

THE LAVENDER LADY

by

Jan Paull

Jan Paull

919 Willow Glen Way

San Jose, California 95125

(408) 293-5166

SAN JOSE PUBLIC LIBRARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Family and Education

Penchant for Lavender

Home, Garden and Animal Lover

Teacher

Club Founder and Poet

INTRODUCTION

The query, "Who was the Lavender Lady" in a local history newsletter aroused my curiosity about this special character in Santa Clara Valley's past. My parents had known her and I had seen her. I began my profile in a writing class and finished it after two events occurred. First, I attended San Jose Historical Museum's (now History San Jose) "Vintage Reflections" program in which the "Lavender Lady" was portrayed by a woman in a lace trimmed long lavender dress with an ornate hat to match. The Lavender Lady was escorted by her real life grandson, Richard Lloyd. Richard had graduated from Campbell Union High School with me. Second, I put together a program on the Lavender Lady for an organization to which she had belonged.

While working on my profile, I discovered a special tree in San Jose's William Street Park. The tree is a Dawn Redwood, a deciduous tree that was believed extinct until discovered in central China in 1948. The tree is special because of its dedication to Caroline Pitkin Brock, the Lavender Lady.

My indebtedness and appreciation for the following essay go to Erna Holyer, who gave me the encouragement and will to lengthen my Lavender Lady story for the Pioneer Essay Contest and to Richard Lloyd, who so willingly gave of his knowledge about his grandmother's life.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Caroline was born in East Hartford, Connecticut on October 8, 1870, the daughter of Charles Allen and Henrietta Lockwood Pitkin. She had three older siblings, Charles Allen Jr., Charlotte and James, who died when a boy. Her great-grandfather was William Pitkin, an early governor of that state.

When Caroline was approximately seven years of age, her father moved the family to California. They lived in Arroyo Grande only a few years because of Mr. Pitkin's longing to settle his family in a rural area to the north. While he looked for the proper location, the family lived in the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. Searching for land in the Santa Clara Valley, an area well known for its Mediterranean climate and beauty, he purchased a site near San Jose on Meridian Road in 1885. Here the family resided for two years. He then bought an existing house at 69 South Tenth Street in San Jose. (This house turned out to be Caroline's lifelong home.) The Pitkins were devout Methodists and soon joined the First Methodist Church, located on North Second Street near Santa Clara Street in San Jose.

Author Bertha Marguerite Rice, describes Mr. Pitkin as "a most scholarly and cultured gentleman" who became a well-known orchardist and invented one of the valley's first prune dehydrators. He served many years as a trustee of the College of the Pacific, then located in the College Park area of San Jose where Bellarmine College Preparatory School now stands. The college's music department was organized in 1878 and, under the guidance of Professor F. Loui King, became the Pacific Conservatory of Music. In 1893, King left the college to form the

King Conservatory of Music, which became one of the leading cultural and educational institutions of its day. (The Conservatory was located on North Second Street and consisted of a large auditorium and a pair of two-story Victorian buildings, one of which remains today and is known as Germania Hall.)

Caroline studied music, piano, concert and voice and graduated from both Pacific and King Conservatories in the late 1890s. According to a *San Jose Daily Mercury* newspaper article, she made "quite a name for herself" in instrumental and vocal music.

She also studied art at the College of the Pacific under Etta Booth and under private tutors, Charles Harmon and Rollo Peters, both well-known local artists. She retained her interest in music and the arts throughout her life and was active in Phi Kappa Lambda (National Music Society), The Music Teachers' Association, and the Shakespeare Club of Santa Clara. She helped organize the San Jose Music Study Club in 1918 with Nella Rogers, a teacher at the University of the Pacific and Miss Lulu Pieper, who was "one of the most beloved and honored of the singers of early days," according to Bertha Marguerite Rice, author of *The Women of Our Valley*. The group of women musicians chose as their purpose and aim, "to study and better understand the great things in music and to help spread the gospel of melody in this community." Caroline served as president once. The club later dropped the word "Study" from its name.

