

TAPE #34

AMADOR COUNTY HOSPITAL

Taped: April: 1979

Subject: Ione and Preston School

(Tiny Roberts, ex-guard at Preston School.)

(You came to Jackson when you were twelve?)

My dad came up to help with the mine disaster in 1922. We stayed in the Globe Hotel. He came up for the rescue attempt. He worked twelve hours a day at the 3000 foot level. He was a hard rock miner. At the hotel we had one room and one bed. If he wanted to sleep in it, he kicked me out.

(Where did you grow up?)

In Lodi.

(When did you start to work at Preston?)

About twelve years ago.

(What can you tell me about Preston?)

Ask Terhune, he can tell you all about it. He's the superintendent out there.

(What was your job at Preston?)

I worked night maintenance and took care of the janitorial crew.

(Where did the inmates come from?)

All over the state. We got the scum of the crop. If they couldn't handle you anywhere else, you were sent to Preston. They had em up to 23 years of age. The youngest was about 17. At ~~CRACK~~ Creeko(?) we had them as young as 7½.

(Why that young?)

Pick-pocket and ~~robbery~~ robbery. One of the best pick-pockets I ever saw was eight years old.

(Was Preston minimum security?)

Well, more or less. Creeko was for younger boys, seven to thirteen.

(What about farming at Preston?)

Oh, they had their own farm. Had a dairy and raised their own cattle.

(Was the castle where the boys stayed originally?)

Yes. But it was inconvenient in many ways. You had to march the boys up and down the stairs all the time. It was open until 1925; ~~was used for administration until they built the new ad building.~~ after that they used it for administration until they built the new ad building.

(How did Preston begin?)

It was started up by two senators. Preston and ~~Waterman~~ Waterman. They got in an argument over who they were going to name the school after and where they were going to put it. So they named it after Preston and put it here on Waterman Road. That was a compromise.

(Why did they build it to look like a castle?)

It's a Romanesque castle, but that's all I know. Originally, it was run under the cadet system. They had a captain of cadets, and they all wore uniforms. If someone didn't behave, they'd take him to the laundry room and beat hell out of him. He'd shape up when he came back. But it was rough. We had a special place for the crazy ones. It cost a lot to keep them.

(How many boys were in the school when you were there?)

About 400. They have a drug program, a rehab group, a lockup, that's where the bad ones go.

They have good security there. Everyone has a silent alarm they wear. If you get in trouble you just press the button, and they come running!

One night a boy tried to take my keys away. You know what I did?
Took the keys off my belt and threw them up on the roof. Then
I said, Now go gettum!

When you get there as a new kid, you don't speak until you're
spoken to. This goes on for six weeks. And if you misbehave
you get your head shaved.

(Do they still do that?)

And if you act like a baby they put a diaper on you.

Well, after six weeks they're taken into a "family" they call it.
But it sort of held them together.

(Where was Muletown?)

It was north of Preston on Mule Creek. Northwest, I believe.

It was a place where all the mules from the mines were kept.

It was an overnight stopping place. But they found out it was on private
property over by the Seco Ranch and they had to move it! I don't
remember what year it was though. But it was the beginning of Ione.
And you know why they finally built a fence around Preston?

(No.)

It was to keep the townspeople from stealing hoses and produce and
stuff. That's true.

(Linda Cuneo)

At the Hotel on New York Ranch Road they also had a blacksmith shop.
It was right underneath the oak tree there that is still standing.
Next to it was a saloon, and then this big hotel. There was the Beam
family living there, and the Hannely family. Then the Camichi family
come in and bought the property.

It was 276 acres or more. It went from the other side of the reservoir clean almost to Sutter Creek. Up top a man named Coleman owned it. He was a single fella, and he lived there and finally died.

(Was the Hotel going until it burned down?)

Oh yes. It was booming in there.

(When did it burn down?)

I think it was in the 30's. I tell you. I walked clear down to the hotel from home and woke up the family there to tell them it was on fire. I tell you we were scared to death. We feared being shot down by the bullets that were stored there. They were going off like firecrackers. Boom! Bam! I tell you you didn't know where to go! We lived about a mile above them, and I yelled at them and told them to get out because the place was on fire.

