CHAPTER 8

FAMILY AND KIN: THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

INTRODUCTION

For the people who lived in the early camps and villages of the Lake Sonoma Area, as well as those on the historic-period farms and ranches, kinship ties were of great importance. Marriage between neighbors served to form tight alliances within the home community, while kinship bonds also extended far beyond the local area, cementing political, economic, and social ties throughout the region.

To a greater or lesser extent, kinship affects how an individual is viewed and treated by society and when, where, how, and with whom he or she may interact. Kinship groups serve as a link between the family and society at large. When viewed crossculturally, kinship and family are extremely complex phenomena. Because of the diversity of kinship patterns and the importance of kinship relations to the survival of the individual and the group, kinship has long been a major focus of cultural anthropology. Anthropologists have developed a complex array of terminology to distinguish the ways in which different cultures reckon kin relationships (1).

For this chapter, it is important only to recognize the difference between family (persons related by blood or marriage) and kinship groups, which include only certain kindred. Both families and kinship groups can be further modified or can be expanded through other means, for example, adoption. In many societies, kinship groups have been of primary importance in both personal and political matters. In such a society, people would know what behavior to expect from their kinsmen. This is very different from contemporary western society, where participation in kinship activities is voluntary and the word “family” is extended to include any group of kinsmen (2).

Anthropologists had studied kinship and families for decades before there was much interest in the history of the western family. During the 1960s and 1970s, the history of the family became an important topic of study for sociologists, anthropologists, historians, economists, and demographers. Previously, such studies had been limited to analyzing large-scale fertility, marriage, and mortality patterns, and to classifying household structure. Concern with overpopulation and with social problems linked by some social scientists to the “deterioration” of the family in western society prompted researchers to focus on an imaginative new set of questions. Primary to these studies is an emphasis on the relationship of birth and death rates to household structure and family organization, and these factors’ influence, in turn, on the behavior of families and individuals.

Using crosscultural studies through time and space, researchers are gaining a comparative perspective and have begun to formulate explanations of family change and development. For example, society defines the appropriate age for marriage, and whether a person of 50 is considered old or middle aged. Other economic, social, and historical factors impinge upon the family and the orderly passage of its members through the anticipated life course. Economic hardships during the Great Depression of the 1930s, for example, prevented many people from marrying and starting families, while draft laws of the 1960s during the Vietnam War provided an incentive for men to marry at a younger age (3).

Using some of the methods developed in the last two decades by social scientists studying family history, this chapter focuses on families and households once residing in the Lake Sonoma Area. The “household,” which may or may not be a family, is a group of people who live together and form a functioning domestic unit. Unrelated, adults may form a household, as may a family with certain hired workers. Households are the agents of consumption, education, and often of production as well. The household is often the main decision-making unit of society; it adapts to changes in regional and national economic and environmental conditions. Thus the household, and the families it contained, can be used as a basis from which to approach a wide range of research questions (4).
The Richards family in front of their house, circa 1890, the site of which is under Warm Springs Dam; left to right, Warren Richards, Judge Price, Harry Van Alen, Mrs. Richards Price, Amy Richards (photo courtesy of Edwin Langhart Museum, Healdsburg)

Transitions

Birth, home-leaving, marriage, childbearing, retirement, and death are outstanding events along the course of life. The transitions from one status to another are recognized, defined, and celebrated in different ways by different cultures. For most people, however, these transitions are celebrated within the familial setting in a manner visible to the wider public. One interest of family historians is the study of these transitions. “Life-course” analysis seeks to discover when individuals moved into and out of various family roles, and how these changes were related to the family as a collective unit (5).

Of particular interest in life-course studies is the relationship between changes in three kinds of time: individual or developmental time (chronological age), family time (marriage, leaving home), and historical time (economic and social conditions). When “family time” and “individual time” are out of sync, conflict develops within domestic groups. Life-course analysis is concerned with how typical lives were “timed” in the past, and how these life-course patterns fit into the specific economic, social, and demographic setting (6).

Age-specific transitions for the Southern Pomo were rigidly scheduled. An individual passed through a series of well-defined roles, with each change of role marked by rituals signaling the shift in status and responsibility. In contrast, family behavior in the 19th century was generally characterized by its diversity and flexibility in regard to timing, “a kind of controlled disorder that varied in accordance with pressing social and economic needs” (7). As state and private institutions gradually took over the functions of welfare, education, and law enforcement, a greater conformity in timing came to be enforced from the larger society. Age-related requirements, such as mandatory school attendance and retirement and child-labor legislation, have imposed more rigid patterns of timing upon family members. Researchers summed up the differences between the last two periods as follows:

‘Timely’ action to nineteenth-century families consisted of helpful response in times of trouble; in the twentieth century, timeliness connotes adherence to a schedule (8).

The following sections will examine transitions in more detail, first by describing how they generally occurred among the local Pomoans and later by focusing on the timing strategies of four Lake Sonoma Area settler families in relation to their changing social and economic milieu.
POMOAN INDIANS

Family and Kinship Groups

Precisely how the Dry Creek and Cloverdale Pomo reckoned kinship and the exact nature of their systems in times past are now lost (9), although many of the functions of their kinship groups have been reconstructed. In Pomoan society, an individual could not survive for long without the aid and protection of kin. Each individual had certain rights and responsibilities based upon his or her position within the kinship group. These mores served as a binding force. Kinship group members cared for both the young and the old; they parcelled out all jointly owned staples and money with which to purchase goods. Members paid doctors’ fees and other debts; they arranged and paid for marriage and burial ceremonies. The Pomoan kinship group entered into and oversaw all aspects of the lives of its members.

Based on extensive interviews with members of Pomoan groups who lived near Ukiah in Mendocino County, anthropologists Bert and Ethel Aginsky wrote what is often described as an ethnographic novel, Deep Valley. Although some Pomoan elders discount some of the Aginskys’ descriptions, the authors succeeded in bringing their subjects to life by personalizing the account. In one sequence, set in the sweat house, an old man counsels his young charge about the importance of kin:

You can always rely upon your blood relatives for aid and protection. You must be good to them; you must not grouch at them; you must give them presents and help them at all times . . . Only your blood relatives comprise your sanctuary, and you can rely only on them. The times you’re with them are the only ones you can relax your constant vigilance. It’s your family members who will take care of you when you are young and when you are old, and when you are sick, when you are hungry, and when you are in need of money (10).

Kinship groups were also important to the political organization of Southern Pomo tribelets. Extended families often resided together in one household and formed the most basic residential, corporate, and decision-making unit of society (11). The village, the political subdivision of the tribelet, was usually made up of one or more kinship groups. Each group had a headman; together these men governed the community and from among their members chose a captain. The captain served as principal advisor to the tribelet group: he welcomed visitors; presided over food harvests, trade, and ceremonies; and settled disputes. He did not, however, have absolute authority over the group. Kinship headmen had the same responsibilities as the captain but presided over a smaller population. Thus a village might be led by one captain and several headmen (12).

Baron von Wrangel, a Russian stationed at Fort Ross during the 1830s, was favorably impressed by the “easy-going” and “tender-hearted” nature of the Pomoan peoples. He noted the near-equal standing of group members and their lack of slavery. Wrangel described their society as follows:

They love their children with great affection, yet they require patriarchal obedience, and all the younger members of a tribe pay great respect, to age, to experience, and to the art of archery. The high esteem in which the father is held is often passed on to the son. But the authority of the chief is generally rather minimal, for anyone is free to leave his birthplace and to choose another residence (13).

Membership in a Southern Pomo kinship group was not determined solely by blood, as choice of residence was also important. Flexible residence rules and a variety of kinship relations made it easy for an outsider to join a group through marriage or adoption. Among the Makahmo and Mihilikawna Pomo, marriage partners had to be chosen from outside the blood kin group. A newly married couple would often live for a time in both the husband’s family’s village and the wife’s family’s village before making a final decision on where to live. They might even continue to shift residence. It was, however, the parents’ choice of residence which determined initial kin allegiance for their offspring (14).

The responsibility for taking care of the children and teaching them traditional ways rested on the entire kinship group, not on the parents alone. This was done along generational lines. All women called “sister” by a woman would care for and treat her child as if it were their own. Children were especially close to their grandparents, who took the primary responsibility for their instruction. Older children also took charge of their younger siblings, sometimes acting as an intermediary between them and their grandparents. Thus a young girl would have called all
A Makahmo family, circa 1898; Mr. and Mrs. Jim Marino and daughters
(photo courtesy of Elsie Allen)
her female cousins “sister,” while her elder sister was called “little mother.” When these girls themselves had children, their daughters would address as “aunt” all their mother’s “sisters,” regardless of the closeness of the biological relationship. In addition, these terms might be used merely to show respect, despite a complete lack of blood relationship. This use of kinship terms must have caused considerable confusion to census takers in the 19th century and continues to plague ethnologists attempting to construct genealogies.