On July 2, 1901 the talented graduate married architect, Norman R. Coulter, who was well-known for designing large commercial developments and government buildings in California, and who was the designer of the Crystal Palace in San Francisco. The marriage vows were spoken in the First Methodist Church on North Second Street in San Jose amid pink and

white sweet peas that must have given a delightful fragrance. The bride carried a bouquet of white carnations and the maid of honor, Miss Jessie Cruthers, carried a pink one. During the ceremony, the bridal party stood beneath a large bell of pink blossoms. The bride wore a gown "of brocade Duchesse satin with insertions of lace; the bodice being of white chiffon." according to the *San Jose Daily Mercury*.

A breakfast for the bridal party followed the nuptials at the home of the bride's parents. The newlyweds made "a tour of the pleasure resorts after which they will reside for the present with the bride's family," the newspaper continued.

The young couple lived at her family's home throughout their marriage. The union produced two children, Therese Lockwood and Richard Pitkin. Son Richard learned radio broadcasting from Charles Herrald and worked at his San Jose broadcasting station, KQW. He became a great chess player and played the world over. Daughter Therese, who inherited her mother's artistic talents, taught music and played the organ for the Darling and Fischer and Amos O. Williams funeral parlors. Therese designed and painted large billboards that told of coming attractions for San Jose's movie houses. Married to Ernest F. Lloyd, a banker, she had a son, Richard Lockwood, and a daughter, Roxana. Caroline's husband, a very severe man, ruled their family life. He became so overbearing that the marriage broke up after eight years. Bertha Marguerite Rice commented in her book, *The Women of our Valley*, "It was not Caroline's fault."

At some point before her second marriage, Caroline took a liking to the color lavender. She yearned to use it liberally, but controlled that urge out of respect for her mother, Mrs.

Pitkin, a very staid and strait-laced lady.

On January 6, 1910, Caroline married a native of Arkansas, Leonard Napoleon Brock, in a quiet ceremony at the Pitkin residence. At this time a new First Methodist Church was being constructed at Fifth and Santa Clara Streets because the 1906 earthquake had made the old church unsafe. The groom was an active member of the bride's church and perhaps that is where they met. Leonard was about four years younger than she and was an employee of the Keystone Company, which dealt in groceries, teas, spices and the popular Keystone Coffee. According to the *San Jose Mercury and Herald*, he was "a man of sterling worth and ability." The same newspaper described the bride as "well-known and loved by hosts of friends." The wedding photograph shows a handsome man and a slender lady with well-defined features. Dinner followed the wedding ceremony at the Lamolle Grill, a popular restaurant of the day. Then the happy couple boarded the train for Santa Cruz; she attired in a heliotrope (light tint of purple) gown with hat and shoes to match. Bertha Marguerite Rice stated Caroline lived with Leonard "most happily the remainder of her life."

PENCHANT FOR LAVENDER

When Mrs. Pitkin died in 1916, nine years after losing her husband, Caroline wholeheartedly pursued her great penchant for lavender. Not only did she dress in lavender hues

owns, wraps, hats, shoes and hosiery dyed to match) but she extended the color to her china, the linens, walls and other items. Lavender wisteria rambling over the portico of the house, proclaimed her favorite color to passersby.

Her husband, "Brocky," as she called him, was an easygoing man and went along with whatever Caroline desired, so she made their home to her liking. She used the color so excessively that she became known as "The Lavender Lady." Her elegant bearing suited her manner of dress to perfection and aroused curiosity in others. Metta Taylor, an acquaintance, told of standing back and watching ladies who followed Caroline while she shopped for material at Norris's Yardage Shop on South First Street. Seemingly oblivious to her following, the Lavender Lady consulted with the owner, Evelyn Norris, as she carefully searched through the many attractive fabrics. She chose a beautiful lavender silk and challis wool for a dress she needed by a certain date. Beth Crummy Chinchin, another acquaintance, said that she and several friends, who attended Caroline's church (on Fifth and Santa Clara Streets) would sit in a certain row so they could look down and admire Caroline's gorgeous plumed hats. Caroline had special-ordered these hats from the millinery section at Hart's Department Store. One observer described her make-up as pinkish with a lavender tinge.

