

MY ALDRIDGE ROOTS

By Anna Belle (Aldridge) Edwards

The earliest Aldridge ancestor that I know of is Francis Aldridge. His wife was Margaret Cole. They were my great great grandparents. Francis was born in Wilkes County, North Carolina in 1764 and died in Paluska County, Kentucky in 1845. Margaret was born in Rutherford County, North Carolina and died in Paluska County, Kentucky. They were the parents of seven children: David, Francis, Elijah, Nancy, Thomas, Margaret and Rebecca. There could have been more. These are the ones mentioned in his will. Francis served in the Revolutionary War as a private.

Elijah Aldridge, my great grandfather, was born 18 February 1792 in Rutherford County, North Carolina. At the age of two years he migrated with his family to Paluska County, Kentucky. There he grew up. He worked for Charles White in his brewery as an overseer of the slaves. While working there he met his boss's daughter, Jane White. They were married in January of 1812. After several years the family moved to Indiana. They later moved to Boone County, Iowa. They remained there until 1871. Their son, Frank, moved them to Watsonville, California to live with him and his family. Elijah died in Watsonville in 1878. Jane died in 1884. They were buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Watsonville. They were the parents of twelve children: Caroline, Frank, Hamilton, Alvin, William, Mary, David, Charles, Nancy Jane, Margaret, Wesley and Rebecca Ann.

Frank Aldridge, my grandfather, was born 20 April 1826 near Louisville, Kentucky. He was the sixth child of Elijah and Jane Aldridge. He had three younger brothers and three younger sisters and three older brothers and two older sisters. He was two years old when his parents moved the family to Indiana. His education was that of the pioneer boy, attending school three months and working on the farm nine months. The family attended the Disciples of Christ Church which later became the Christian Church. At an early age Frank began to study the Bible. At that time if a minister misquoted a scripture, anyone in the church could stand up and correct him. This was the goal of young Frank. At the age of 20 he married Elizabeth Young of his immediate neighborhood. For five years he remained in Indiana farming and teaching school. In the spring of 1845 he moved his family to Illinois. There he farmed and taught school. In 1850 he moved his family to Boone County, Iowa. His parents and some of his brothers and sisters had moved there earlier. There he farmed and taught school and served the people as Township Clerk and Justice of the Peace for three years.

In the spring of 1853 he and his younger brother, Wesley, joined a wagon train for California. By this time he had three little daughters: Elmina, Mary and Nancy. The wagon train left from Council Bluffs, Iowa. There were 200 wagons, all pulled by ox teams, 40 men on horseback, and two scouts. Frank was a scout. One of his jobs was to swim the rivers underwater and find safe places for wagons to ford the rivers. It was a long, hard trip. They arrived in the Sacramento Valley in late September. Frank and his family settled in the Suisun area. There he spent his time farming and harvesting grain with much success. He was united with the Disciples of Christ Church of Woodland. Soon afterward he began to use his talent as a speaker and became a very useful minister of the Gospel. He was

ordained as a minister, evangelist, and teacher. He rode a horse as far as 20 miles to preach a sermon. After his ordination in Vacaville in 1862, he preached there and in many parts of the state. His preaching was marked by originality and thought, force, and boldness. While he lacked an easy flow of language, his sermons were filled with thought. He impressed his listeners with the truths he presented and his sincerity in presenting them. If he had given his whole time to preaching, he would have been numbered among the great ministers of his day. His mind was strong and clear and he sought for truths, causes, and reasons for things. He dared to speak his mind, condemn wrong, and approve right. He was liberal to all good work, generous, kind of heart, bore no malice, frank as his name, so was his character. He also had a fine business head.

On December 31, 1862 his wife, Elizabeth, died. She had born him seven children -- six daughters and one son. On March 12, 1864 he married his second wife, Sarah Jane Bradley, in Woodland, California. In November of 1865 he moved his family to Watsonville, California. His oldest daughter, Elmina, and her husband, John Bradshaw, moved with them. They settled in Corralitos, about ten miles north of Watsonville. He bought an interest in the Corralitos flour mill. The mill was run by water power from the creek. Much wheat was grown in the Pajaro Valley at that time.