Despite these complications, census data from 1880 and 1910, in combination with genealogies collected by modern ethnographers, allow us to reconstruct residential kin and family groupings around the turn of the century. Indians evidently continued to live in large extended family units. The following “Family Tree” illustrates the residents of Oak Ball Village in 1880. Except for two brothers, whose connections with the others are unclear, all persons appear to be related to the Bill family either by blood or by marriage. The four offspring of “Dr. Bill” remained together; their spouses, and sometimes the spouses’ relatives, joined the residential group. Thirty years later, in May 1910, nine of the former Oak Ball residents still resided together at the Cordova Place, along with their children and grandchildren. Captain Charlie Bill, the leader of this group, had died two years earlier. His role was never refilled, although his sister’s daughter took over some of his duties (15).

Pomoan household size and structure during the historic period were extremely variable, as men or other members of the family might spend part of the year away from home engaged in temporary agricultural work. At the time of contact, household size and structure varied by season and according to the preferences of individual families. Large households held up to 15 persons, all related by blood or marriage, while a small household might be made up of only a woman, her children, and perhaps an old man. According to a Pomoan elder, a couple usually remained in the grandparents’ house until they had “too many children” (16).

**POMOAN LIFE COURSE**

**Birth**

If a family was not already living at the wife’s mother’s home, they returned there for the birth of a child. Here the expectant mother was counseled by her female relatives, who also assisted the midwife at the child’s birth. The infant was washed and wrapped by a woman who was good and generous so that the newborn might acquire these qualities. Both parents were confined after their child’s birth, the mother in the childbirth hut adjacent to the living house (also used as a menstrual house) and the father in a special bed in the dwelling house. The parents also observed dietary restrictions for a prescribed period (17).

A month or more after birth, the child was named in a special ceremony and placed in a traditional baby-carrying basket made by men. The basket was lined with tree moss, which served as a diaper, and secured by a strap to the mother’s back for carrying.

**Childhood**

Children played a variety of games, many of which taught them skills necessary in adult life. They also spent much time listening to “Coyote Stories” about the adventures and misadventures of the “animal people” who occupied the world before human beings. One elder Mihlakawna recalled the role of stories in her childhood:

Stories taught us how to sit still and listen, how to listen to our elders, how to behave towards them. We learned our language that way too, by listening to those stories. The stories also taught about different things in the world: how things were made, what was good and bad, the way people should act towards one another, and more (18).

As parents were often away hunting and collecting food, grandparents usually took over the care of the children. According to one Pomoan woman, teaching was constant. No one said, “Come with me and I will teach you now.” It was just daily. Someone would say, “Come with me. We are going to gather clover” or “We are going to gather some smooth flat rocks to put in the acorn basket.” It was just constant. We learned from watching and went from there (19).

Children began taking on adult responsibilities upon reaching puberty. The father and other male relatives instructed the boys on hunting and fishing and the roles of manhood, while the mother and female relatives taught the girls the art of basketry, food gathering and cooking tasks, and the special
rules and rituals pertaining to womanhood. There was no special single ceremony for males at puberty; a number of separate events indicated their passage into manhood. The initiation of young men into one of the secret religious societies appears to have been one marker of this transition. At this point a boy also began to take up residence in the sweat house with his father and the other men. In addition, his first deer kill was noted by a ceremony in which the meat was shared with his close relations.

For young girls, entrance into adulthood was signaled by their first menstruation and celebrated by a prescribed ritual. At the onset of her first menses, a girl, followed by her immediate family who sang the customary songs, entered the menstrual house. She was confined to this separate room, where her diet and behavior were restricted, as they would be for subsequent menstrual periods. The confinement and restrictions on this first cycle lasted for four weeks, while all subsequent confinements lasted only four days. This transition was accompanied by a change in the girl’s appearance. Among the Dry Creek Pomo, a young girl would have her ears pierced at puberty, while among the Cloverdale Pomo, womanhood was marked by the right to wear women’s clothing.

**Adult Life**

The passage of a person into full adult status was usually associated with marriage. Men and women became eligible for marriage shortly after being recognized as adults—men at about 16 years and women at about 15. For Pomoans, marriage served not only to bond the couple in a special relationship, it also joined the families, communities, and tribes into a cooperative network. Thus marriage was a political as well as a social arrangement. In the vast majority of marriages, the husband and wife spoke the same language. Some sons and daughters of socially and politically important families, however, married outside of their language group and thereby created or strengthened the ties between groups and enlarged the opportunities of both peoples.

Potential spouses could be met at the regularly scheduled social events and dances attended by neighboring peoples. Courtship was a serious undertaking, for it involved not only the two young
people but their families and relations as well. The parents or sometimes the grandparents of the man would initiate the betrothal by offering gifts to the woman’s parents. Acceptance of these offerings by her parents indicated their acceptance of the suitor, his family, and their relatives. Discouraging courtship had to be done tactfully, for to refuse the gift outright might result in bad feelings between the families.

The wedding ceremony included an exchange of gifts between the families of the bride and groom. The groom’s family gave the bride strings of clamshell beads, while the bride’s family gave baskets to the groom’s family. In addition, each family was responsible for supplying ingredients of the wedding feast. Pomoans continued to follow traditional customs into the 20th century, as shown by the following description of a wedding in nearby Coyote Valley:

old women in Potter Valley had been pounding acorns for days to make pinole which is like flour. Great big baskets were filled with acorn mush, pinole and perhaps fish. What I saw was the bride’s family going back to reciprocate what the man’s family had done. All the girl’s relatives from the Valley carried a basket of something. The mother of the bride had a belt made of beads about that wide and she laced that around her somehow. Can you imagine how many beads that took? Then they had a choker much more elaborate than the one we have at the Museum. They put that around his neck and on the end of it would be ornamental shell and feather. I always felt that their weddings were just as costly and just as elaborate as weddings today among your people (20).

Although the couple was united by the feast and the exchange of gifts, their families were not formally joined until the birth of their first child.

Pomoan women practiced birth control to either promote, prevent, or terminate pregnancy. This involved using herbal preparations accompanied by the appropriate songs and prayers. Cloverdale couples wishing children sometimes visited a special rock, near what is now the Sonoma/Lake county line, where they made offerings. Births were also limited by frequent taboos on sexual relations: men had to avoid contact with their wives before hunting, gambling, or entering into any situation which required their full power, while women observed the same restrictions prior to collecting basketry roots or sacred plants. Mourning observances often required lengthy periods of sexual abstinence, as could a prolonged illness in the family. Illness or death in the family also prevented marriage from taking place.

We do not know what prehistoric Pomoan groups thought of as the ideal family size. It would have been important to insure the survival of enough offspring to support the parents in their old age, but children beyond a certain number would not have been seen as desirable. At the time of contact, nearly all Pomoans married. Judging from documentary and ethnographic sources, this norm continued in historic times, in contrast to the Euroamerican population, among whom the proportion of married people fell as the 19th century progressed. Local native couples did not, however, have large numbers of surviving offspring. As can be seen by comparing the family trees within this chapter, Pomoan women had fewer children than did settler women.

During his visits to the Cloverdale area in the 1870s, ethnographer Stephen Powers was told that the Makahmo practiced infanticide in order to avoid raising any more children among the Whites. According to Powers, a feeling of intense pessimism had overwhelmed the Makahmo:

There seems to have fallen on them a great and bitter despair...they see themselves slowly and surely throttled by the white man with his busy engines, his vast enterprises, his thundering locomotives; all their fine broad valleys wrenched from them with bloody violence; themselves jostled, elbowed back, crushed to earth; all their rich nut-bearing forests filled with the swarming flocks and herds of the avaricious and never resting American, consuming the acorns which are their subsistence, and for presuming to gather which off lands which were their own from time immemorial, and for which they have never received the compensation of one poor dollar, they have been sometimes pursued and shot unto death like jackals (21).

Infanticide was also sometimes practiced if a child was born with an immediately recognizable birth defect. In the 19th century, the infant mortality rate among Pomoans must have been extremely high due to their lack of resistance to introduced diseases,
poor living conditions, and lack of medical care. In addition, couples may have consciously avoided having more than a small number of children. Together these factors kept the completed family size of Pomoans relatively small. In recounting her life story, one Pomoan elder from Potter Valley indicated that small families continued to be the norm into this century:

I often wondered if it was a subconscious rebellion against the White man or what, but do you know that the young people [in ca. 1910], very few had any children. Aunt Maggie had four, three sons and a daughter. Mother had four. Now there is two of us. The rest, whole families, are just gone. I think there are five direct descendents of the people who were there. I have always wondered why but I don’t know (22).

In contrast to the Potter Valley Pomo, there are still quite a few descendants of Dry Creek and Cloverdale Pomo living in northern Sonoma County. In fact, with better sanitation and medical care, the declining population of native peoples reversed itself on a statewide level in the mid-20th century: in 1960 American Indians had relatively larger families than did any other ethnic minority group in California (23).