Almost invariably when asked about the Lavender Lady, people claimed that she drove a lavender electric car and sat very straight. Some even claimed that the upholstery was lavender and that she used a tiller. Her daughter, Therese, stated in one of Dick Barrett's *San Jose Mercury News* columns, that her mother "never drove a car in her life and never had an electric car." However, her first real car was a 1910 chain-drive Buick in which, "mama" rode but

"Brocky," as Therese also called her stepfather, always drove. After the Buick, the family car was a Maxwell, and then a 1929 Studebaker that weighed about two tons and got five miles per gallon of gasoline. It was lavender for a time and Caroline kept lavender flowers in the two glass vases that came with the car.

HOME, GARDEN AND ANIMAL LOVER

The Pitkin home originally had eight rooms. Also on the property was a two-story pink barn with a hayloft. In the early days the family's transportation had been by horse and carriage. While Caroline's children, Therese and Richard, were growing up, the neighbors to the north threw some wild and clamorous parties that sometimes lasted all night, a fact which so disturbed and irritated Mrs. Pitkin that she could "stand it no longer." To be permanently rid of such unruliness, she bought the neighbor's house and had it moved. The Pitkin house was then enlarged to 18 rooms plus a room in the attic. The barn was replaced by a garage with an upstairs studio, which provided Caroline with an apt place for enjoyable hours of artistic creativity.

The former neighbor's vacant lot afforded Caroline the opportunity to let her gardening ideas go wild. Her excitement to create a dream garden made for lively discussions with Brocky who also had botanical interests. No doubt the children were in on the project, too. She planned

garden with a pergola, sun parlor and a greenhouse at the back. She had truckloads of peat moss brought in from the Santa Cruz area and she herself worked the soil. Tall bearded irises, each kind with its own distinctive scent, became one of her specialties. The blossoms, including her lilac-hued favorites, made a lavish show every spring. In her enthusiasm, she joined the Santa Clara County Iris Society.

Flowers were not Caroline's only passion. She felt deeply for animals and belonged to the Audubon Society and, with Brocky, to the Humane Society. She was especially fond of large birds. Behind the house she kept a huge aviary for her birds - parrots, macaws, cockatoos, pheasants and, at one time, two trained white pelicans. Little Therese rode in her parasol-topped tickler carriage pulled by the pelicans.

A conflict resulted between the birds and the family's 20 pound cat, Estrellita. At times, one or several of the trained birds were allowed in the house. At first Estrellita let his instincts lie and tried to attack the birds as prey. When they attacked him with mighty squawks and heavy beaks, he considered it wiser to keep his distance.

Two of Caroline's special birds were a cockatoo named Jasmine and a parrot named Queenie. The parrot was given to her by a sea captain friend whose crew had grown tired of the misbehavior and bad language of the bird. (He had first given Queenie to some firemen but they couldn't stand the bird.) In spite of the bird's bad reputation, Caroline gave her a home. Queenie was about 50 years old and could speak very distinctly. She was clever at imitating sentences, but never gave up her "choice" words learned from the seamen. She used them unmercifully whenever she spotted the family's orange tabby cat and chased after it until the poor

cat found respite in some cubbyhole. When Caroline gave tea parties, she covered Queenie's cage so that she would not offend the guests. When the cover was removed after the guests left, Queenie could repeat much of the conversation. There were rare times when Queenie was forgotten while she was out of her cage. Friends would drop in for tea and enjoy either fancy cakes or the flavorful (purple) loganberry ice, both favorites of the hostess. Suddenly, from the chandelier the parrot would erupt with a flutter of wings and screech parts of their conversation. Caroline, no doubt, laughed and said something like, "Oh my, I forgot Queenie!".

The only room in the house not painted in lavender shades was the music room. On one of Caroline's visits to the White House Department Store in San Francisco, she became intrigued by a gold piano - so much so that she ordered an unfinished one like it from the Sherman Clay music store in San Jose. She, likely using a lavender smock over her clothing, gilded the piano herself and successfully transformed it into the golden instrument she envisioned. Also, in the room stood her golden harp. As a treat for visitors, she played her classical favorites, especially Bach and Beethoven, on either the piano or the harp and, at times, played for outside groups. On the walls of the music room she painted scenes from Grand Opera. For her life-size scene, she chose Elsa and the Song to the Swan from *Lohengrin* in which Lohengrin, rescuing Elsa from false accusations, arrives in a boat drawn by the stately bird. As she painted, she may have hummed arias learned during her music conservatory days. Also, Caroline put her artistic skill to other uses. Around her wall mirrors, she drew and painted flowers. To offset the violet hues of the walls, she used green, another color she liked, around the clocks. In her studio, she created paintings and held some "off the record" shows.

