobacco and a large supply of cigarette papers and matches and decided to try smoking. We were very inept at "rolling our own" and nearly succeeded in burning down the barn. Punishment was severe for my brothers, but I escaped with a scolding and a reminder that nice girls did not do that. It must have made an impression-I have never smoked to this day.

Jack Creek was full of fish and we had many visitors from Elko try their luck. Their success was often augmented by my brothers who could catch fish very well. The late Harry Gallagher and the late Newt Crumley made visits to our home. Mother cooked for them and they always had their limits to take home.

In the fall, some men used our corrals for holding the mustangs they had rounded up. They shipped them away for chicken feed and dog food. Often, there were some beautiful horses among them and I would dream of having one of them for my own. Our horse, Snowball, was a gentle, white horse with a pink nose. He was so placid, that as many as four of us would get on at once. He would walk, but getting him to trot took a lot of urging. My brothers rode a blue roan, who was semi-gentle. Whenever I got on, he got rid of me by brushing against fence and gate posts.

Most of our neighbors were south of us. The exception was Charlie Butler, the ranger at Jack Creek Station in the canyon. Charlie was a bachelor with gray hair and moustache. Every summer, he had young ladies come to stay with him. They all referred to him as "Uncle Charlie" and each was introduced as his niece. It was never the same one twice. My mother provided him with milk and eggs. He shared garden produce with us. Charlie raised wonderful strawberries.

The next ranch south belonged to the W.T. Jenkins Co. My uncle Manuel was the foreman. Cousins Steve, Louis and Tia Balbina (Lauriana) made up the family. They lived frugally and worked extremely hard. My uncle always raised a productive garden.

One year, Mormon Crickets infested the place. Manuel surrounded the garden with every kind of metal he could find to prevent the crickets from invading the garden. He and the family beat on pans and kettles to make a lot of noise until the insects changed direction and the garden was saved. Everything else in their path was eaten as they went on their way.

The crickets went right over our two-story house and down the other side. Some fell into our chimney and into our wood stove. We had to shovel them out and destroy them.

The next ranch was the Balbino Achabal place. He was a large man, who knew no strangers. His wife was a tiny, frail lady named Emerdehilde. They had two children, Pio and Adelina. Adelina was probably eight years older than me. She loaned me her old *True Story* and *True Romances* magazines. I read them by flashlight after going to bed.

To the southwest and off the main road was the Lee Reborse ranch. Lee and Verna had two sons, Lee and Clyde. They were good with horses and usually in the process of breaking broncs. It was easy to see a small rodeo anytime at their place.

Vicente Bilbao and his wife Paula had the next ranch. They, too, had a small store and bar. Their place was dubbed "Vicente's" and our place was "Credo's". There were three children-David, Thomas and Lucy. She and I were the only girls attending our school. Vicente did a lot of trapping of coyotes.

One year, a camp tender discovered a den of baby coyotes, and brought us one. The pup did not have his eyes open yet. We fed him with a bottle. He grew into a delightful pet, except that he retained many of his wild instincts. He killed chickens right and left, so my dad put a muzzle for him. He then turned his attention to my lambs and practiced knocking them down. He didn't do them any harm. They became so conditioned to this that they all laid down whenever they saw him. He was quite an attraction and had grown into a beautiful animal.

My mother was entertaining a group of ladies one day and they asked about the coyote. I let him in. He took a look around at the ladies and they admired him. Then, he spotted the refreshments on the table. In one smooth bound he was on a chair, grabbed as many slices of jelly roll as he could, and dashed out the screen door. Poor Mother was so embarrassed!

A truck driver, who was hauling copper ore from the Rio Tinto mine near Mountain City, offered us \$15 for him. This was an unheard of amount of \$5 each. With the urging of our parents, we sold him. The driver often stopped by



Snowball.

and let us hug and pet him.

Not all our coyote experiences were good ones. After my brothers had gone to high school in Battle Mountain, our dog, Reno, went to school with me. One day, while we were out for recess, a coyote fearlessly approached us. This behavior was most unusual, and our teacher quickly herded us inside. Reno challenged the coyote and a fight ensued. Reno was bitten on the tongue and the coyote left.