Adulthood for Pomoan men and women required participation in a number of activities, which varied according to their age and sex. Among precontact Pomoans, food-collecting activities were governed by
a fairly strict division of labor. While men hunted in
the nearby hills or fished the creeks, the women
collected basketry materials on creek terraces,
harvested plant foods in the meadows, or processed
foods back at the village or camp. Pomoan women
worked very hard. Baron von Wrangell observed that
hunting was the male domain, while the women
“undertake the difficult tasks in general” and “carry
all the heavy loads.” He attributed this unequal
division of labor to biological factors; the women
being generally of a “much stronger physical
constitution” than the men, “who, although large and
well-proportioned, still seem to be weaker than the
women” (24). Women gathered and prepared most of
the food. Some staples required numerous steps in
processing before they were ready to eat. Just
preparing acorns, the mainstay of their diet, was “a
lot of work” involving “gathering it, shelling it,
drying it, grinding it, soaking it to leach out the
bitterness and cooking it” (25).

Although many tasks were limited by age or sex,
some activities involved most of the people in a
village. All family members joined in when the large
communal fish dams were erected across a creek;
some stayed on the banks to clean, salt, and dry the
catch, while men, women, and children waded in the
water, driving the fish into the central basketry trap.
Acorn collecting, carried out in the late fall and early
winter, also required all family members. Men
climbed high in the tree and, using angled harvesting
poles, knocked the acorns to the ground, while women
and children collected them into large baskets.

Pomoan men and women had separate social
networks. Women were not allowed into the men’s
secret societies, and only old women could enter the
sweathouse. Thus women were excluded from direct
participation in interfamily and intergroup decisions.
Pomoan women did, however, have direct control
over the internal affairs of the family. The
“headwoman” of each family had charge of the
valuables of all family members, including those of
her married sons. She regulated gift giving at
weddings, funerals, and other occasions, and was also
in charge of food collection, preparation, storage,
and distribution for the family.

Men spent much of their time in the sweathouse
with other men. Although they ate their meals at
home, they would often sleep in the sweathouse. Here
the men developed close friendships, exchanged
information, educated the younger men, planned joint
activities, dealt with political matters, and played
games of chance, skill, and endurance. Men could
gain status and wealth through specializing as
craftsmen in bead, bow, or stone tool making, or as
professional gamblers, athletes, dancers, singers, or
storytellers. There were also a limited number of
leadership roles as tribelet captain, and as trading,
hunting, and fishing captains, and kin group headmen.
Positions in the curing arts, such as herbal doctors,
singing doctors, and “outfit” doctors, were also
highly prized, and open to both men and women.
Most of these positions, however, were filled by men
trained by their fathers or other kinship group
members who previously had held the same position.

The women and children gathered in the dwelling
houses. Here, the women developed comradeship,
learned from each other, dealt with the affairs of
women, and planned female-centered activities. The
menstrual house was the exclusive domain of women.
Here younger women were counseled by their older
female relatives.

There were also positions of high status and
authority for which only Pomoan women could strive:
the headwomen presided over the affairs of women,
and there were also female gamblers, storytellers,
and doctors. Unlike men, only a few of whom were
selected by the elders for specialized roles, women
had greater opportunities to specialize. Many women
excelled in midwifery, herbalism, and in the making
of special baskets. Most women made baskets for
domestic use, but some specialists created lavishly
decorated baskets for important ceremonial and social
occasions. Pomoans are considered by many to be the
world’s finest basketmakers and are known
internationally for their decorated baskets.

Through her basketry, a Pomoan woman gained
recognition from her group and from persons from
other tribelet groups. Baskets continue to bring
Pomoan women into the larger social network.
Renowned Pomoan basketmaker Elsie Allen learned
the art from her mother and grandmother, went on to
teach it at the Mendocino Art Center, and put on
demonstrations at craft and art exhibits in major cities
from California to New York. Her mother also
influenced Elsie in her desire to teach non-family
members:

Mother showed baskets for seven years. She
showed baskets at the Boonville Fair, and
around. She liked people and noticed how
A Makahmo weaver at home, 1980; Elsie Allen with the basketry art of three generations
(photo by Scott Patterson)
people liked the basket displays. She wanted me to travel and meet people through the baskets and not destroy her baskets and have nothing left for me and others in the future. Mother died in 1962, and I have tried to keep my promise (26).

**Old Age and Death**

Among the Southern Pomo, people were accorded the respect owed to “elders” when they became grandparents, often before they reached middle age by 20th-century standards. At this point, their responsibilities shifted to caring for and educating their grandchildren, while their own children took over the tasks of providing the group with food and other staples. The elders were greatly respected and readily obeyed by their grandchildren, whom they instructed in the traditional ways and beliefs. The accumulated knowledge and experience of old people gave them considerable power. Little by little, until their deaths, they passed their power on, in the form of information, skills, and ritual objects, to the succeeding generations.

Both the Cloverdale and the Dry Creek Pomo cremated their dead along with all of the possessions of the deceased. The name of the dead person was never used again, for its use might cause the deceased to want to remain among the living. The dead could find the afterlife only if all attachments to their earthly presence had been broken—thus, the burning of possessions and the prohibition on using the name. Upon death, the family and relatives of the deceased gathered together to mourn. Men and women painted their faces, cut their hair, and cried and waited to demonstrate their grief. The Makahmo observed a mourning anniversary one year after the funeral. Again, everyone waited at the loss of the deceased, and food and items of value were burned at the grave.

**SETTLERS**

**Family and Kin**

Although less formal and encompassing in their influence than true kinship groups, kin were nonetheless a very important factor in the development of the West. Kin served as a resource to protect and promote the desires of member families and individuals. For example, during the settlement stage, families having the support of an effective kinship network often had an advantage over families trying to make it on their own. Kinship was also a factor in migration, settlement, and marriage patterns. Kinship became less significant in the 20th century, as many of the activities performed by these groups were taken over by impersonal, outside agencies, both private and governmental.

In western society of the late 20th century, one of the major functions of kin is to provide emotional support, offering a sympathetic ear and sound counsel. This was not always the case; in the 19th century, extended family members were valued as much for their ability to provide assistance during periods of economic need or crisis. These economic exchanges cemented familial relationships from generation to generation and maintained the self-sufficiency of the family. Families preferred to rely on relatives, rather than on strangers, for aid (27).

Kinship had a strong influence on migratory practices. Multifamily units often moved west as a unit, even when making stops spread over many years or decades. Brothers, often with their wives, widowed mother, or even mother-in-law, traveled together. Numerous examples of families moving west to be near kin are recorded for the Lake Sonoma Area. Given the nature of landholding described in Chapter 5, it would have been easier for kin to move into the area than for unrelated persons. As described in that chapter, relatives might help a settler to consolidate his claim. They might also settle a portion of that claim for their own use. Such was probably the case when, in 1884, the Tom Scott family moved onto a ranch neighboring that of Tom’s half-brother, Sylvester Scott.

Relatives did not always make the best neighbors, however, and the antics of feuding kin make up a good part of the gossip of most rural communities. The family of one project-area landowner lived in Mendocino County to the north, where, in the 1850s, a number of relatives had settled a valley. Two of the brothers quarreled for decades over a fence line. After many, many years, the pair had a tearful reunion at what was presumed to be the deathbed of one of the brothers. But when, to their mutual embarrassment, the brother recovered, they continued the feud, more fiercely than ever (28).

Marriage between neighboring families served to expand and strengthen kinship bonds and to consolidate property holdings. Close relationships between neighbors were inevitable in a relatively sparsely settled and isolated area, where fortuitous meetings with eligible strangers would have been few
and far between. These romantic involvements would have been either encouraged or discouraged by families, depending, in part, on the mutual benefit that the union might bring about. Active kin groups took a strong interest in the romantic attachments of their members, which could result in family feuding and bad feelings. Privacy was not possible even on geographically secluded properties in the Dry Creek uplands. As one young woman complained:

How that old hen can keep track of the private affairs of the rest of the Nation baffles me. She has seven children to take care of and a house to keep neat and clean, and that ought to keep any woman busy and happy, but she seems never so happy as when she has precipitated herself into the innermost secrets of her neighbors far and near (29).

The lovers themselves were not oblivious to the economic aspects of their anticipated marriage. One local boy was quite taken with a certain Miss Cassidy who lived just to the north, but when her father’s gold-mining prospects failed, so did their romance. An observant brother wrote of the young man’s plight as follows:

I feel sorry for hennery. He seems to feel a kind down hearted lately. The rage about the mine seems to die a way and I think that he thinkes ther is nothing in marreying a red heded women we thought [without] a fortun and he wishes he tied up his stockinges passing buy ferrey’s [punctuation added] (30).