Grandson Richard remembers that, when he was growing up, he spent occasional weekends with Caroline. When very small he was unable to say "Grandma" so he called her "Mayma." Therese, thereafter, also referred to her mother as "Mayma." According to Richard, Caroline was not a bit strait-laced like Mrs. Pitkin but was very congenial and "a lot of fun because she was always doing different things."

Caroline, a member of the American Antiques Study Club, made her home a showplace of antiques and curios such as stained glass, marble, teakwood, statuary, paintings, pedestals, furniture, miniatures, crystal and other objects of art. She opened her home for the members inspection and enjoyment of her valuable collection. For young Richard it was a wonderland to explore and investigate. He never tired of searching for hidden drawers and compartments in the large pieces of furniture.

TEACHER

Whatever Caroline did, she undertook with her whole heart. Daughter Therese commented in one of Barrett's newspaper columns that "mama was interested in so many things" and stressed the two to which she was most faithful - The First Methodist Church and The Women's Christian Temperance Union. The W.C.T.U. came to Santa Clara County in the early

1880s. The purpose of the organization was to bring together Christian women for "the protection of the home, the abolition of the liquor traffic, and the Triumph of Christ's Golden Rule in custom and law." Men belonged as well as women and formed "one of the outstanding forces for good in this locality." according to Bertha Marguerite Rice.

Caroline worked loyally for her church and, in Therese's words, "never missed a meeting." For many years she held the position of Sunday School Superintendent and head of the Junior Department. According to author Rice, she took over "a mischievous and somewhat unmanageable group of small boys as her personal Sunday School class." She worked with this class for ten years until the boys were in their teens and called them "Soldiers of the Cross."

Of these boys, more than half became missionaries, pastors, or teachers. She invited them to her home about once a month for a party that usually featured a program or a talk. Along with the Sunday School class, she held a Temperance Class that she considered important for young boys. My father, William Paull, and his brother, Harold, attended both classes from 1908 to 1911. She had a knack for keeping control of such a group, yet demonstrated kindness and caring. "Willie," my father, thought very highly of her. She impressed him so much that, one year, he struggled mightily to pull threads from a fabric in order to make a drawn work design on a handkerchief as a Christmas gift for her. He also saved one of the party invitations and some of the picture post cards she sent him. In later years, when Therese led two groups of Campfire Girls, Caroline assisted her.

Caroline taught piano and harp to students of all ages for many years. Imagine a young student coming to Caroline's home for the first lesson. From the street, large trees hid

the house from view, but, as he or she approached, the house must have overwhelmed. Colorful stained glass surrounded the main entry door. Waiting for the bell to be answered may have caused trepidation. When Caroline herself opened the door, she gave the student a warm greeting that eased the tension. Inside, the rooms amazed the student with their antique furniture, statuary and curios. Orchid hues dominated. The unique furnishings made the student stop and stare. On entering the music room, the atmosphere changed. The paintings of opera scenes on the walls seemed like the backdrop for a stage. The gold piano and harp appeared to await their cues. Caroline, through her gentleness and encouragement, gave the student assurance. The lesson began.

CLUB FOUNDER AND POET

In 1919 the Lavender Lady gathered a group of fellow flower lovers together at her home to form the Santa Clara County Flower Lovers' Club. Eight people, including Brocky, attended. Horace Keesling, farm editor of the San Jose Mercury Herald, was elected the club's first president and Caroline was elected secretary. The members chose as the object of the club, "The conservation of the wild flowers of California, the discussion of the cultivation of the garden flowers and the beautification of homes." To join, a person had to be a "floral fanatic." Horace served as president until 1931 and Caroline served in that capacity three times. In 1924,

Caroline wrote in the *San Jose Mercury*, that the club had grown to about 1500 members and was holding seven flower shows throughout the year. As I grew up in the 1930s, I attended some of the flower shows with my parents who entered their irises and chrysanthemums and displayed them in handwoven baskets made by my mother. (I vaguely recall seeing the Lavender Lady there.)