His second wife, Sarah, died in November from scarlet fever. She bore him three children -- one son and two daughters.

In 1871 he returned to Boone County, Iowa to bring his aging parents to California to live with him and his children. While there he met and married his third wife, Anna Margaret Fallien, a Swedish girl. She was 20 years old and he was 44. They knew each other just three weeks when they were married. He brought Anna and his parents home to Corralitos to a houseful of children. Life was not easy for poor Anna. The older girls resented a stepmother, younger than some of them, telling them what to do. Many times she had to call their father from his work at the mill to settle things. But some of them loved her very much.

Anna and Frank had seven children -- five sons and two daughters. Their oldest child, Charles, died on his fourth birthday. Anna refused to allow him to be buried in the Corralitos cemetery where she could look out the window and see it. So Frank bought a plot in the Pioneer Cemetery near Watsonville. At that time he also had the remains of his second wife, Sarah, moved to the Pioneer Cemetery.

In 1878 the Corralitos mill was sold. It was purchased by a man named Brown and converted to a paper mill. A few years later it burned. After the sale of the Corralitos mill, Frank had a much larger and better mill built in Watsonville on the corner of Main Street and Ford Street. His son-in-law, Mike O'Brien of San Francisco, built it. Their first home in Watsonville stood where Mehl's Funeral Home is today. The house has been moved to Center Street. Later he purchased the big house on Ford Street. It is the second house from Pajaro Valley Bank and has a large redwood in front. For a few years the mill did well. Then disaster fell. About 1884 the Golden Sheaf Mill shipped 10,000 barrels of flour to England. They received part of their money when the flour was loaded on the ship in San Francisco and were to receive the rest when it arrived in London. Before the flour even arrived in England, they were notified that they would not receive any more pay for it. This was far more loss than the mill could handle. They were thrown into bankruptcy and the mill was sold. This affected the wheat growing in the Pajaro Valley. It declined and soon was no more.

The loss of the mill was a great blow to Frank. After everything was settled he came out with \$1,800. He was nearly 60 years old and had a wife and three small children, two or three

teenage daughters, and his parents to support. He took the money and bought a mountain ranch above Corralitos -- the ranch which later became Uncle Lafe's and Aunt Kate's. He farmed, cut and sold wood, and worked for the saw mills. There were several in the mountains at that time. Three more children were born to them in the mountains.

While operating the flour mill in Watsonville, he was the very first ordained minister of the Christian Church. He preached for them for five years and never accepted any pay. The little church stood on the corner of West Lake Avenue and Rodriguez Street. Long's Drugs is built on the spot. After he moved to the mountains he continued to preach some and work in the church. He was called upon many, many times to perform marriages, some of which he had to travel horseback many miles to reach -- back in the mountains. Many people did not pay him so he never had their marriages recorded.

A few years after moving to the mountains, Anna received some money from her parents in Iowa. They used the money to purchase the adjoining one hundred acres. This property eventually became my father's when the ranches were divided. In 1898 Anna received some more money from her parents. This they used to make a down payment on the property in Brown's Valley which later became Uncle Bill's and Aunt Neva's. The family moved there to live.

In 1897 Frank was elected to the California Legislature. He served the people as an assemblyman and was elected by the People's Party. Then some wanted to run him for governor, but his health was failing and he declined. He died in 1900 at the age of 75 years.

Ernest Aldridge, my father, was born April 25, 1874 in Corralitos. He was the second child of Frank Aldridge and Anne Fallien. The old house where he was born is across the road from the old Forestry station (now moved). There are big redwood trees in front. The flour mill was where the old Forestry station was. The first school he attended was on East Lake Avenue close to Main Street. There were four rooms downstairs. This was the grammar school for all of Watsonville at that time. When they finished the nine grades they could go to classes upstairs and become a school teacher. There was no high school at that time in Watsonville. Two of his older half sisters attended those classes.