Ferry, their neighbor to the south, was a successful rancher with several young, unmarried daughters.

A considerable amount of intermarrying went on between families who lived in the Dry Creek Valley: the Pritchett, Bryant, Ireland, Hendricks, Wood, Phillips, Richards, and Van Alen families were connected by marriage with each other and with other families up and down the valley. Some of the landholdings of these families bordered on each other. At marriage, the parents of one partner might give the couple some of the family’s acreage, either deeded or possessory, and eventually the aging parents might mortgage or give all their holdings to them. Loans, ranging from small to large sums, were commonly arranged between kinfolk. Most kin could not supply large sums, however, especially following the turn of

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Wedding photograph of Dry Creek Valley residents Maude Phillips and Geo. L. Hendricks, 1901 (photo courtesy of Edwin Langhart Museum, Healdsburg)
the century; loans were then negotiated with a bank, but often with a relative acting as the guarantor.

Families and individuals residing in the area also had connections with their urban-dwelling kinfolk. This enlarged the social and economic base of both groups. The Van Alen family—John, Egbert, William, and Harry—are a good example of this extension. Together, they engaged in a wide range of speculative ventures in the late 1880s, including a stock ranch at Flat Ridge, a farm and vineyard on Dry Creek (CA-Son-1127H), and a fruit-packing cannery in Healdsburg. To raise capital for these ventures, the Van Alens mortgaged real estate. At some point, they over expanded, for in December of 1894, with two complaints against them for unpaid debts, their 960-acre Flat Ridge Ranch was sold at a public auction (31). The Van Alens’ range of holdings foreshadowed the financial empires consolidated by local kin during the early 20th century. Livestock, wine, mineral deposits, lumber, and of course, real estate, made up the assets of these corporations, governed by boards of directors composed of family members.

Most arrangements between rural and urban kin, however, were not so formalized; they were based instead on notions of family favors, responsibility, and reciprocity. Urban kin could run errands and purchase a wide variety of consumer goods for their rural “cousins.” They could keep country relatives abreast of price conditions in town and help them market their livestock and produce to best advantage. They also supplied a place for rural kin to stay when in town. In turn, city folks could summer on the country property of relatives. Although they might give some aid at harvest and sheep-shearing time, the city cousins were primarily on vacation. The implications of these extended summer visits on landholding patterns have been discussed above (see Chapter 5). In addition to letting their city relatives live off the “fat of the land” during summer, rural kin sent gifts of game, poultry, and produce throughout the year to their urban counterparts.

From old letters and oral history, a flavor of all the best aspects of this relationship between urban and rural kin can be reconstructed. George Matthews ran a kind of summer camp in the Dry Creek uplands for the Cochranes, relatives on his mother’s side from Marin County (32). From 1900 (20 years after the death of George’s mother) until around the First World War, members of the Cochrane family spent
summers at the ranch. Some families camped in tents, while others had cabins scattered about the property. George supplied the tents, picnic tables, straw mattresses and cots, and, for some families, even a milk cow. In addition to the ranch’s orchards, vines, and berry bushes, George planted a vegetable garden for the families’ use. Everyone ate well during their visits. There was plenty of fresh food and game to eat. And when George wasn’t around, the cousins did a bit of illegal hunting or helped themselves to his chickens. The commodities that couldn’t be caught or picked at the ranch were shipped in advance from San Rafael. In addition, George made weekly trips to Cloverdale, armed with a shopping list from each family’s camp. This must have been a substantial gathering, for there were 36 second cousins, their parents (George’s cousins), and unrelated friends of the families who summered at the ranch. No family members ever paid Matthews to stay on his ranch, and he reportedly enjoyed the summer get-togethers as much as they did.

During the first summers the entire family of each cousin would come up, but as the years went by, the men could not take time off work and would join their families only when they could. As soon as school let out, the cousins got ready for the trip. Each family traveled by train from San Rafael to Cloverdale, where George met them with horse and buggy at the station. After a big lunch at the Cloverdale Hotel, the families changed from their city things into their country clothes in a room reserved at the hotel for that purpose. They left their city clothes in Cloverdale to be retrieved on the way home. Everyone piled into George’s buggy for the ride to the ranch. Before the climb up Red Mountain, all the children had to get out and walk up the steep slope.

First thing in the summer, the boys filled sacks with sand and built a dam in Dry Creek to make a swimming hole, complete with diving board. The children spent their summers swimming, hiking, and horseback riding; they also learned to hunt at a young age. George Matthews believed that girls and boys should be raised the same, so the girl cousins learned these skills too. Soda Springs, three miles to the north of Matthews’ house, was a favorite spot, with both hot and cold pools. The children brought sugar and lemons from the orchard and made a delicious lemon fizz. They also visited Hood’s Hot Springs about two miles south of George’s house.

In the evening all of the families came in from the different camps and got together on the verandah to tell stories and sing songs. George’s foreman, Charlie Cook, played the accordion, and other campers played violins. Eventually George built a dance pavilion for all his guests. There the teenage cousins, their friends, and young members of the hunting club frolicked until the early hours of the morning. The older and younger guests thoroughly enjoyed
themselves as well, but the stage was certainly set at the ranch for many a first summer romance.

One long-remembered event was the “Great Water-Fight.” One particularly hot day, when George was in town, silliness overwhelmed the family camps and the entire clan participated in a marathon water fight that not only emptied the water tanks George had built to supply the camps, but the well, and even the dishwasher, which “Mama threw at Uncle Jim.”

The vacations ended when school started, although some lucky children were allowed to miss the first weeks of classes. When a family was leaving for the season, everyone got together in front of the house to take photographs. Then they went down to Cloverdale in the buggy, got back into their city clothes, had lunch, and caught the train. Most visitors left reluctantly, and it took them quite awhile to get used to city life again. As one young cousin wrote during class on her first day back at school:

We all arrived safely home, although I cannot say happily, as far as I am concerned for I got the blues frightfully just as soon as I struck this cold, miserable city. It was so foggy that I could not see my hand. Heinze [a member of the hunting club] managed to keep us cheerful though, throughout the journey. I was positively ashamed of him. He came through the city in the same old clothes that he wore on the ranch. He was as happy as a lark and as proud as a prince, with his gun and his buck on his shoulder and the horns and a log of wood tied with a hayrope in his hands. He was exceedingly happy when he arrived in the city and papa a little bit too. Mama managed to keep him somewhat straight. They sat in the smoking car by themselves so no wonder they were happy (33).

**Louis Mead: A Solitaire**

Solitary individuals were unusual in this area of family enterprises. Although some project-area residents lived alone during their bachelorhood or following the death of a spouse, only a few residents can be singled out as “hermits.” Louis C. Mead was one of these, described by archaeologists as a man of “subtle mystery” (34). He lived on a homestead (CA-Son-555/H) bordering what became Skaggs Springs-

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“The goat that followed George Matthews home from Ornbaun Valley,” circa 1910  
(photo courtesy of Geraldine Von Husen)
Two young campers on the Matthews ranch who had just been awakened by a bucket of water, circa 1910 (photo courtesy of Geraldine Von Husen)

Stewart’s Point Road. He arrived sometime after 1870 and worked as a laborer at a nearby farm. The 1880 census listing placed him up the road from Skaggs Springs, where he remained until his death in 1920 at age 71. He had either traveled west with his parents and younger sister, or had been followed by them after a short period. His father, S.P. Mead, was the Indiana reporter who penned the descriptions of Skaggs Springs quoted in the Cultural Landscape section of Chapter 3. The elder Mead may have come to California for his health; he spent some time taking the waters at Skaggs, before eventually settling with his wife and daughter in Healdsburg and becoming a co-editor of the Russian River Flag, the town’s Republican newspaper.

The 1880 census showed Louis and his father living together on the homestead and his mother and sister on Matheson Street in Healdsburg. S.P. Mead may have been only visiting his son at this time. Louis apparently quarreled with his family and remained a recluse for the rest of his life. His parents and sister moved to Santa Barbara in 1883, and when his father died the next year, Louis received nothing. His mother’s obituary, printed in the Healdsburg paper in 1897, failed to mention her son, who lived only a few miles away, but noted that Mrs. Mead was survived by a daughter who lived in San Francisco (35).

Local residents remember Louis Mead as a loner who had no family and socialized little. Louis’ name did not appear on any of the guest lists of local parties published in the Healdsburg paper and later collected by WSCRs researchers. His reputed stingy nature—“he was as close as the bark on a damn tree”—is revealed by the following story: “One time his own dad came there to visit him and stayed on a couple of weeks and when he left why, he presented the old man with a bill for board and room.” The same old-timer recalled a typical Louis Mead shopping trip to Geyserville. He came in an old cart pulled by a starving horse and followed by a couple of skinny dogs. Following his shopping and before returning home in the afternoon, he would lunch on an onion sandwich, the main ingredient having been “borrowed” from the seed box in the store. Other locals remember Louis with humor and affection as a man who “lived from day to day.”

