

Oral History of
Mrs. Effie Root Stahle

This is an interview with Effie Root Stahle (Mrs. George P.) on May 11, 1978 at her home in Rossmoor in Walnut Creek. Mrs. Stahle was born June 3, 1891. The interviewer was Angela Broadhead for the Lafayette Historical Society.

Angela Broadhead: When did your family come to the Lafayette area, Mrs. Stahle?

Effie Stahle: The family came in 1904 and I think it was in the wintertime, I was going to McKinley Grammar School in Berkeley at the time. Our home is still there in Berkeley between Claremont and College on Webster Street. It was a big white house with five bedrooms and a fireplace in every room. It is now an apartment house.

Angela Broadhead: Tell us about Locust Farm, your home in Happy Valley.



Effie Stahle: I'll show you a picture. (Reference: Residences, Lafayette, in historical materials file in the Lafayette Library for the Root ranch in Happy Valley, dated 1910). We remodeled the house when we came to Happy Valley. There were two bedrooms downstairs and a big fireplace. There was a stairway to the upstairs bedrooms and a balcony along the front of the house. There were locust trees out in front of the house, huge ones! I think that is my brother, Bob, on the horse in front of the house (see photo).

Angela Broadhead: We understand that the locust trees were planted by Nathaniel Jones. Is that correct?

Effie Stahle: They were there when we came. I don't know their history.

Angela Broadhead: Did your family buy the ranch from the Nathaniel Jones family?

Effie Stahle: I don't remember. I didn't go out to Lafayette at the time we purchased the ranch because I was still finishing my school in Berkeley.

Angela Broadhead: Would you describe the exact location of the Locust Farm home with the hill in the background?

Effie Stahle: I can't tell you the exact location, but I could take you there.

Angela Broadhead: Well, some day we'll take a ride up there and you can show us the location. (For exact location of Locust Farm, see last page.) What was your father's name, Mrs. Stahle?

Effie Stahle: John Boise Root. He was always called J.B. My mother's name was Evelyn Esther Hain.

We all had our own horses and our Shetland ponies. We would ride them into town to Lafayette. When Mr. McNeil of the Pioneer Store would see us coming he would say, "Here come the Roots, watch out!"

Angela Broadhead: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Effie Stahle: There were five in the family. Edna was the oldest, then Effie, Bob, Helen and Mildred. I had my own horse and saddle. I was a tomboy and Bob and I would jump on our horses and run like anything. Sometimes we would even ride bareback, we had lots of fun.

Angela Broadhead: How big a ranch was Locust Farm in Happy Valley?

Effie Stahle: It was 500 acres. Happy Valley Road ran in front of our house. We had lots of big locust trees. It was a cattle ranch when my father bought it in 1904. It was stocked and he continued to stock it with cattle and horses. We had fruit trees in the flat portion of the property. We also planted grain, oats and things like that for the cattle and horses. My father couldn't ride very much because he was not a well man when he bought the property.

There was a canyon on the property that we called Silver Canyon.

We also had milk cows and at the time of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, I remember we took 10 gallon cans of milk into Berkeley, near Bancroft and Dana, to give to those families who were fleeing from the city. We also slaughtered cattle, but only for our family use. My father died in 1910 and was buried in the Lafayette Cemetery. I believe that cemetery is the oldest one in Contra Costa County.

My mother, my grandparents on the Root side, my husband and my two sisters, my brother and his wife and his first child are also buried in the Lafayette Cemetery.

My husband, George F. Stahle, was an engineer and worked in San Francisco where he was in charge of streets and grades.

Angela Broadhead: Tell us about your brother and sisters.

Effie Stahle: My sister Edna married Lloyd Brown. He was Sybil Brown Wilkinson's brother. They had two children, Kenneth and Warren. Kenneth has lived many years in Lafayette and owned Rolling Ridge Ranch. Warren is now living in Piedmont. Bob was a veterinarian and lived with his wife in Walnut Creek.

In 1920 my husband and I bought a house in the center of Lafayette near School Street and Moraga Blvd. (3465 Monroe Ave). It was when my daughter, Muriel, was 6 years old.

Angela Broadhead: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Locust Farm?

Effie Stahle: We hated to sell it after my father died but my mother couldn't run such a large ranch.

I can tell you a little about the Lafayette Elementary School on Moraga Rd. I was the first P.T.A. president there in the 1920's. Irene Bunker, an old friend, was the secretary. We did everything. We helped with lunches and improved the playground because they had nothing. We gave dinners to raise money; we also gave dances and plays to raise funds. I was the only one with a car at the time, and I would sometimes drive around town to pick up donations for our fundraising. Everyone worked so hard to make something better for the school.

Angela Broadhead: Thank you, Mrs. Stahle, for telling us what you remember of Locust Farm. We'll go there one day soon and you can identify the locust trees for the Historical Society.

Addendum

LOCUST FARM AND LOCUST TRESS IDENTIFIED

On August 4, 1978, Mrs. Effie Stahle, her daughter Mrs. Muriel Hart and Mrs. Angela Broadhead drove to Happy Valley Road in Lafayette to locate Locust Farm, one of the earliest farms in this area.

When the J. B. Root family bought the 500 acre ranch in 1904 it was bounded by what is now Crestmont Drive and Redwood Lane. The property extended to both sides of Happy Valley Road according to Mrs. Stahle.

The two story Locust Farm house was once located at 3786 Happy Valley Road across from Palo Alto Drive. Several of the tall, stately locust trees said to have been planted by Nathaniel Jones are still growing on the property. Very old apple trees at 3815 Happy Valley may have been planted by Mr. Root. A weeping willow tree under which Mrs. Stahle was married on May 2, 1912 has been removed.

"There were very few houses in this area when we lived at Locust Farm, it's all changed now," said Mrs. Stahle.