Dad was ten years old when the family moved to the mountains. Uncle Cleon was seven and Uncle Lafe was one. The boys attended Hazel Del school. The spring he was fourteen and in the ninth grade, his father needed someone to drive team for him. So Dad dropped out of school and became his father's teamster. He was up at three each morning, fed and harnessed the horses and ate, and was on the road at four. He did not return until dark. The work was hard for a boy and the hours were long. He became one of the best teamsters in the country. He drove six horses hitched to wagons loaded with logs to the saw mills on those narrow, winding mountain roads. His brother, Cleon, worked on the ranch and rode horseback to Corralitos at night and took his high school lessons from old Doctor Burbank.

The year of 1894 was a good year for crops in the mountains. They had a very good hay crop and planned to sell part of it. The two big barns were loaded to the tops. But someone a few miles away burned some brush. Some of the sparks flew and landed on the shake roofs of the barns. The men were all away working and even Grandmother was gone that day. Ida Filmore, Dad's cousin who lived with the family, was home with Aunt Neva. When she saw the smoke she ran and got all the animals out of the barn, but there was no way she could put the fire out. Both barns burned and all the hay. They had to buy hay for all the horses that winter. It was a great loss.

The winter of 1895 was a very wet winter. When there were lots of storms in the mountains the roads washed out and bridges were rammed by big logs that were washed down the creeks. On Christmas day, Dad's Grandmother Jane died. She was 90 years old. [Note: Grave marker in Watsonville Pioneer Cemetery says she died 24 December 1884 at age 90. This agrees with date given on page 1.] She died upstairs in the old house on the ranch. Someone made her a coffin and they took it upstairs and put her in it. Then the stairway was narrow and had a turn in it. So the coffin had to be stood on end to get it downstairs. They loaded the coffin on a wagon and drove down the mountain to the canyon. The bridge in Brown's Valley Canyon was out so they had to go down Hazel Del. Quite a way down they came to a place where the road was partly washed out. As they worked the horses and wagon around the washed out place, they nearly lost the coffin off the wagon and into the creek. They finally got to the cemetery and got Grandma buried.

After Dad's father died in 1900, Dad continued to farm the mountains and to work out to earn money to pay all the taxes on the three ranches. Uncle Cleon was going to Berkeley College and taking correspondence courses on the Bible. He was studying for the Ministry. Uncle Lafe had been riding a bicycle into Watsonville to high school. But he was skipping school and going to Palm Beach with some other boys. Dad took him out of school and put him to driving the sprinkling wagon to help earn money to pay the bills. The roads were all very dusty and had to be sprinkled. He was seventeen. Aunt Kate was fifteen, Uncle Bill (Cecil) was twelve, and Aunt Neva was ten. Times were hard but by them all working together they made it.

On July 2, 1904 Ernest married Isabelle Watson. The Watson family was from Idaho. They lived up the Redwood canyon on the old Bickmore place. Later the Batniches bought the place.

Dad built a new house on the mountain ranch. The old house was in poor repair. They only lived there a few years. In September of 1905 they rented a cabin across from and beyond the old Free Methodist Church in Brown's Valley to be closer to the doctor when their first child was born. My brother, Creston, was born September 19, 1905. He was a beautiful baby with big dark blue eyes and golden brown curls all over his head. They moved back home soon.

Spellman was born April 19, 1908 at Grandma Watson's house. He was still quite small when Dad left the mountains. It was just too hard to make a living. He worked on a big ranch in Monterey County for a while. Then he moved his family to Blythe, California. He bought some land and farmed cotton. In July of 1912 Mama took the two little boys on a train to Flagstaff, Arizona to be with her parents when I was born. I was born July 2, 1912. Dad came and took us home in a wagon three weeks later. Dad and Mama worked long hours in the cotton. But they did well. The war broke out in 1915 and Dad thought the price of cotton would drop to nothing so he sold out and came back to Corralitos. Mama did not want to come but Dad insisted. His mother had divided the ranches and was begging him to come home and take care of his ranch. Mama and Dad were not happy about the ranch they got. It was the farthest one up on the mountain. There was only a small cabin there and it was a long way for children to go to school. Well, Dad built a kitchen and one bedroom onto the cabin. Dad and Mama worked very hard to feed and clothe us and pay taxes. Life was hard. But we children were happy. Our brother, Frank, was born the Fall after we returned from Blythe and our sister Marjorie two years later. The boys attended Redwood School and I went there one year. Then the School was closed and we went to Corralitos School.