Louis Mead apparently supported himself for over 40 years on his 320-acre homestead. He cultivated a small field and raised poultry, hogs, goats, and a few cattle. Work done by historical archaeologists attests to Louis’ self-sufficiency. Archaeologists excavated two stone dugouts on his homestead; one apparently served as a tool shed and the other as a cold cellar for food. The dugouts were constructed by digging into a slope and lining the
Hiram Perry Hulbert and Mary Bell Hufstader Hulbert and children, ca. 1897

interior with unfinished stone of differing sizes. One
dugout apparently had steps approaching it made of
wood planks, flattened tin cans, and soil. Both
outbuildings probably had wood sides and roofs. Food
bone recovered from the cold cellar suggested that
Louis relied more heavily on home-butchered goat
and deer meat than on store-bought beef cuts.
Evidently not pressured by family or self-ambition,
he avoided the pitfalls of bad debts which plagued
other area residents. He also resisted overtures from
expansion-hungry neighbors to buy him out. In March
1920 Louis Mead sold his property to an outsider as a
“Life Estate,” to be turned over to the purchaser upon
Mead’s death. Six months later Louis died during an
operation to amputate a gangrenous leg.

Family Life

During the 1800s, families faced an uncertain
future; life was fragile, and shifting economic trends
could be perilous. In 1900 the average life expectancy
at birth of White Americans (male and female) was
only 49 years, yet up seven years from the 1850
figure (36). High infant mortality was one reason for
the low life expectancy; the infant mortality rate for
the late 19th century was approximately 10 times that
of the 1980s. As infant mortality declined and life
expectancy rose, birth rate and family size also
decreased. One of the most noticeable changes in
western families over the past century is the decline in
birth rate: between 1810 and 1930 the birth rate
decayed from an average of eight children per mother
to slightly less than three (37). There are not enough
data to work out the birth rate for all women in the
Lake Sonoma Area; we do know, however, that
during the 19th century it was high for many of these
women, especially those living in the Dry Creek
uplands, ranging up to 20 births. Families with six or
seven surviving children were common. Completed
family size dropped considerably after the turn of the
century.

Death in the family was a common childhood
experience in the study area, as in the general
population. The long childbearing period—over 25
years for some women—and shorter life-expectancy,
meant that the lives of parents and children overlapped
for a shorter period than they do at present. The
“empty nest” phase, so common today, in which a
couple spends many years together after the departure
of their children, was rare; marriage was more
commonly broken by the death of a spouse before the
end of the child-rearing period. The insecure nature
of the family meant that many individuals did not pass
through the life-course transitions in the ideal order
or at the appropriate age. The youngest children, for
example, often had to care for and support their
widowed parent and thus could not marry until an
advanced age, if at all.
Families settling in the area faced a changing set of constraints and opportunities that challenged their resourcefulness. In addition to the precariousness of life itself, families had to cope with the instabilities of the developing capitalist system. The first problem was to establish a homestead with a sufficient quantity and variety of crops and livestock to supply the subsistence needs of a growing family. Then a cash crop was necessary if one was ever to be successful and rise above the subsistence level. Cattle, sheep, and grapes were the main choices of the area’s operators. These investments required labor and cash for development. It also became increasingly important to secure legal title to one’s property; this also required cash. Older members of the growing families might aid in property development and expansion, but many families needed additional help from the outside in the form of hired hands and loans. A woman who settled with her family in Green Valley, about eight miles south of Healdsburg, described what they did in the mid-1850s as

only the common routine of business incidently [sic] to farming & such kind of work, such as ploughing & clearing planting out orchards & vineyards & raising stock & milking cows trying all ways to make a living & our girls & boys getting large enough to help us. so that we might be able to pay our debts (38).

The expanding operators’ constant need for cash to pay the help and mortgage payments strained some enterprises beyond the limit of their resources. The rapid price fluctuations of agricultural products could bankrupt families who were forced to sell their goods at a low price in order to raise needed cash. An additional threat, climatic disasters, might not only severely damage a family’s crops and livestock but, by destroying their means of acquiring cash for mortgage payments, might cause the eventual loss of the entire operation. Thus, heads of households sought to balance the needs of property development with the needs of their families, all within an economic and environmental climate subject to rapid change. Developing ventures within the Lake Sonoma Area were faced with a decline in productivity due to deteriorating grasslands, the phylloxera epidemic, and falling prices for wool and sheep.

Settlers also had to confront the lack of opportunity for younger family members seeking a place in the rural economy, as well as the rising expectations of young and old stimulated by the industrial revolution. Landholdings were often settled by brothers or by a father and his sons. These holdings, however, could support only one family. Thus younger brothers needed to acquire sufficient capital to purchase their own land when they wished to marry. After about 1875, the lack of funds and scarcity of suitable land kept these men single and within the family operation for most of their younger years. In particular, the large acreage requirement of sheep ranching did not permit the fragmentation and formation of new enterprises, forcing the eventual
departure of all but one son. After establishing an enterprise, the problem was no longer property development, but maintaining the family enterprise intact through an increasingly harsh period of economic and environmental crises (39).

Women

Until relatively recently, the role of women in developing and maintaining these agricultural enterprises had been essentially overlooked. This oversight was due in part to the focus of traditional historians on great men and major events and to the less public stage on which much of women’s history had been played out—the household. In the Lake Sonoma Area, as elsewhere, women not only participated in the families’ economic ventures, they also helped create and maintain the social community.

The influence of wives on property development decisions was probably greater than will ever be realized. Women, through their role as cook and household manager, may have had a greater awareness of the success or failure of the operation than did their mates. It was a woman’s responsibility to parcel out the family’s supplies in such a way as to never run out. In dwellings lacking electricity or running water, simply accomplishing those tasks traditionally defined as “women’s work” was a mammoth undertaking: cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing, and giving birth to and caring for numerous children. Some women were in charge of cooking meals for up to 20 hungry persons, three times a day. One may add to this the necessary chores of canning fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish, making soap and clothes, and tending the garden and farmyard animals.

Aside from their domestic role in the home and farmyard, some women worked on the range with the men as well. In 1887 one woman living in the Dry Creek uplands wrote, “Jonney and my self is the stock men now dayes we mannage things while the others do the plowing” (40). And later: “If I had not looked after the cattle this winter we would loose a great moneys both calves and young heffers” (41). This dual role was sometimes necessary when the husband was sick or dead and the sons were not old enough to assume responsibility for the enterprise. Married women often ran the family homestead alone while the husband was out hunting or tending to other business. When widowed homesteaders remarried, their second wife was usually much younger than

Washing day in the Dry Creek uplands (double-exposed photo from GM collection)
themselves, thus possessing the stamina to outlive them and carry on the property.

After a property was successfully established, the women were under less of a burden to work outside the physical limits of the house and farmyard. Then the personal temperament of the woman and the attitude of her husband had a good deal to do with the scope of her activities. According to one woman, who spent her life working with her husband on their Humboldt County ranch:

It depends entirely on the woman. Some women did nothing but keep the house and tend the garden and that sort of thing. Canned and whatever had to do with the household. But some women also went out and worked with the sheep. Oh, lamb’em and gather, put them into the corral. Worked with ’em when they were shearing, tagging and did all kinds of things that pertained to the sheep business (42).

Sheep ranching, more so than cattle ranching, was often undertaken by husband-wife teams. Many properties within the North Coast Ranges were managed in such a way, with the woman taking equal responsibility and possessing equal knowledge and skills in the family operation.

Women may have been more affected than men by the isolation of ranching life. Women had fewer adult social contacts than men and, in the early days, had fewer reasons or opportunities to leave the home. Especially in the winter and during times of sickness, the poor roads and lack of neighbors would have been a real hardship. One woman wrote from the Dry Creek uplands in 1887:

I realey thught I was dyeing. The creekes were overflowing and no one could get heir and no one could get out. This is a verey poor place for a woman to live this time of year unless there is some one that understands what to do when one is sick. There at last to be too wimen to gater [together] where the nubers [neighbors] are so scarce [punctuation added] (43).

Hard work and lack of affection caused this same woman to complain bitterly of her spouse: “He treats the femal sext lik he doe the cattle. The can come in and come out and die if the like and that is all the stock man seems to care” (44).

Drinking was the way in which one of the first women settlers coped with her isolation and unsympathetic male companions. There is an often repeated story concerning Mrs. Scott’s grandmother, or Aunt Katie, who was reputedly “partial to a dram.”
The men were going off for the day and, not wishing to leave Katie in possession of the whiskey jug, they hid it in a tree. Katie eventually found her prize:

With methodic precision she carried out a large wash-tub, and having taken correct bearings, placed it immediately beneath the jug, and next, procuring her husband’s rifle, she took deliberate aim, bang went the charge, the bullet pierced the target, the liquor trickled into the tub. Aunt Katie regaled herself, and was found, on the return of the party, in affectionate proximity to what remained of her favorite tipple, having had as much “independence” as was good for her (45).

