

“Recollections of My Tarbell grandparents and My Early Childhood”, by: Betty Jean Tarbell Cotton

My grandfather, George Josiah Tarbell, was known by everyone as 'Buck', perhaps the nickname coming from his love to hunt deer, bear and raccoon. He was born, and raised, in St. Charles County, Missouri and hunting was a common practice for families back then. My family lived next to my grandfather and grandmother for many years. In those days the families were close and spent a lot of time together at his farm, on Road 136, in Orosi, California, and at the ranch that was called the 'Mountain Place' above Badger.

Grandpa 'Buck' raised cattle and pigs, other animals on the farm were chickens, guinea fowl, peacock and a few hunting dogs. He had a large acreage of Black Mission and Kadota figs. I remember my grandfather as being a quiet man with high principles. He was not a rich man, but earned a comfortable enough living to own a farm in the valley and a ranch above Badger in the mountains just at the timberline. He drove an old Ford pickup truck that he called 'The Machine'. I don't believe he ever drove that pickup truck over 30 miles per hour.



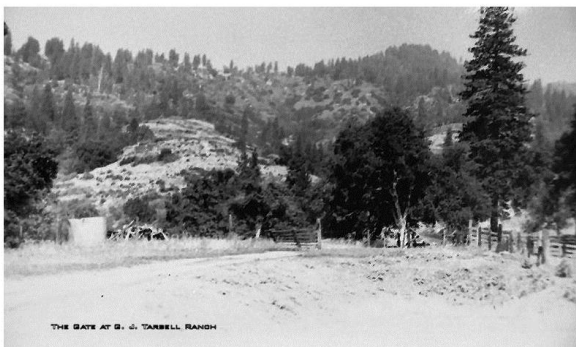
'Buck' next to the 'Machine', with his hunting dogs.



Blanche Caroline Margaret Mound Tarbell with the guitar

This 'Mountain Ranch' holds some of my fondest memories of my early childhood. We would travel up Boyd's Grade and head up to Badger. Here we would take 465 then onto Hogback Dr. We would travel on this road until we reached Peter's Ranch Road. During deer hunting season and cattle branding time everyone would go to the 'Mountain Place' for days at a time. It was a fascinating place, situated on 360 acres off Peters Ranch Road in the Sierra Nevada foothills. A long, winding dirt road, that seemed 5 miles long, led to the main gate of the ranch.

On the long road leading to the main gate of the ranch, there were Indian paintings on a huge granite rock. They were painted, by my 'artistic' Uncle Joe Tarbell, as a landmark. As young children we thought that they were painted by the Indians and they fascinated us all. From this dirt road came the main gate to the ranch. In my early years I remember always looking for 'Nellie', an old brown mare, that roamed the ranch. Past the gate came the corral and old barn. An old abandoned garden patch was off to the right. The house sat atop a steep hill that seemed almost flat at the top. Many Indian artifacts were found here and it was thought to be the dwelling place, long ago, of many native Indians. A few years back my brother, James, went up to the ranch. After 40 years the house had fallen in disrepair and remnants of the old corral can still be seen by a pine tree



An old photo of the view of the 2nd gate to the ranch house



Newer photo of view from Peters Ranch Rd of corral and house

The dirt driveway circled in front of the house. In the middle of the circle stood an old water tower, under this was a large grinding wheel used to sharpen knives and axes. Off to the left was a large granite rock, with many large holes, that Indians had used to grind corn or acorns. This granite rock later became a giant 'car stop' for my mom and dad's car. I, with my sister Carol, and my brother Jim were playing in the family's old Ford coup. I was the driver and my sister and brother were also in the front seat of the car. Suddenly, the car began to roll down the steep hill to the valley below. My father, Harvey, spotted the car rolling from the house. He immediately ran out of the house, chased the car down and dove inside to secure the hand brake. It took quite some time to live down the shame from this episode. I was the oldest of my siblings and "I should have known better-I could have killed us all!"