The word spread in the little community that there was a rabid coyote loose. All the men rode out with guns to search for it. The animal avoided being seen all afternoon. That night, however, the Bilbao family was awakened when the coyote attacked their dog and puppies. They killed the coyote. The dog and her puppies had to be destroyed.

We knew time was short for any chance to save Reno. The Pasteur treatment was in our hands in two days. My dad injected him each day, but we lost the battle. He became rabid and had to be shot. This devastated our family and, even now, is a sad memory.

Haying season was the time extra help was hired. All implements were horse-drawn. The mowing machine was first, followed by a dump-rake that gathered the mowed hay into rows. A buckrake bunched it into piles the right size for the net that was raised to the stack. A derrick horse patiently went back and forth to raise the hay and lower the net for the next load. A trip mechanism dumped the hay and stackers placed the hay with pitchforks. It took a sturdy man to handle the stacking job. They were the highest paid of hay hands. Their pay was two to three dollars a day. Other hands received a dollar to a dollar-and-a-half a day. They were glad to have this work during the Depression. They also received three good meals a day, plus a mid-morning snack and one in the afternoon.

Our main water supply was Jack Creek. Water was piped in from a spring that was often dried up. Dad made an unsuccessful attempt to dig a well. We mostly carried creek water to the house in buckets.

On wash day, everyone was recruited to fill the large tub on the kitchen stove. Everything, including linens from the rental rooms, was scrubbed on a washboard. The first rinsing was in another big tub. The final rinse was in the creek. This made hands ache in the middle of August. Wringing by hand was a two-person job. Hanging the laundry on clotheslines was my responsibility, followed by folding after drying. If things did not dry, it all came indoors to be re-hung until it was.

A Maytag salesman came and demonstrated a gasoline-powered washing machine. My hopes went up, and I tried to sell my mother on it as well. She decided that she didn't need it — so, back to the washboard!

Perhaps it would appear that we lived a sheltered life growing up in Jack Creek. However, it seemed there were more than the normal number of "characters" in the area and they usually came to our place.

An old gentleman came to work on the roads in the spring and stayed with us while he graded in both directions. His name was Tillman Hunt Lisby. He spun yarns by the hour. We were fascinated by him and looked forward to his coming each year.

Another story teller was "Dutchie." He was a relative of the Achabals. A chain smoker, he rolled the next one from the Bull Durham sack before he finished the first one. Usually his visits lasted half-a-day. He didn't seem to have much else to occupy him.

People we knew furnished us with a whole spectrum of human conditions. Often, we were exposed to the seamier side of human behavior. People lost their inhibitions when they were out in the sticks. On the other hand, we had all that

was good in our close-knit family. Also, the people in our little community rallied around to help when there was a real need.

Although we sometimes felt we had missed experiences in growing up, such as learning to ride a bicycle and to play a musical instrument, we did learn that hard work was the secret to success. We grew up healthy and strong. Our early education was good enough to do well in high school and provided a background for future endeavors.



AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Mary B. Urriola Smith

Mary Urriola Smith was born in Elko, Nevada at Shaw Hospital on Court Street. Her parents, Ysidro and Esperanza Urriola were living in Independence Valley at the time. The family moved to Jack Creek when the author was three or four.

She studied in the one-room Jack Creek School through the eighth grade and then attended Elko County High School in Elko where she graduated. Smith then went to Henager Business College in Salt Lake City, Utah.

She met Bill Smith in Salt Lake City and the couple was married in 1939 at Elko. They lived in Rigby, Idaho where he worked for International Harvester. He passed away on April 24, 1990. They have three children, a son and two daughters. There are eight grandchildren.

Smith is interested in sewing, needlepoint, art and writing. She does volunteer work for the Jefferson County Historical Society and Museum. The organization is currently raising funds to build a new museum that will feature Rigby resident Philo T. Farnsworth, the inventor of television. Farnsworth developed the idea when he was in high school there. His wife lives in Salt Lake City. The family has donated some of his original tubes to the historical society.