As more women arrived in the area, they sought more constructive remedies for their problems.

The need for a community and for the companionship and help of other women provided the impetus for the establishment of numerous organizations, religious and secular, including the Saturday Afternoon Club, the Dry Creek Neighbors Club, and the Cloverdale Spinsters. These reflect a similar pattern to what has been reported about a Canadian ranching community. There, it was revealed that although the social networks of men and women were separate, “due to the limited number of alternatives, these ties are complementary, and they incorporate different members of the same household.” The women established the social context of the household: “Whereas men have important work exchanges with other men, it is the women who, for the most part, organize the social relationships between the household, the kin group, and the community” (46).

Four Settler Families

The local careers of four families illustrate how people met the challenges presented by the changing constraints and opportunities of the Lake Sonoma Area. The histories also underscore many of the points made in this chapter and throughout the volume.

As will be seen, the composition of the family and the seat of authority within it changed throughout the life course of each family. The precariousness of setting, flexibility of response, and diversity of action so characteristic of the 19th century also can be seen in the history of these settler families. Despite the fact that we are now aware of the tremendous contribution wives made to family enterprises, little was recorded on the women connected with these four families. We are left primarily with their childbearing record, as reconstructed from the U.S. Census. “Family trees” have been constructed from the census for each family at ten-year intervals, except for 1890, for which there are no data. The family trees also include boarders (b), as the census listed people by household (47). In our area, these households were the economic units of production; thus, these family histories emphasize economics.

The Scott Family

The life course of the Sylvester Scott family typified many of the trends discussed in this chapter (48). In about 1858 Malinda Miller and Sylvester were married in Healdsburg. Both had experienced California in its frontier days. In 1854, at age 16, Sylvester had left his home town in Wisconsin and headed for the goldfields of El Dorado County, while Malinda had crossed the Plains in a covered wagon with her grandparents, settling in the Healdsburg area before 1850. The Millers became well known in the area, for Valentine Miller had brought the makings of a distillery with him. In the early days, grain was in short supply, so he had little opportunity to ply his trade. But when Cyrus Alexander sold him a quantity of damaged wheat in 1851, Valentine was back in business (49).

The Millers continued to produce alcoholic beverages and were the forerunners of today’s thriving wine industry in the area. By 1860 Valentine made wine as well as whiskey; he was the only winemaker listed on the agricultural census for Mendocino Township for that year. Both the Scott and Miller families then lived as neighbors on the Sotoyome Rancho. By 1865 Sylvester had a possessory claim along Cherry Creek, and by 1870 his family had moved onto the property. In the first ten years of their marriage, Malinda gave birth to nine children, including one set of twins, one of whom died. Valentine’s brew must have been healthful, for in an era where few couples lived to be grandparents, Valentine and Kate lived to see the birth of 12 great-grandchildren. In 1872, in an interesting case of overlap between legal and familial dealings, the Millers signed their property over to Sylvester, with the consideration that Sylvester “support and maintain” them during their natural lives (50). At that point, the Millers probably moved in with their granddaughter and her family. They had both died by 1874 and were buried at the ranch. The
The Scott family in 1860 (constructed from U.S. census)

The Scott family in 1870 (constructed from U.S. census)

The Scott family in 1880 (constructed from U.S. census)

The Scott family in 1885 (constructed from information provided by descendants)

Millers’ graves were marked with tombstones, carried across the Plains under their covered wagon. During the next decade, the Scott family cemetery was used at least two more times: a young son died in the mid-1870s, and another son died at birth in 1884.

Sylvester expanded and diversified his ranch during the 1870s. He put in an orchard, a vineyard, a dairy, and a carp pond stocked with fish imported from Germany. He held claim to a 3000-acre ranch, part possessory, part deeded, stocked with milk cows, cattle, and some sheep. Sylvester was in the process of upgrading his livestock through the purchase of thoroughbred Durham bulls and cows, and fine, imported sheep.

To help with this work, as his children were still young, Scott hired laboring men and went into partnership with his wife’s uncle, Isaac Stailey. During the 1870s, the pioneer ranchers on the North Coast Ranges, including Sylvester, fared very well on the rich, almost pristine grasslands. In the early 1880s, with at least some of his one-dozen-plus children old enough to help, Scott continued to develop his ranch. His Durham herd won first prize at the State Agricultural Fair, and he ran one of the area’s model properties (51). Orville Baldwin remarked that Sylvester raised “twenty children to the age when they were old enough to run away from home, which everyone of them did” (52). This was a slight exaggeration, for 15 was mentioned as “old
enough,” and in 1880 three children of this age and older remained at home, while two children over 18 had left.

Malinda was related to Joaquin Miller, a poet well known for his unpredictable nature and sentimental verse. Billing himself as the “Byron of the Rockies,” Joaquin toured Europe and the British Isles in the 1870s. For a time, Londoners were quite amused by his frontier dress and bizarre antics, that is, except for Queen Victoria, who expected proper behavior even from foreigners and poets. Through Joaquin, members of the European and British mobility learned of the fabulous hunting in the Dry Creek uplands and of Sylvester Scott, “the hunter.” Scott operated a forerunner of the hunting clubs which followed in the area. Joaquin Miller and other famous persons traveled to the area just to hunt with Sylvester, who at one time had 20 bear dogs, some purchased for as much as $100 apiece.

Sylvester’s half-brother Thomas Benton Scott, Tom’s wife, Margret, and their five children moved to an adjoining ranch in 1884. The two families were very close; the children played and went to school together, while their mothers enjoyed each others’ counsel, companionship, and help. Remembering their childhoods, a daughter of Malinda’s wrote to her cousin,

The things I liked best on the ranch was when your mother [Margret] and you would come up to our ranch and help dry fruit and can in those tin cans and seal with wax. I can remember all the preserves and so many pickles and things, my mother and your mother used to fix. I often think our mothers got a lot of comfort together (53).

The two Scott families were neighbors for only a short time. As early as 1873, Scott began mortgaging property. As with other area ranchers, his indebtedness may have grown over the years. In 1881 he took out a seven-year, $12,000 mortgage on his property, which at that time was valued at $20,000. Sylvester’s financial problems became obvious in the winter of 1886, when the Bank of Cloverdale and the Bank of Sonoma both filed proceedings against him and Staley. Eighteen months later the ranch was sold at a public auction to the mortgagee. What had gone wrong? The boom period for North Coast stockmen was passing, but his neighbors would manage to hold out for a few more years.

The profits from Scott’s stockraising enterprise may have been dwindling due to deteriorating grasslands. His large herd of cattle and dairy cows would have needed more and better quality acreage than the sheep that were quickly becoming the area’s staple. In fact, between 1880 and 1882, Scott had sold at least 200 of his stock cattle and purchased more than 1000 sheep. Since he had negotiated his loan, the prices of farm products had fallen while currency was becoming scarcer in supply, considerably reducing his chances of making ends meet. Scott may also have been a casualty of what demographers have labeled the “dependency ratio,” that is, the number of consumers compared to the number of workers. As a household moves through the developmental cycle, the “dependency ratio” changes. If the number of dependent children increases and the number of working adults remains stable, each family worker will have to produce a greater amount of food or cash to support the rest (54). In 1880 there were six persons over 15 and 10 children in the Scott household.

Most of Scott’s neighbors, however, were too worried about themselves to consider the reasons for his bankruptcy. One neighbor, in fact, attributed his failure to divine punishment incurred by Scott’s blasphemy: “my perence [parents] told me whom so ever spit against heaven it fell in his face and it is so in scotts case he was all wayes blastfarming” (55). The sudden demise of Scott’s operation caused quite a panic in the area, as he owed money to local businesses and working men:

Their is great excitement in the neighborid last week on accout of the failour of sylvester scott. His stock and everything he had was atached last week for det . . . [illegible]. Nearly all the men in cloverdale is conserent in the failur. He owes dick murpehy a thousand dols and they say he owes the familey laberin men in town from a hundred to to [two] more. The stock is all on ferris ranch and the sheep are all a shering their and one of the wells and fargoes detectives is their to luck out...tom scotts hop house was burned with the hopes in it. Saved nothing but the press [punctuation added] (56).

Tom Scott was not the only person to be affected by Sylvester’s failure. Small disasters multiplied as old feuds revived between neighbors and a government land inspector toured the area. One of
Scott’s lenders died from a cold he caught removing Scott’s sheep to his own ranch in the rain.

