

Taped Interview: Miss IRENE PONCE
Sawmill Flat Road, Tuolumne County
July 21, 1975

Side 1

Family History - Parents

Gold Rush people. Came from: Mother's father - Upstate New York
Father's people - Chile, South Am.
Location and work in California:

Grandfather - mother's side - mined around present site of Jr. College. Lived in area called Martinez. When placers ran out, he pocket mined - mostly on south fork of Stanislaus River, up toward Italian Bar on opposite side of river. Took out around \$30,000 from first pocket.

Irene's theory: richness of most of mines in this area was near surface, and richness of placers was caused by sloughing off of this top layer. Not as much gold deeper in mines.

Discussion of how grandfather mined: tunneled; would sink or go up on cross veins as he would find them. Old mine still in family - nephew has it.

Problem of mining now: no miners to know what to look for, and people not willing to work for 'beans and bacon'. Wages in other occupations and great expense in mining demands that the mine be very rich to make it pay.

Family mine not dangerous; in hard rock; most of it didn't even need timbering.

Grandfather - father's side - She doesn't know if he mined in Chile; She really didn't know those grandparents. They settled in Vallecito, and placermined all through that area. Grandmother made a living by dressmaking. She had 14 children. She had the first Singer sewing machine in Calaveras County. She was from Santiago, Chile. Her father made guitars. Father's father's people came from Valparaiso. Some were quite wealthy.

Grandfather - mother's side - Came to California by way of the Isthmus of Panama in 1850.

She doesn't know just when her father's family came. Her father was born in 1866. There were about 7 children before that, so they must have come at the beginning of the Gold Rush, or earlier. Her father's mother never called San Francisco San Francisco, it was Yerba Buena. The Chilean people sailed up and down the coast. She read recently what a bustling place Valparaiso was at the time of the Gold Rush. A lot of ships picked up their grain there. Nothing was here - they had to start from scratch. They brought animals and had to pick up supplies somewhere.

Irene Ponce:

Born in Columbia, March 30, 1895. She went to school in Columbia School, the famous red schoolhouse on the hill. Went 7 years to grammar school and 4 years to high school.

She worked a few years in Oakland, and then came home and lived on the ranch until she moved to present home (on Sawmill Flat Road) She sold the ranch, when she bought her present home.

The ranch: When she was a child, it was a placer mining claim. They didn't mine it. They farmed it...garden, orchard, cattle, goats. Made a living off of it when they were small. In later years, her father worked. He was a blacksmith by trade. He blacksmithed at the marble quarry and later for the state highways at Douglas Station.

7 children -- 3 girls and 4 boys. The 2 oldest and the 2 youngest are alive now. One brother lives on Shaws Flat, on Saratoga Road.

Homestead: She was living alone on the ranch, and filed a homestead claim. A mining claim, that isn't a patented claim, doesn't have a very good title - so much work has to be done each year to hold it. She homesteaded 70 acres. Much was stock range.

She sold the ranch in 1962 and moved to present home. She used to walk to town, day or night, which she feels she couldn't safely do now. She did not want to move right into town. She likes where she is -- privacy, nice area, nice neighbors.

Homestead was about 2 miles beyond Columbia, on Italian Bar. Turned off the Italian Bar Road at the old Columbia Brewery. When they were children going to school, they would often stop and watch the horses grinding the malt for the beer.

They had chores - with cows, calves, goats. Always went straight home after school....there were many things planned -- if no chores, there were certain places to go....see if certain wild flowers were in blossom. They were always busy. They were never around town very much, unless there was something special to go to town for. She feels that makes for a real healthy life for kids. So many kids nowadays lose out on a lot.

School: Boys and girls were not separated at her school. Columbia School had 3 rooms. Primary room: 1,2,3rd grades Intermediate room: 4,5,6 and the 'big kids' went upstairs -7th and 8th graders.

(ENCLOSED)

She has a picture of the Columbia School students and teachers, taken in 1906 or 1907. The picture was picked up at the Columbia Dump. The man wanted to sell it to her for \$10, which she thought high. He loaned her the picture to study and review the faces. She had copies made for herself and her family. She likes to get the picture out every now and then and look at the faces of the kids she went to school with, and her teachers. There are 90 pupils in the picture. She remembers 89 of the 90, and has their names neatly written on the back. (She, some of her brothers,

sisters and cousins are in the picture.) The man from the dump finally told her to keep the original picture.

The picture shows the Principal, G. P. Morgan, who taught 7th and 8th grades. The primary teacher was Fanny Yancy and the intermediate teacher was Nettie Siebert. Irene had started school a year late, because she couldn't go by herself. She caught up during fourth grade.

Pic-
tures:

Another picture: She had shot a young lion. She had had only one shell, a .22 short. She thought it was a bobcat and then saw the long tail. She had a little lamb down at the house and was afraid the lion would get the lamb. She hit him right between the eyes.

She enjoys the old pictures. She showed a picture of her Dad, as a young fellow, in Vallecito. She has a book, Vallecito History, that has many old pictures in it.

There is an old history about Tuolumne County and a book put out by the Union Democrat about 1909, something on the order of this (Vallecito book). It's quite interesting. It tells about all the industries that were going on at that time. I think the Historical Society sells it.

The Vallecito book has the same group picture that has her Dad in it. It tells who everyone is. It has a picture of her uncle, Sam Ponce.

There is also a picture of the school way back, and one of her father's sisters is in the school picture. The book was put out by the school children of Vallecito. (She loaned it to me.)

Church:

She belongs to the Episcopal Church in Sonora (the red church). She stayed with people who lived in the house across the street from the church (where the service station is now) while she went to highschool and worked for her room and board. They were members of that church. In Columbia, they had gone to the Presbyterian Church. Basically, her family is Catholic.