When the club gave rose slips to anyone who would plant them, Caroline saved clippings from her garden. The club required neither dues nor charged admission to its many shows. The members earned money by selling plants and shrubs that they themselves donated. They participated in the Santa Clara County Fair after it began in 1944, and relied on its members for decorating projects. The club's demise came 29 years after the passing of the Lavender Lady. She was remembered. Columnist Dick Barrett wrote, "I can still picture her fussing over the plants in one of her club's flower shows in Dunne Hall at the Municipal Auditorium."

In memory of the club, the members planted a Japanese flowering plum and redwood trees on the History San Jose (San Jose Historical Museum) grounds with the money remaining in the club's treasury. Mrs. Gene Vennum, the club's last president, in her final remarks in the *San Jose Mercury*, commented, "Members did more than just sit around and sniff the blooms." The club closed with 28 members.

Nature inspired Caroline to write poetry. Picture Caroline strolling in her garden on a delightful fall day with the flowers blooming profusely and sending forth their subtle fragrances. The begonias catch her eye and she stops to admire them. In her mind, words begin to compose themselves. Quickly she retrieves paper and pencil:

"To a Pink Begonia"

"Sweet blossom of the fall

In springtime color fair arrayed.

Blooming in Autumn's glowing sun,

Just nodding from the clematis shade.

The royal Dahlia and Chrysanthemum

In Autumn colors flaunting swell,

In contrast to your dainty blooms

Like the pink tinting of a shell.

So in the Autumn time of life

The sweet and tender memories of the years

Give peace and contrast to the glowing

passions of our hearts

Which brought us only tears."

She published a small book of poems entitled "The Sprite of the Rock and other Poems."

Titles of some poems are: "To a Brilliant Bird," "Dawn," "A Dream of Carmel," and "To a Pink Begonia."

CONCLUSION

Caroline Pitkin Brock died September 23, 1947 near the age of 77. She was survived by her husband Leonard, daughter Mrs. Therese Lloyd and two grandchildren, Richard Lockwood Lloyd and Roxana Lloyd Harrington. In 1948 the huge shade trees hiding her home were removed and the house eventually gave way to a San Jose State University parking garage. Today, offices are being constructed on the ground level.

Descended from a prominent Connecticut family and blessed with a fine education, Caroline filled her days working for the good and enjoyment of people. For all her elegance, she did not shun work. She dug in the fertile valley soil, applied paint to blank surfaces making them come to life, instigated a flower club, worked with the area's youth and helped others wherever she was needed. She inspired others with her enthusiasm and proficiency. She touched the lives of many people, from those who simply observed her to those who felt her influence. Daughter Therese sums her up in a Dick Barrett column, "She was a woman of determination and will power. But she never gossiped or ran anyone else down."

Caroline brought class and grace to the local scene and must be counted among Santa Clara Valley's women of substance who shared her era. She crossed paths with Cora Curtner Zanker, whose husband was an orchardist. Cora belonged to the Shakespeare Club. Violet Ryan Clarke, whose husband's father created many beautiful plants in his horticultural work, also studied music at the King Conservatory. Winnefred Wool Hendrix, whose family founded the Wool Packing Company (fruit), belonged to Caroline's Eastern Star chapter.

I still can envision San Jose's Lavender Lady. When I was growing up, she and my mother belonged to the same Eastern Star chapter. (She and Brocky belonged to a number of Masonic orders.) It was after a meeting that I saw her. I was enraptured when this fascinating lady swept into the banquet hall, tall, slim and straight in a beautiful long and lacy lavender gown with shoes dyed to match. She made me think of royalty. Her voice was unforgettable; rather high and carrying. She looked regal. Yet, there was no condescension. She was conversing with Brocky, her shorter, fairly stocky husband. Even as a child, I could sense his devotion.

It was in 1950 that Bertha Marguerite Rice planted the special Dawn Redwood in the Williams Street Park in memory of her dear friend, Caroline Pitkin Brock. This tree continues to grow there today, not labeled, yet a fitting memorial to a very talented and gracious Lavender Lady.

