

An Alpine History Mystery:

August 2014

Who was the first settler in the valley on the west side of Alpine?

This story begins in the Black Forest of Germany, where young Nikolas grew up. As he reached adulthood, he learned the skill of making charcoal – a “charcoal burner” they called him. We don’t know for sure when he was born, but we do know that in 1880, as a single man, he immigrated to the United States. When he arrived in this area that was not yet named Alpine, he found a small community of about 50 folks who were already homesteading on some of the most promising land. But this young German immigrant found an unclaimed valley with lots of mature Oak trees on the west side of the settlement. This was like a little piece of paradise for a charcoal burner. Of course Nikolas had other skills too and he soon built himself a fine three room home and a good barn. He also fenced in the property so he could manage livestock and tend to a garden and orchard.



But living the life of a bachelor in 1880’s Alpine can make a man yearn for a wife and family. So Nikolas sent back to Germany for a bride. Some say she was a girl he had met in the Homeland while others believe that she was a mail-order bride. Well, after briefly corresponding by mail, the couple became engaged, and it wasn’t too long before Nikolas met his wife-to-be at the Port of San Diego. They got married right away and immediately set out for their home in Alpine. Later, the young bride told friends that her sea voyage was uneventful, but the ride up the hill from San Diego, on the worst road imaginable, terrified her!

Well sometimes things work out, and so it did for this newlywed couple. Although they never had children, they lived and worked happily together for many years at their valley ranch, where Nikolas’ charcoal was a highly sought after commodity. It is said that when he began supplying the Hardy meat packing plant in San Diego, they were so impressed with the quality of his product that from then on all Hardy hams were smoked by charcoal produced by Nikolas right here in Alpine. In addition to charcoal, our young German raised turkeys, pigs, cows, and chickens, and his charming wife made butter and cheese, baked bread, and she canned and preserved produce from their garden and orchard. They were well thought of in the little settlement of Alpine, and the valley to the west of town still carries their surname. Do you know the last name of this couple from Germany? The name that graces the lovely valley where they lived on the west side of Alpine with the long and winding road that passes among the oaks and over gentle hills?