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REDWOOD SCHOOL

By Anna Belle Aldridge Edwards

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ABSTRACT: Anna Belle Aldridge Edwards, at age 84, recalls her early school days -- from 1918 in the little one-room Redwood School nestled in the Santa Cruz Mountains, then to the somewhat larger Corralitos School, until finally her eighth grade graduation from San Andreas School, just a short walk from Monterey Bay. -----[[[[[COMPLETE]]]]]-----

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: Anna Belle Aldridge Edwards was born in Flagstaff, Arizona on 2 July 1912, and lived in Blythe, California until 1915. At that time her parents moved back to their ranch on Redwood Road near Watsonville. She lived the rest of her life in the Pajaro Valley. In the mid-1980s she started recording childhood memories for her children and grandchildren.

REDWOOD SCHOOL

Redwood school was located about a mile up Redwood Canyon Road. The school district was established March 6, 1893. It closed in the spring of 1919. The building was torn down and the land went to Peter Battinich. It had been a part of his ranch before it became a school. The children were then taken to Corralitos School by bus that was drawn by horses. At that time Corralitos also took in Browns Valley School.

My Father's family moved to the mountains in 1884. My father and his brother had to go to Hazel Dell School. Later when Redwood School opened in 1893, his younger brothers and sisters attended Redwood School. Some of them graduated from ninth grade there.

The schoolhouse was small. There was one room and a small room where we put our lunches and coats. There was a large wood stove for heating the room. The teacher was a high school graduate and had taken the State Board examination to teach. She boarded with one of

the families in the area and walked to school. There was no plumbing. There were two outhouses at the back of the playground, one for boys and one for girls. In the coat room there were hooks on the wall. Each one of us were given a hook, a towel, and an enamel drinking cup. These were hung on the hook. We walked down to the road and crossed it to the creek. We took our cup and towel to the creek with us to get a drink and wash our hands. Sometimes we had to go up the creek a little to get above others who were washing their hands or wading in the creek.

There were only four families of children. The Kirkman family was large. There was Grace, the oldest -- she was in the eighth grade -- then Ray, Ruby, Mildred, Nellie, Ralph, Fay, and Buelah. In the Battinich family were Peter, Mitchell, and Mary. Peter and Mitchell only came to school when there was no work for them at home. There were two Cikuth children; Johnny and Lucy. They lived down the Browns Valley Canyon and up on the mountain. They did not always come to school. The fourth family was the Aldridge family. There were three of us; my brother Creston, my brother Spellman, and I. It was very seldom that everyone came to school but my brothers and I were always there.

I looked forward all summer for school to start, I was so anxious to go to school. My Aunt Ranghild, Uncle Lafe's wife, took me with her to Hazel Dell School a few times so I would know what school was like. She taught at Hazel Dell School for a few years. Mama made me some pretty plaid dresses. Dad decided it was too far for me to walk to school so he bought a two-wheeled cart and put a bigger seat on it so all three of us could sit on it. The school was all of three miles from our home on the mountain.

On the first day of school we kissed Mama and Dad goodbye and headed for school in the cart. When we reached the school, Creston found a good place to tie the horse for the day and Spellman took me into the schoolhouse. The teacher met us at the door and Spellman told who I was. She showed me where I was to hang my coat and put my little red peanut-butter lunch pail. She showed me my drinking cup and towel and then showed me where I was to sit. There were two other girls in the first grade -- Lucy Cikuth and Buelah Kirkman. Our seats were next to the blackboard. We were each given a slate and a slate pencil. We used them the whole year. We never had any paper. I do not know whether the older children had paper or not. We were careful and did not break our slates. We learned quickly. We had a very good teacher although she had just graduated from high school and had no college. Recess time was great. I had never had so many children to play with. The girls all ate lunch together and sometimes traded sandwiches.

Not long after school started I needed to leave the room. Now no one had told me what I was supposed to do so I just slipped out. I had done this several times when one day the teacher missed me. She went looking for me and found me in the outhouse. Now there was no bathroom tissue furnished for us. The teacher cut newspaper in small squares at home and brought them to school. She hung them on a nail in the outhouse. I had decided to look through the paper. Way at the bottom I found a picture that interested me so I pulled all the paper off the nail so I could see it better. She put the paper back and told me I must ask permission to leave the room and I must leave the paper on the nail. Then we went back to the room.

There were so few of us that we all had to play together. One day we were playing Run Sheep Run. I was knocked down and was unconscious. The teacher made me a bed on the floor of the coat room with coats. When I regained consciousness, Creston took me home. I remember lying on the floor of the cart. Mama was upset but I was all right.