THE END

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. SOURCES

Post cards to my father

Party invitation to my father

San Jose Chapter No. 31 Order of the Eastern Star bylaws

Santa Clara County Flower Lovers' Club scrapbooks: 1941-1956

(California Room-San Jose Main Library) 1958-1960

1961-1963

1965-1966

Dick Barrett's San Jose Mercury newspaper columns in the Flower
Lovers' Club scrapbooks

2. PERSONS

Richard Lloyd, grandson

William Paull, church school student

Sylva Climo Miller, cousin of William Paull

Clyde Arbuckle, San Jose Historian

Sandra Sobie, grand niece of Bertha Marguerite Rice

Millie Baird, First Methodist Church member

Estel Brown, First Methodist Church member

LAVENDER LADY/Paul

Mildred Lewis, observer

Metta Taylor, acquaintance

Beth Crummy Chinchin, acquaintance

Ada May Ames (relative worked in millinery at Hart's)

Irene A. Clark, shopper at Norris's

Nano Conway, observer

3. BOOKS

The Women of Our Valley - Bertha Marguerite Rice - Vol. I, 1955 and Vol. II,
1956

History of Santa Clara County California - Eugene T. Sawyer (original edition -
1922) - Issued by San Jose Historical Museum Association

History of San Jose - Clyde Arbuckle, 1985

The Sprite of the Rock and Other Poems - Caroline Pitkin Brock

The Victrola Book of the Opera - Samuel Holland Rous, Fourth Edition, 1917

4. PUBLISHED ARTICLES

DOUGLAS, Jack. "Our University of the Pacific Legacy," San Jose Historical
Museum Association News, May 1987

DOUGLAS, Jack. "King Conservatory of Music/Germania Hall," San Jose
Historical Museum Association News, September 1985

LAVENDER LADY/Paull

PECK, Willys. "Long-Wilted Flower Club Bids For Remembrance," San Jose Mercury, June 25, 1976

SAN JOSE DAILY MERCURY. "Coulter-Pitkin," July 7, 1901

SAN JOSE MERCURY AND HERALD. "Brock-Coulter," January 9, 1910

KEESLING, Horace (Editor). "California Farm," San Jose Mercury Herald,
February 9, 1919

SAN JOSE MERCURY HERALD. "Mrs. Brock's Funeral Rites Set Today,"
September 26, 1947

SAN JOSE MERCURY HERALD. "Brock," September 25, 1947

SAN JOSE MERCURY HERALD. "Brock," June 23, 1952

MILESTONES IN THE LIFE OF CAROLINE PITKIN BROCK

Born - East Hartford, Connecticut - October 8, 1870

Arrived in California - 1877

Graduate - Pacific and King Conservatories of Music - late 1890s

Married Norman R. Coulter - July 2, 1901

Daughter Therese born - May 2, 1902

Son Richard born - October 10, 1906

Divorced Norman R. Coulter - 1908

Married Leonard Napoleon Brock - January 6, 1910

Helped organize the San Jose Music Study Club - 1918

Founded the Santa Clara County Flower Lover's Club - 1919

Died - San Jose, California September 23, 1947

A Member of: First Methodist Church, Women's Christian Temperance Union, American Antiques Study Club, Phi Kappa Lambda (National Music Society), Music Teacher's Association, San Jose Music Study Club, Shakespeare Club of Santa Clara, Santa Clara County Flower Lover's Club, Order of the Eastern Star, Order of Amaranth (Masonic), Order of the White Shrine of Jerusalem (Masonic), Humane Society and the Audubon Society.



Caroline
in her younger years



Caroline's lavender candlestick holders
and handkerchief



Wedding Photo
Leonard Napoleon Brock and Caroline Pitkin Coulter
San Jose Mercury and Herald - January 9, 1910