The second or third year after we were back, Dad planted an apricot orchard. The trees grew fast and there was big promise of a good orchard. There was a small, old apricot and apple orchard on the ranch. The apricots on the old trees were very good. But brown rot struck our

trees and we never got a crop. Dad and Mama were so disappointed. Christmas of 1918 was spent in our big, new house. Dad built it all by himself. We were all so proud of it. All the family, Grandma, and all the aunts and uncles came. It was great. It was our last Christmas together.

In the Fall of 1919, a big fire broke out in the mountains. It burned many acres of trees and brush before it was stopped. One night the fire was very close to our house. The roof and sides were shingles so all sparks had to be put out quickly. My two brothers, Creston and Spellman, spent the whole night on top of the house putting out sparks. Mama and Dad carried a lot of things out of the house and put them in the middle of a small alfalfa patch. Mama made beds for my little sister and brother and myself on the front porch. Mama stayed up all night and poor Dad worked all night making fire trails and putting out any fire that edged up toward our house. Dad sat down a few minutes to rest. He was wet with perspiration. The next day the fire was out near our house and was soon out all over. The beautiful redwood trees were all blackened and the underbrush was gone. What a mess!

Dad came down with a hard cold and it soon developed into pneumonia. He was very ill. Then my baby sister also became ill. She had pneumonia too. The doctor came and did what he could which was not much. Grandma came and stayed and helped Mama. They did not know from one day to the next if Dad and Margy would make it. Grandma went home on Saturday afternoon to cook up some food for Uncle Bill. She was to come back on Sunday afternoon. But she didn't. By Monday morning Mama was worried. She sent Creston on horseback to see why Grandma did not come back. He found Grandma in a coma. Aunt Kate was there caring for her. She had picked up the germs from dad and had a bad case of pneumonia. She had gotten up Monday morning and fallen on the floor. Uncle Bill had come home from driving school and found her on the floor. He had put her to bed, covered her good and sent someone for the doctor and Aunt Kate. On Tuesday Mama left Dad and the baby and went down to see Grandma. She never came out of the coma. She died on Thursday. She was only 69. Dad was too sick to get out of bed. None of us went to the funeral.

In the Spring Dad bought a Maxwell truck to haul wood into Watsonville to his customers. He bought it at Ford's in Watsonville! Creston asked Dad who was going to drive it. He said he was. But he never, ever, learned to drive. Creston was not yet fifteen years old but Uncle Bill taught him how to drive the truck. He learned quickly and became an expert driver. He drove the truck up and down those narrow mountain roads with no trouble.

In the Fall of 1920 Dad built a framework on the back of the truck and covered it with canvas. Then the whole family traveled to Flagstaff, Arizona and spent the winter with Grandpa and Grandma Watson, Mama's parents. Creston was just fifteen and Dad and Mama could not drive and knew nothing about a car. We camped along the way. On Thanksgiving day we ate our lunch on the beach in Los Angeles. We got stuck in the sand a few times in the desert. We crossed the Colorado River at Needles. One railroad trestle was too low for our truck to go under. Dad got out his tools and dug the roadbed deeper. At another place we got stuck on a hill. We unloaded the truck and everyone pushed while Creston drove. Spellman's job was to put rocks behind the wheel when it stopped. Well, the rock did not hold and his fingers were smashed. A car came along and fortunately there was a doctor in it. He took care of the smashed fingers and helped get the truck over the hill.