One day we heard bells ringing. We all ran out to see what it was. Buelah Kirkman got all excited and insisted that Santa Claus was coming. But soon a team of horses and a big wagon appeared coming down the road. Poor Buelah was very disappointed.

When Christmas really did come, Santa Clause did come. It was Corine Redo dressed in a red suit. Most of us recognized her right off. She had a bag on her back and gave us each an orange and a stick of candy. Now that was really a treat for us! The teacher, Miss Adams, boarded with the Redos and had bought the treats for us.

Shortly after Christmas the flu epidemic hit. All the people in the mountains thought they were safe. They only went to town when it was absolutely necessary and then they wore a mask. Well, Mr. Kirkman had two grown sons who lived in town and worked. They got sick and came home for their mother to take care of them. Some of the smaller children got it from them and the flu spread through the mountains. The Battinich children got it. Then their parents got it from them. The mother was sick but still stayed up to care for her sick family. Finally she passed out and someone put her to bed. She did not make it, she died. The rest of the family got well. Mary was seven and her little brother, Nicky, was five. Mrs. Redo took Mary and kept her for a while. She cut off her long hair and taught her how to comb it. Peter was the oldest so he took over the job of cooking and caring for Mary and Nicky. Creston and Mama and I all had the flu. Mama was quite sick but Creston and I had it mildly. The school was closed for quite a while.

One day that Spring, Mitchell Battinich came to school in a buggy. He challenged Creston to a race. Now the road was narrow and winding and there were no places to pass. During the race our cart lost a wheel. I do not remember how the cart got home but Dad never fixed it. He decided I was big enough to walk to school.

After the race I walked home with the younger Kirkman children. My Father had taught me to sing Tipperary. One day I sang it for them. From then on they pestered me to sing Tipperary for them every day. Walking home from school with them were happy times. I always dreaded the time when we reached their driveway. Then I had a long walk alone. We picked wild strawberries along the road. Sometimes we played in the creek. One day I dropped my book in the creek and it was ruined. The teacher gave me another one. Sometimes we played around the old coal mine. It was along the Redwood Canyon Road before we got to the school. My brother, Spellman, used to sneak matches from home. He would light them and go in the mine a ways. I was afraid and never got farther than the opening. Dad would have really landed on us if he had known we had even gotten near it.

Several times that Spring our teacher took us on a trail along the creek past the coal mine to a little flat area. We took our books and each one took turns reading. Then we played little games until it was time to go home.

For a while that Spring the Free Methodist Church in Corralitos sent people to our school on Sunday mornings to hold Sunday School. My brothers and I always walked that long way to Sunday School. We enjoyed it very much. When the class closed, we all went to a meeting at the church and all the children had to get up in front and speak a piece. Mama drilled us on ours and I still remember mine. My little brother, Franklin, learned one too. He started to say his as soon as he left his seat and finished it as he got back to his seat. I was very embarrassed. But everyone thought he was cute except Grandma.

The end of the school came too quickly. I did not want it to end. The teacher planned a school picnic. It was held in a pretty area near the creek up O'Niel's road. A tablecloth was spread on the ground and we all sat around it on the ground. The parents came and brought lots

of good things to eat. Grace Kirkman was given her diploma. Everyone was proud of her. We played in the creek and had a good time.

And that was the end of our little school. Mama and Dad had worked very hard to get our school consolidated with Corralitos School. They wanted better trained teachers and more advantages for us. So in the Fall of 1919 we were taken to Corralitos School in a horse-drawn bus. But our happiest memories are of our little Redwood School. The building was torn down. The desks were used in Corralitos School. Dad was a trustee and he got us each one of the drinking cups. I often wondered what had become of the slates. I would have liked to have had one of them. The land on which the school stood had originally been part of the Battinich ranch so it reverted back.

A few years back I decided to drive up the canyon to where our school had been. Uncle Bill Aldridge was with me. I parked the car by the trail up to the clearing where the school used to be. The trail was full of tall grass but I could see that someone had recently walked up there. I walked up the trail to where the school had been. At the back of the clearing I could see a tall Redwood tree. Now just before the end of school my brothers and the other older boys of the school had planted a little Redwood tree. So I went closer to see the big tree it had become. Off to one side I saw that someone had a little garden so I went over to see it better. There were tomato plants but mixed in with them were several marijuana plants. No one was around. I have never gone back.

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