High School: The first 3 years of highschool, she stayed in town. The last year, her brother was going and they rode to school in the horse and buggy...that was fun. In those days, you had to furnish your own transportation; a lot of the kids came on horseback. They had stables at school, with stalls for the horses. In those days, students furnished their own transportation and their own books.

She graduated from Highschool on June 13, 1913. This year their anniversary came on Friday, too. She called one of her friends, whom she had graduated with. 62 years.

Organizations:

She belongs to the Native Daughters, Gem and Mineral Society, Garden Club and to the Historical Society and to the Grange. She can't go to them too much, but she does go to Native Daughters and to Garden Club. There is an interest in each one. She especially likes the Native Daughters. She's been the Secretary for over 50 years. She's belonged to Native Daughters for 56 years.

Side 2

Comment: They lose so many tape recorders at the college - taken out of cars. She listens to the police reports, and hears about these thefts every few days.

Organizations (continued): She has no offices in other organizations right now. She's been President of Garden Club a couple of times and at one time held offices in the Grange. The Garden Club is landscaping at the Museum -- putting in native and old-fashioned plants. She hasn't gone to too many work days. She gave them a redbud to plant.

History: She hasn't taken any history classes -- has learned from reading and from listening to people talk about earlier times.

Natural History: Just a hobby. She's always been interested in the native plants. She doesn't have any favorites..just loves wild plants. She doesn't eat them. As children, they used to eat hens-and-chickens when they were thirsty. They're quite moist.

She has a little of everything around her house. She has several naturalized redbud, a madrone, and a fremontia. (Discussion about Fremontias) (Discussion about Chaparral Pea - Pickeringia) (Discussion about taking pictures of flowers).

A friend took a picture of the Dog-tooth violet from Italian Bar way and another plant that grew out in the pine grove near the ranch...they're the Calochortus, Fairy Bells, only it's a yellow one. It's different from the yellow one that grows in the Coast Mountains. There's only one place she knows that they grow. Her friend brought a botanist to see the; the botanist had never seen the flower before, but thought it was an offshoot between the white one and 'kitten ears'. However, Irene doesn't think it would come true every year if it were. She's known them to grow in this certain area since she was about 10 years old. She thinks it's a variety by itself.

Garden Club had a meeting at the college recently and Blaine Rogers took them around the plantings there.

In very few botanical books has she found the plant called Hound's Tongue - it grows very plentifully out in the back hills and river slopes....Cynoglossum grande. It has long leaves at the base; the blossom is the shape of the forget-me-not....bluish purple.

Some of these books 'kinda get' her. They said 'The Indians ate them, the Indians ate them...' Well, a lot of them, the first

people who ate them were the Mexican and Spanish people who came here.

(Discussion of identification books, specifically Sierra Nevada Natural History - University of California Press) She got this book when she took a Geology-Botany-Biology class from Modesto Junior College. The teacher would come up on Saturday and they'd take field trips. He recommended the book.

Further discussion of the Hound's Tongue. It grew all over - mostly on the north slopes. They'd go out as children and get bouquets of this, shooting stars, and California Saxifrage, -- and Maidenhair fern. (Discussion of wild iris.)

Quite a variety of different native plants. She yearly has wanted to make a collection of pressed plants, but keeps putting it off (Discussion of doing this at school)

(Discussion of her rock collection) She picks them up all over she goes on trips. Some obsidian from Modoc County. She has a friend she met through Native Daughters, and goes on yearly vacations with her and her husband. (Discussion of Modoc County)

She talked about a basket of rocks and shells that she had picked up in various places. One was a rock with chunks of garnet in it. It came from Garnet Mountain, in El Dorado or Amador county. She had some obsidian needles they had found.

She has some petrified clams that she found down near Jacksonvill. It's under water now. It must have been under oceanbed at one time. They picked them up themselves. She has some shale she found the clams in.

-End-

By P Morgan
Lillian Bish
Minnie May
Irene Ponce
Ossie Doyle
Mamma Nelson
Lennie Kross
Anna Kross
Gertrude Marcus
Ethel Gancey
Walter Engelke
Lula Harding
Adele Gancey
Angie Podesto
James Podesto
Hyle Bish
Eva Donders
Mary Kimball
Walter Hill
Arthur Fisher
John Podesto
Vester Mary
Lymon Libets

Katia Kross
Charlie Doyle
Irene M. Ponce
Mellie Engelke
Lillie Kross
Alma Engelke
Felsa Young
Minnie Gunniater
Johanna Hoderman
Charlie Smith
John Pedro
Will Morgan
Tom Doyle
Myrtle Engelke
Albert Kross
Chester Carder
Rolly Kimball
Faret Schoettgen
Effe Washburn
Katie Smith
Miss Gancey
Miss Siebert

Joe Bish
Leon Ponce
John Doyle
Fred Bish
Rose Nash
May Williams
Sadie Washburn
Palmeria Podesto
Theresa Kross
Alice Peterson
Margaret Kross
Lillie Plummer
Delpha Donders
Bertina Kross
Dollie Bish
Viola Tatten
Gladys Hogmeyer
Myrtle Copeland
Dolly Copeland
Dorothy Harper
Eana Harper
Clara Plummer
Mary Souza
Lyle Schoettgen
Edgar Hill

Gordon Mapes
Lennie Copeland
Daisy Copeland
Ewen Elliot
Clarence Plummer
Ray Engelke
Bugs Hill
Fred Plummer
Lennie Young
Carl Hoderman
?
Alphie Ponce
Reuben Plummer
Preston Doyle
Grace Mapes
William Ponce
Clara Hill
Loyde Kross
Louisa Kross
Geo. Williams
Nettie Ponce
Domingo Jueralo