The house was built on the side of the hill and its foundation was built with rock and mortar and extended out to become the basement. There was no running water or electricity to the house. An old 'out house' stood off to the right and down the hill. The main entrance to the house was through the kitchen. On the left was a place to hang coats and hats and several milk cans containing fresh water from a nearby stream. On the right was a large black, kitchen wood stove. Baking and cooking here was always a challenge. Across from the stove, on the opposite wall, was a long shelf that contained the most fascinating set of Oriental dishes. Straight ahead of the kitchen, a door led to the pantry. The sink was in this room as well as the cupboard space for pantry items. Kerosene lamps, with reflectors, were mounted on the walls for light.

The dining room was off to the right of the kitchen. It was a fascinating room situated in the middle of the house. It was very dark, had no windows, and was eliminated only by the kerosene lamps on the large oval 'claw foot' oak table. On the walls various pictures were hung. One was a group of dogs playing poker painted in 1903 by Cassius Marcellus Coolidge. The only refrigeration for food in the house was an oak ice box that stood in the corner. Huge blocks of ice were set in the ice box to keep butter, milk and eggs cold. Numerous chairs surrounded the large table where many a meal of fried venison, fried potatoes, gravy and biscuits were eaten. The family would talk about hunting tales and discuss the next day's chores or where they might go to hunt the next day.

The house had four bedrooms all with the convenience of a 'chamber pot' so as not to have to venture out to the 'out house' in the middle of the night. One of these bedrooms had a twin-size bed where our grandmother, Blanche, slept. In later years this bedroom was turned into another entry for the house. The living room spanned nearly the whole side of the house. It contained an old horsehair sofa that made into a bed. Various tables and chairs were situated in the room along with a console Victrola and old records for entertainment.

In the living room a big potbelly stove stood against one wall and next to the stove was my grandpa's large oak rocking chair. He would sit here and smoke his pipe at days end. This was a favorite place for me to sit by the fire and eat 'not so ripe' apples, sprinkled with salt, from the old apple orchard below the house. At the end of the living room a large Indian rug hung on the wall. Attached to this Indian rug was a large assortment of Indian arrowheads and 'rattlers' from rattle snakes that had been collected on the ranch. There was a large bearskin rug on the floor, a trophy won by my great-grandfather, Josiah John Tarbell. We all referred to great grandpa and great grandma Tarbell as 'Grandpa and Grandma Exeter' because they lived in Exeter and it was easier to identify them.



Josiah John and son, George Josiah Tarbell



Joseph, Harvey, Josiah John, Milton and George 'Buck' Tarbell

My grandfather, 'Buck' Tarbell, after dark would grab his rifle, a flashlight and unleash his hunting dogs. He would go hunting for raccoons. I never understood his dislike for raccoons until, later in life, I realized the destruction they can do to lawns, gardens and just about anything.

A large covered porch surrounded the house. Many large deer antlers were hung along the eave of the porch. All the lower foothills could be seen from here. Family members would gather on this porch after supper. Sometimes the grownups would tell stories of past hunting ventures and sometimes we just enjoyed the sunset.



'Grave Yard Point' from the back-porch



G. J. 'Buck' Tarbell and his pelts and hunting dogs

On the East side of the porch was the washtub for laundering clothes. Attached to the porch was the double clothesline, that stretched perhaps one hundred feet, and was connected, at the other end, to a large oak tree. The clotheslines were equipped with a pulley. Laundry could be hung, and retrieved from the porch, a piece at a time. This ingenious pulley system was designed so that one person could hang the wet laundry by themselves standing on the porch.

Down the hill, to the East, was the reservoir that captured water from the spring running above it. We sometimes went fishing there, but most of the time I ventured along the stream, finding numerous old Indian grinding holes in the granite rocks, and looked for Indian arrow heads.

A favorite time, for all of us, was to pile into the old pickup truck and head down the hill to the Sierra Glen Store. The Sierra Glen Store was about five miles away from the entrance to Peter's Ranch Road. My father and my uncles would ride on the fenders of the truck. The children, my mother, and aunts, would all ride in the truck bed. My grandmother, Blanche, rode in the cab with my grandfather. At the Sierra Glen Store cases of soft drinks in glass bottles were bought. Strawberry, Orange, Root beer and Pepsi, Big Hunk candy bars and peanuts were packed back into the pickup truck. Then off we would go, back to the ranch, to sit on the porch and listen to more family stories.