In 1889 the Sylvester Scott family moved to Idaho in a covered wagon. Sylvester was over 50 years of age; Malinda, who had given birth to her twentieth and last child in that ill-fated year of 1886, was 48. Well past their prime and with at least a half-dozen dependent children, the Scotts started over with a ranch in Lewiston, Idaho. It appears that the majority of offspring from both Scott families married.

The ranches of both families, along with many small holdings, became part of the 8000-acre property purchased by Orville Baldwin in 1903. From Baldwin a portion of the ranches passed to George Matthews in 1926, and from Matthews’ family to the Corps of Engineers for the Warm Springs Dam/Lake Sonoma Project.

The Ferry Family

John Ferry and his wife, Mary, were both born in Ireland (57). They lived in California by 1865 and had moved to the Dry Creek uplands by 1870 (CA-Son-567/H). At that time, the couple had four children under the age of six. The Mendocino District School was located near their home for many years, and all but one of their 11 children attended classes there. John Ferry was the school clerk for 30 years, beginning in 1874. Like the Scott family, the FERRYS lost their ranch for bad debts.

Loss of the Ferry ranch was due to a combination of family and national economic conditions. In 1870 John Ferry purchased a $7000 possessory claim to an unspecified acreage; the bounds of his parcel were simply described by neighboring claims. As a result of the vague nature of his property boundaries, Ferry had squabbles with some of his neighbors. He was also a Justice of the Peace, and despite a considerable amount of vandalism, threats, fisticuffs, and gun waving, the only casualty was one of Ferry’s dogs.

Although Ferry began as a dairy farmer, he quickly perceived the greater profit to be made from sheep. It was during the 1870s that the North Coast Ranges first began to assume importance as the center of the state’s range sheep production. Ferry was one of these pioneer sheep ranchers. The height of the industry, however, was barely reached in the late 1870s, when a number of factors combined to bring about the decline which characterized the following three decades. Profits from sheep never again approached those realized by the pioneer sheep raisers of the 1870s (58). At that time, a fairly managed flock of good sheep yielded six to seven pounds of wool per head each year. Ferry’s flock did even better than this, averaging four pounds a head for just one of the two yearly clippings in 1879. Spurred on, perhaps, by a notion of unchanging conditions and steady profits, Ferry borrowed money to upgrade his herd and secure legal title to the land he held in possession.

Ferry’s operation had mortgage problems almost from its inception. Each time the mortgage was renewed, its face value increased. Like Scott, Ferry took out a seven-year loan in 1881. When his mortgage fell due in 1888, however, Ferry was able to renegotiate. In 1891, with the general economic climate even worse than before, Ferry was again able to renew the mortgage. His luck ran out, however, in 1897: the mortgagee died and his heirs foreclosed when Ferry could not make the payment.

The 1890s were a disastrous period for local ranchers. The tariff on wool imported into the United States, which had been in effect since 1875 when most sheep ranches began in the area, was lowered by two-thirds in 1890 and eliminated altogether in 1894 (59). As a result, the bottom fell out of the wool and sheep market. Some time around 1890, Ferry planted a vineyard, perhaps in an attempt to diversify. The sheep business began to improve in 1897, when the wool tariff was reinstated at its 1890 rate and the national economy recovered from the depression of
the mid-1890s. But it was too late for the Ferrys, who lost their ranch to the Smith family.

The Ferrys, like their neighbors the Scotts, had a large family, with ten or eleven children surviving to adulthood. Although John Ferry’s stepfather homesteaded with them and aided in property development, the Ferrys still hired more help than did the majority of their neighbors. The eldest daughter was retarded and could neither read nor write at age 15, and the eldest son left home in 1886, at age 20. He worked shearing sheep for other ranchers, before eventually getting a job installing wire for the telegraph company. Ferry’s neighbors believed that his son had left home due to family squabbles. Thus, in the mid 1880s, while trying to repay their loan, the Ferrys had one disabled daughter, three teenaged daughters, four young children, and two teenaged sons at home. In a time of declining productivity, this “dependency ratio” may have increased the property’s economic liabilities.

The Ferrys were able to hold on to some of their sheep and, following the sale of their property, they moved onto a smaller neighboring parcel homesteaded by their son, John F.B. Ferry (CA-Son-1165/H). The older John Ferry, probably disheartened by his failure, apparently retired, and John F.B. took over the family’s stock; he also worked for Orville Baldwin for a short time before moving to San Francisco. A number of his brothers and one sister moved to San Francisco at the same time.

John F.B. seems to have done fairly well financially for himself in the city, and the family’s second homestead may have been used for awhile only as a hunting and recreational cabin from around 1908. Johnny was, however, not a great social success in his new urban environment. Although “he of the purple face” could afford to take young ladies out to the “swellest restaurant” in town, he lacked in the art of conversation. As one young lady lamented, “he is so slow. I would like to have stuck him with a pin” (60). Ferry remained friends with the sons of the Smiths, who had foreclosed on his father. At least one of the Smith brothers also lived in San Francisco, and he and Ferry partook of the gossip network that reached from the Dry Creek uplands to downtown San Francisco.

Johnny did not stay in the big city; by the 1920s he was in his fifties and living in his cabin in the Dry Creek uplands. He lived alone and seemed an eccentric figure to the neighborhood children. Every week he would drive his Model A Ford into town for services at the Catholic church, dropping off the Sunday paper at a neighboring ranch on his way home. From documents and oral history, it appears that none of the Ferrys ever married; at least one sister joined the Ursuline Convent in Santa Rosa. From 1929 until 1935, John F.B. Ferry, like his father before him, was one of the trustees of the Mendocino District School. Neighbors did not know how Johnny supported himself during these years. A walnut orchard was his only visible asset. In 1948 a family from Oakland purchased the property from Ferry and two of his sisters for use as a summer home.

Portions of the two Ferry ranches eventually became the property of the Corps of Engineers. The original homestead passed from the Smiths to Edwin Thompson in 1919, and from Edwin and Lottie Hallengren Thompson to the Hot Springs Ranch Corporation in 1931.

The Pritchett Family and the Hallengren Family

The following two families—the Pritchettst and the Hallengrens—faced a different set of opportunities and constraints than did the Scotts and the Ferrys (61). They lived in the upper Dry Creek Valley, where fertile bottomland presented the opportunity to grow a wider variety of crops. As the area was less rugged, transportation networks were more reliable, and the greater proximity to population centers allowed for easier shipping of goods and the possibility of employment in nonagricultural sectors. Although the Hallengrens eventually diversified into stockraising, neither they nor the Pritchettst had this as their primary emphasis, and thus they were not under the pressure that stockmen faced to expand and consolidate vast acreage. The Hallengrens and the Pritchettst survived the economic crisis of the 1890s. The families were similar in the diversity of economic resources they exploited but dissimilar in their use of family members and their life-course strategies.

James and Elizabeth Pritchett and their two small children left their Illinois home in 1854 bound for California by the “ox-team route.” It took them six months to cross the Plains and reach the gold country: “they suffered many hardships on this long pilgrimage, but with youth and buoyant hopes born of visions of the golden land they held their way undaunted” (62). They lost three of their four oxen on
the hot Nevada desert but were rescued by a friend from former days who happened to be a herder in the area. The family made it to the “diggings” in El Dorado County, and their troubles seemed to be over, although the gold was not so plentiful as they had imagined. Mrs. Pritchett got a job cooking for a company of miners for $50 a month, and James got a job in the mine at the same wage. When, after three months, the mine owner abandoned his claim and left his workmen unpaid, the Pritchets decided to quit the mines and try farming. They came to the ranch of William Niles, Mrs. Pritchett’s father, in the Dry Creek Valley.

The Pritchets purchased a possessory claim on the public domain northwest of Tzabaco Rancho. In 1860 they grew wheat, barley, corn, and oats—all common cash crops for small farmers of the period. They owned a small number of cattle and sheep and a large number of hogs. In addition, some family members took on other employment when the need or opportunity presented itself. During the mid-1860s, Elizabeth Pritchett served meals to travelers on their way to the mines in the west. Later, in the 1880s, one son-in-law worked as a clerk and one son as a blacksmith. All of these activities would have added to the family cash reserve as well as decreasing their reliance on a single source of income.

In 1856, at age 20, Svente Hallengren left his native Sweden and emigrated to New York, where he worked as a blacksmith. In 1863 Hallengren journeyed via the Isthmus of Panama to California, where he pursued his occupation in the gold country. It was there, in El Dorado County, that Svente met Henrietta, the woman who was to become his wife. Henrietta had been born in Germany and came to America with her parents in 1847, at the age of eight. The family settled first in Maryland and then moved as far west as Missouri before making the long journey across the Plains to El Dorado County in 1854.

Svente, Henrietta, and two children, probably from a previous marriage of Henrietta’s, moved to a possessory claim just north of the confluence of Warm Springs and Dry creeks in 1865. Like the Pritchets, their nearest neighbors, the Hallengrens began with cereal crops and a small quantity of livestock. Svente also took outside work as a blacksmith and tried his luck at copper mining to increase the family’s cash income.

