

# LONE OAK FARM THE HOME OF JOHN & ANNA YOUNG

BY JANET NEWTON

John Young was born in Ohio in 1835. He came to California with his parents in 1861. It was a farming family whose roots were in New York state in the 18th century. John Young's wife, Anna Simmons Young was born in Illinois about 1848. She came to California in 1862 with her mother Laura and Laura's third husband, John Roberts. Anna's father, James Simmons had died in a cholera epidemic in 1848, leaving Laura with three small children to bring up. Widows with young children had a difficult life on the frontier.

In her memoirs, Anna recalled that before Laura married Daniel Gates (her second husband) she had had no one to cut firewood for her and that she burned fence rails by putting one end in the fire and the other on a chair. She had no lamps or candles, only the tallow dips she made herself. (Dips were sometimes made of the soft inner part of reeds soaked in animal fat.) Their carpets were made of rags. These made fine carpets, but they had to be hand-made.

Anna said that she had a happy childhood and was unaware of her mother's difficulties. She remembered when they got their first coal-oil lamp in 1860. For the first time they could see all over the room at night. She wrote "Formerly I had some tallow dips of my own that mother let me make and I would have my little corner to play with my dolls. But the lamp did away with all that."

There was a little school, but it was too far away for Anna to walk to it. She got her education from her mother. Her mother would sit sewing at night with the children around her. Anna remembered sometimes waking up in the middle of the night and seeing her mother still sewing.

After their long trek to California, Laura and her family spent their first winter in a cottage at Leavenworth and Geary Streets in San Francisco. They thought it was paradise because the climate was so mild. But it was a dry winter and there was no feed for the horses - nothing but sunshine to live on, Anna wrote. They decided to retrace their steps to the Truckee meadows in Nevada (now the town of Reno) where there was good dairy country. But though they could make a living by selling butter to the mining centers near Virginia City, it was a very hard life and they returned to San Francisco.

It was here, in 1866, that Anna married John Young. At first, the newlyweds lived with John's father and mother, Daniel and Martha Young, in what is now Fremont, until they got a house of their own, just over the hill from Mission San Jose. Two of their neighbor families were to become, with the Youngs, some of Livermore's earliest pioneers, the E.S. Allens and the Buck Mc Donalds.

In 1868, the John Youngs moved again, this time to the mouth of Corral Hollow in San Joaquin County. Anna wrote "Of all the forsaken windy places I have ever been, it was the worst. There was not a spear of anything green (except our nearest neighbor's name was Green...)" Once when her husband was away for several days working on the threshing machine, Anna decided to visit her mother in San Francisco. But she was told that there was an epidemic of smallpox there and so did not go.

At the ranch Anna wrote "We had to haul our water three and a half miles, so had to use every drop. My baby's bath was used to mop the floor and then to the chickens or pigs and dishwater went to the pigs. The wind blew so hard some nights the chickens could not go to roost. The way most of the sheep herders of Corral Hollow lived was terrible. Mrs. Green and I used to go to help one poor woman with a house full of children. We taught her to make bread.... They lived on mutton and beans and potatoes...the lambs shared the one-room house with the babies...."

In 1869, the Youngs moved on to the land they were to call home for the rest of their lives. It was near the Altamont Pass, east of Livermore. First they moved into the large one-room house of John's brother Francis until their own house was ready. One day there was a severe earthquake. A boiler of water on the stove slopped over and the milk in the cupboard skimmed itself over the edge of the dish and needed a lot of cleaning up.

Pa Roberts came from San Francisco to build a house for them. The nearest town was Mission San Jose. Livermore was not yet built. The grain from the Young ranch had to be hauled to

the San Joaquin River or to San Francisco Bay, long distances for a horse and wagon. There was a small store at Laddsville (now part of Livermore), but it was not until the first train came through late in 1869 that life on the ranch was made easier. It was still a long way to Livermore over primitive roads, but the railroad could bring them anything they needed and carry to market anything they could produce.

Of Livermore at that time Anna wrote "How barren it was, no trees, just a few small rough houses." But Anna and her husband and baby daughter rode on the second passenger train to Oakland and then crossed the bay to San Francisco. They visited Woodward's Garden, a pleasure park. It must have been a great change from life on the ranch.

Anna got her first sewing machine in 1875. Before that, like most housewives at that time, she made all the family's clothing by hand, even the boys' suits and her husband's pants and underclothing. She still made them, but it was much easier with the machine.

Young Alice brought home an acorn from an oak tree in Napa. She planted it near the house where it grew large and provided the name for the ranch. Anna's parents lived in Napa. When the new house was finished, it was really fine. It was one of the few houses of that time that had a bathroom. It also had a library. The family needed a big house. In 1883 there were six sons and one daughter. A group of neighbors built the Highland School nearby. The teacher lived with the Youngs. Jessie and Will Young graduated from Highland School but Will died soon afterwards of tonsillitis. The Youngs had another daughter in 1888. Martha Eva was born a cripple, but Anna wrote that she was the happiest baby she had ever known.

John Young's brother Alben and his family that had been living nearby, decided to return to the east in 1890. They took all their furniture and farm implements with them on the train, leaving from Altamont station. We wish we had a picture of their departure.

The first Union High School in the state of California was opened in Livermore in 1891, and John Young was one of those who organized it. He became one of the first trustees. Chester Young graduated from it, then Archie, then Fred. Guy Young went to business school in San Francisco. Little Mattie started school when she was eight and this left Anna with an empty house. The establishment of a creamery in Livermore in 1897 made a great difference in the work of the ranch, since they no longer had to take care of the milk and butter.

In 1888, Archie read an article in an Eastern magazine about two men who had linked their homes with a telephone line made of barbed wire. He was inspired to install a similar connection between his parents' house and Alice's. It was a successful project and a great boon to the family.

John Young died in 1898. Except for Fred, all the sons were away working elsewhere at the time. Fred rode his bike to high school every morning (about five miles) after milking several cows.

In 1908, after the big earthquake and fire in San Francisco, Chester, Archie and Fred Young, and Norman Sweet, Alice's son, were called, with Livermore's National Guard Company I, to San Francisco to help keep order. The family received some interesting messages from them and their friends. One was written on the wrapper from a tomato can and one on a piece of a box, labelled "Souvenir card". One message told of moving refugees into a tent camp in Jefferson Square (which was beyond Van Ness Avenue, the limit of the fire).

During this year, Anna decided to move into Livermore, to a cottage she bought at the north east corner of 8th and South G Streets. After this, her son Guy and his wife Jessie Mae took charge of the ranch.

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For the story of the Barbed Wire Telephone Co., see LHG publication of that name at the sales desk in the Livermore History Center, 2155 Third Street, Livermore, 94550, 449-9927