(What do you know about the winery?)

Well, we used to make wine. The best. 18% alcohol. Gallo wanted to come up and buy our white wine. But we didn't do it. And finally you couldn't buy any decent grapes. They were just to sour, and so we quit.

(Edith born and raised in Ione and worked at Preston School)

(Have you lived in Ione all your life?)

Yes dear.

(How old are you?)

I'm 87 dear.

(What did you do for a living?)

I was a stenographer, dear. And I handled the money and everything.

(Where did you do that?)

For 42 years at Preston School. I was 26 when I started working there.

(What did you think of the boys there?)

Oh, they had some good and some bad, dear. But they wern't so terrible bad.

(Did you teach them as well?)

No, dear. I never taught.

(What did you do at Preston?)

Oh, all kinds of clerical work.

(How many boys were in the school?)

Oh, about 800, dear.

(How were the boys treated then?)

Oh, they were treated like gentlemen. They got along alright, but you had to be kind to them.

(Did the boys wear uniforms?)

Yes.

(What kind of work did the boys do?)

They had a farm, and the boys learned different things.

(Who ran the school?)

Oh, different people. Superintendent Banks was one. I can't think of the others.

(Did they get along well with the people in Ione?)

Fine, dear. They didn't cause trouble, but once in a while they might run away.

(Was the castle itself in use when you were there?)

Oh yes. I was in the castle all the time, and I worked 42 years.

(What was the food like, and was it hard to feed the boys?)

Oh, no it wasn't. They grew their own food. And if they wanted they could work on the farm. And they ate fish and potatoes and mush and all kind of meat things.

(Do you remember any one special boy you got close to?)

Oh no. You wern't supposed to do that. But the boys wern't so bad, but they wern't good either or they wouldn't be there.

(Did you grow up in Ione?)

I was born there.

(Where did you go to school?)

At Mt. Pleasant(?) Elementary School.

(Did you go to college?)

I went to college in Ione, dear.

(Where was your family born?)

My father was from Baltimore and my mother from Ione.

(What did your dad do?)

He was 19 years of age and came here. At first he worked in the mines and later he went to work at Preston.

(You must have had a horse and buggy before you had a car.)

Before I had either I walked. I walked a mile to school. And then I had a surrey.

(Do you remember taking the train and going on a trip?)

Yes, I do!

(Did you ever ride a stagecoach?)

No, dear. We had buggies and carts and things like that.

(Do you remember what your first big trip was?)

Oh, we went to Sacramento lots of times.

(Did you ever go to San Francisco?)

Yes, I did. My mother was raised in San Jose, so we went there.

(Did you ever go to dances, Edith?)

I loved to go to dances. Usually we walked to them. They would have them in the Ione Town Hall.

(Were they big events?)

Yes, we would have dinner, and sometimes we would dance for hours.

(What kind of bands did they have?)

We had good music.

(Did you go to the dances with dates?)

No, we went by ourselves and with our families. The boys would ask us to dance. And the worse thing was that the boys couldn't have cigarettes.

(What dance step was your favorite?)

Oh, I liked the waltz best of all. And the two-step was nice.

I didn't care so much for the square dances, though.

(Did you dance to jazz bands like King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton.)

Oh, Jelly Roll Morton! Oh dear! He was a wonderful person.

(Was everyone well behaved?)

Yes. I wish they were that was today.

(When did you retire?)

I retired in 1959, dear. I was seventy then.

(Where was your home?)

I don't remember.

(How did you get to work?)

In the early days with my father. He had a horse. We'd go across dry creek.

(Do you remember your first radio?)

Yes, a man from Lodi had one up here, but I don't remember his name.

(In your home what did you do for refrigeration?)

We would come to Ione and buy ice and go home and make ice cream. We had butter and cream, and we got our meat from the butcher in Ione. One week we would tell him what we wanted for the next week. My father had a vegetable garden, and later on I did. And we had a cow and nice, thick cream. And my mother made butter for sale.

(Did you have a dog?)

Yes, dear. His name was Ponto.

(What did you do for play when you were little?)

We played ball a lot. But I never learned to swim. My mother was afraid of it.