In 1878 Svente bought a “Gordon & Huffman horse-powered threshing machine,” and the local paper remarked that “threshers are quite numerous on the creek” (63). By 1879 Pritchett and Hallengren each had 50 tilled acres; Svente concentrated on barley, while James had nearly equal amounts planted in barley, wheat, and corn. Both families had small numbers of horses, cows, and cattle, but the Hallengrens also raised sheep, while the Pritchets owned a greater number of poultry. Lastly, the Pritchets had a larger apple orchard, while the Hallengrens had a one-acre vineyard. Judging from these figures, it would appear that the Hallengrens were investing a larger amount of time and money in a narrower range of cash crops than were the Pritchets, who raised a diverse range of products that required less initial expense.

The Hallengrens and Pritchett children were around the same age and attended the same school and many of the same social events. The timing of their life-courses, however, was very different. While the Pritchets married at a young age, the Hallengrens married late, if at all. In the case of the Pritchets, marriage and home leaving did not necessarily coincide; with the Hallengrens, it did.

Nine of the 11 Pritchett children survived to adulthood. During the 1870s and 1880s, these children began to marry, usually upon reaching ages 18 to 20. All of the known marriage partners came from nearby farms or ranches. In three instances (Richard Pritchett, Frostena Pritchett Ireland, Albert Pritchett), the couple settled on property adjoining the family farm, probably once considered to be part of its possessory holdings. A daughter married into a stockraising family bordering the family to the west; and a son and a daughter married into the Wood family, who lived nearby in the Dry Creek Valley. In 1900 three households made up of seven adults (persons over 15), five children, and two hired hands—a total of 14 persons—resided on the Pritchett property. Within the immediate neighborhood, Elizabeth Pritchett, then a widow, had at least five children, 20 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. In contrast, the number of persons residing on the Hallengren property actually diminished by one, to a total of six persons, as Svente had died in 1896. All five of the adult children remained single and at home with their widowed mother.

The Hallengrens, who were not well integrated into the neighborhood through kin alliances like the
Pritchets, seemed to have been involved in incidents of feuding. In 1879 vandals burned Svente’s threshing machine right at harvest time. It was only through the efforts of the threshing crew, made up of many neighbors, that the fire was put out before it reached the barn. The local paper intimated that everyone knew who the culprits were, and that they would soon be brought to justice, but evidently no charges were ever filed. A few months after the incident, Svente leased his ranch to devote his attention to his copper mine, an endeavor which likely failed (64). Later, in what was probably a boundary dispute, the Hallengrens were involved in a feud with their Finnish neighbor to the north. In 1888 and again in 1894, the man was charged with criminal assault, first by Svente and, in the later incident, by daughter Lottie. This time period coincided with the “proving up” period of the neighbor’s Homestead Entry patent, which may well have been filed on land once used by the Hallengrens. The Hallengrens may also have engaged in their share of antagonistic pursuits. An old timer recalled that Svente had James Pritchett’s “Whiskers hanging by a rope over the fireplace,” but did not intimate how they had come to be there.

Like most area families, the Pritchets experienced financial difficulties during the troubled 1890s. They mortgaged property first to their son-in-law, John Bryant, and later to an early area resident, Joel Ragan. Following James’ death in 1890, the family’s remaining hogs, goats, and horses were sold. Joel Ragan attempted to collect his loan from the family in 1893; the success of his effort is uncertain, for although the encumbered acreage was reported sold at public auction to Ragan, the Pritchets retained possession.

While the Ferrys and the Scotts illustrate the consequences suffered by borrowers in early mortgage agreements, the case of Joel Ragan demonstrates the risks and losses suffered by lenders, especially during periods of declining land values. Ragan had been one of the earliest settlers in the Russian River Valley and was once a rich man. When he died on 10 October 1895, he owned no real estate or livestock; he owned 132 shares in the Bank of Healdsburg, one trunk of clothes, and 36 promissory notes—many from Dry Creek Valley residents—dating from 1868 to 1895. All but four of these notes were appraised to be of no value because they could not be collected. The four “good” notes eventually proved to be worthless as well, for the mortgaged property could not be sold for a price sufficient to pay the note. In fact, the property could not be sold at all, as no buyers could be found. Thus, after the probate costs and the payment of Ragan’s debts, there was very little of his once large estate (65).

Despite their lack of support from a kin network, the Hallengrens, with fewer family members to support during the 1890s, were far better off financially than their neighbors. While the Pritchets were bartering with eggs, Svente returned to vacation in his native Sweden. By this time, the Hallengrens’ winery was in operation, using grapes from their own and neighboring vineyards. The Hallengren offspring stayed at home and managed the family enterprises. Henrietta Hallengren died in 1910, by which time only one daughter had married and left home.

With the turn of the century, business and agriculture improved, as did the lot of most area
residents. Judging from newspaper accounts and oral history, up until the First World War there was a very active social round in the Dry Creek Valley. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other occasions supplied excuses for large gatherings of 60 or so neighbors. The Hallengrens and Pritchets both hosted their share of these parties. To celebrate the New Year in 1914, the Hallengrens decorated the barn with fir trees and holly berries for dancing. Cards, games, and music provided entertainment in the house for the less energetic, and at midnight a turkey dinner was served. “Old man Richards” often called the reels for the square dancing. Guests commonly departed these affairs at daybreak (66).

In 1911 at the age of 37, Lind Hallengren married Marie Heaton, the daughter of one of the earliest settlers in the Dry Creek Valley. Six years later, Marie, her baby, and another woman were killed in an auto accident at the railroad crossing on Dry Creek (67).

Sometime around 1920, eldest daughter Lottie, now past 50 years of age, married Edwin Thompson, a local rancher and owner of considerable property. By this time, the Hallengren family may have been suffering financial problems despite the diversity of their holdings. The toll, first of the phylloxera epidemic and then of prohibition, on the area’s vineyards and wineries was severe. Only two offspring, Lloyd and Lily, remained on the family’s holdings. As the market for grapes was very poor, the Hallengrens, like other local agriculturalists, planted prunes. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Lloyd and Lily repeatedly mortgaged their crop of prunes and grapes and their real estate. The Hallengren winery apparently did not reopen and was described as an “old winery” on a 1925 GLO map. Although the family had maintained their holdings, the enterprise operated at a considerably reduced scale from days past. By 1943 Lloyd Hallengren had diversified into the raising of turkeys—encumbered, however, by a $2750 mortgage to a poultry-feed concern in Los Angeles.

Although the Pritchett family survived the 1890s depression, they were unable to maintain their property through both the phylloxera epidemic and prohibition. By 1910 only the Albert Pritchett family remained on the holdings. Elizabeth had moved to a small house in Healdsburg. Albert apparently “midwifed” at the birth of each of his seven children, an unusual practice when doctors and midwives were generally available. Albert had a vineyard and may have sold Ford automobiles from the large two-story Colonial Revival house he built in 1900. He also kept two wagons and six horses for hauling grapes into town. In another indication of longstanding antagonism between neighbors, Albert drove his grapes right past the Hallengren winery which stood next door.

Albert left his family in 1912, and later remarried. A neighbor, Will Richards, Jr., oversaw the management of the family vineyard during the couple’s divorce proceedings. In September 1914, Albert was judged to have deserted his family, and his wife, Jennie, was granted a divorce. Jennie sold her 40 acres, including the house, to Lloyd Hallengren in 1917. Frostena Pritchett Ireland’s son and his family lived on the Pritchett/Ireland property in 1920, but the family connection with this acreage ended in 1928, when Albert sold the remaining portion to John Henderlong, son of another Lake Sonoma Area settler family.

When Lottie Hallengren Thompson died in 1945, she left considerable property to her husband, Edwin, and some also to her brother Lloyd. Edwin later married Lottie’s niece, who inherited the property in 1964. By the time of the Corps acquisition, the Hallengren family had consolidated the property of many of their former neighbors into one large estate.

Each of these four families followed different strategies in their use of land, money, and kin. The success or failure of these strategies depended, in part, upon their adaptability to changing environmental and economic condition. Flexibility was an asset; too many constraints in the form of large mortgages, overreliance on one type of crop, and very large families hampered an operation during times of stress, when quick change was essential.

These family histories are not unusual. During the second half of the 19th century, families settled throughout many rural areas of northern California. Areas which now have only a few residents, once boasted populations in the hundreds. The histories of these families is contained not only in old documents, but also in the ground, on the landscape, and in the memories of old-timers descended in fact and in spirit from the original settler families.
Local rancher George Matthews (at left), hosted many relatives from the San Francisco area during their summer vacations (from the GM collection)
A trainload of visitors to the Cloverdale Citrus Fair, early 1900s
(photo courtesy of the Sonoma County Room, Sonoma County Public Library, Santa Rosa)