We finally arrived at Grandpa's ranch. Grandpa had homesteaded it and built all the buildings. He had quite a nice house and two big barns. There were no nails in the barn. He had drilled holes in the timbers by hand and driven wooden pegs in to hold them together. The

land was very fertile, but rocky. He had picked up rocks to clear the land for farming and built many rock fences with them. He raised grain and potatoes and pigs. Dad and the boys helped him butcher a lot of pigs for market. We spent Christmas there. We loved the snow, but Mama would not let Frank, Margy or me play in it. Of course we touched it when she was not watching. Creston and Spellman made snowmen and learned to ice skate on the pond with the neighbor kids.

Dad and the boys worked in a wood camp to earn money for our trip home. We left in March. Mama had planned to send Spellman and me to school there. But the schools had closed for the winter. They opened about the time we left. Spellman was in the 8th grade. So he had to take it the following year. I was in the 3rd grade. They let me go on into the 4th that Fall. Creston had not started to high school that Fall. He had stayed out to help Dad. He was supposed to go the following Fall, but refused.

Dad finally traded the mountain ranch off and wound up with 160 acres in British Columbia, Canada. He and Spellman went up there and stayed a couple months. They loved it. But the closest high school was 55 miles away. So we never moved up there. There were three of us to go to high school. Many years later Dad sold the property. Dad farmed in various places in the Pajaro Valley and retired at 65. He returned to work briefly during World War II. He was a caretaker of the grounds of the CCC camp at Arroyo Seco. He had a house furnished him and Mama to live in. He loved that work. The last seven years of his life were spent at Redwood City. At the age of 87 he became ill with tuberculosis. He spent five months in a sanitarium in Redwood City. Then he was home two-and-a-half months when he had a stroke and pneumonia set in. So he was put back in the sanitarium. He lived two more months. He died on the 28th of February 1963, just two months before his 88th birthday. He always wanted to live to be 90.

Creston Ernest Aldridge, my oldest brother, was born September 19, 1905 in Corralitos, California. He was the first child of Ernest and Isabelle Aldridge. He started school in Blythe, California at Rocky Comfort School. He learned quickly and did well in school. He and his younger brother, Spellman, learned to swim in the irrigation canals at an early age. Older kids threw them in and they had to learn. When he was nine the family returned to the mountains. There he, and the rest of us children, attended school at the little Redwood School in Redwood Canyon. The school had one little room and an anti-room. Our coats were hung in the anti-room. Then our tin cups and towel were also hung there. We had to cross the road to get a drink or wash our hands. Each child had a towel and a tin cup. On Friday we took our towel home to be washed. We had one teacher, a girl who had graduated from high school and taken the State Board examination. There were all eight grades.

On Sunday a lady came to the little school and held Sunday School. Creston, Spellman and I went faithfully. When the lady quit coming, Creston drove the team to the spring wagon and we went clear to Corralitos to Sunday School. One day we stopped and Grandma went with us.

In the Fall of 1918 I started to school. Dad decided it was too far for me to walk. It was close to three miles. So he bought a two wheel cart and put a larger seat on it and even an umbrella could be attached when it rained. Creston drove the horse and the three of us went to school in the cart. After a few months, Nick Batinich came to school with a horse and buggy. After school he challenged Creston to a race. Well, the roads were narrow, only wide enough for one car. During the race our poor cart lost a wheel. Dad never fixed the cart. He decided I was big enough to walk to school.

May of 1919 was the end for our little school. It was consolidated with Corralitos School and we went there. A bus came to the mail box to pick us up. The bus was drawn by horses. The door was in the back. There were seats on the sides. Creston only went to Corralitos School one year and graduated. He did not go to high school that Fall. Dad had been sick and needed him to help with the work. He promised he would go the following year. But when the time came he refused to go. He said all the others were ahead of him. After Dad bought the truck he became interested in auto mechanics. Aunt Laura bought him a book on mechanics and he began studying it. When he was sixteen he went to work in a garage as an apprentice. He became a very good mechanic and later had a shop of his own.

Creston married Irma Oksen on January 14, 1925. Their baby son, Robert, was born the following year on April 15th. He was the pride and joy of the whole family. But he did not enjoy his father very long. Creston was killed in an accident in the canyon in July of 1928. It is believed that he was crowded off the road. He had learned to drive on those mountain roads and knew each turn by heart. So it could not have been his fault.

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