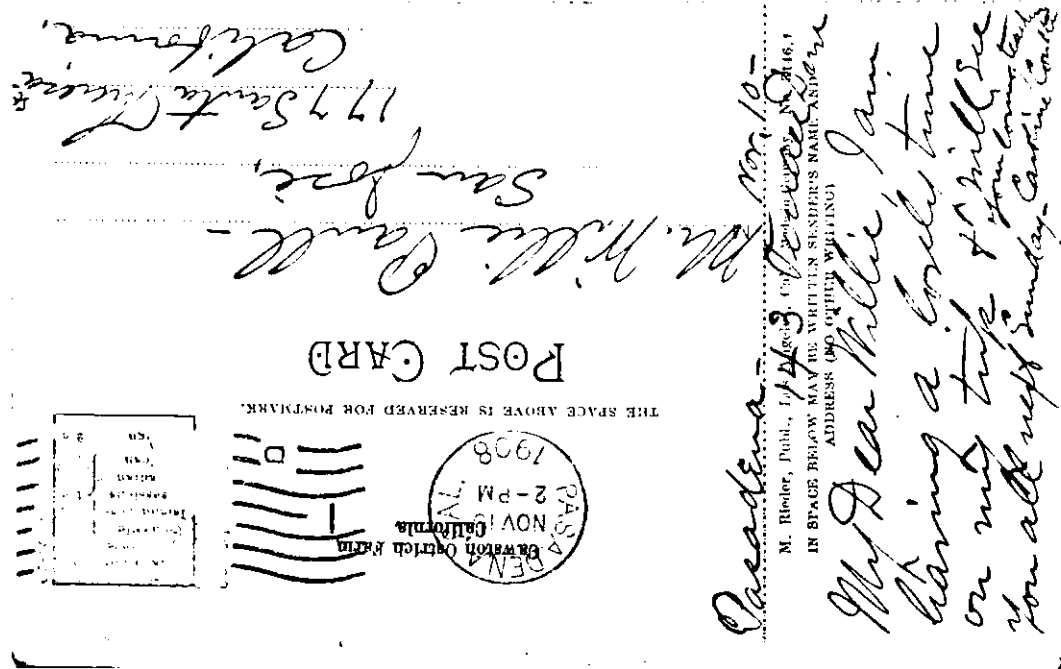
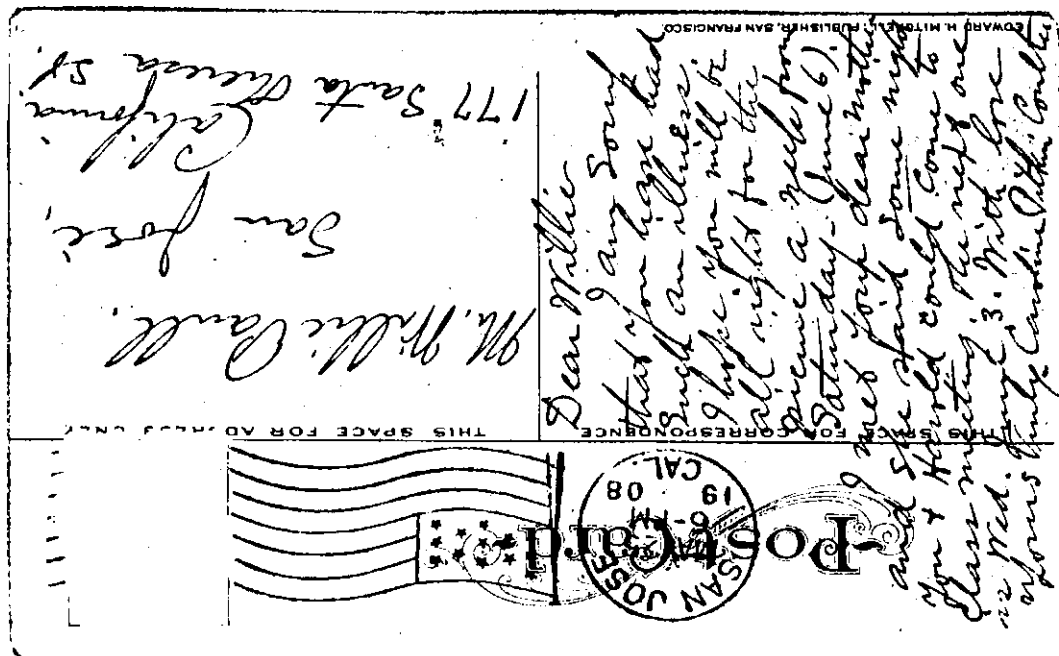


Caroline
in her later years

Mr. Willie Paul,

Caroline Pittkin Coulter
Sends Christmas Greetings
and asks the pleasure of
your presence at our
Christmas party, Wednesday
eve, December 22nd - 7:30
O'clock - 69 South 10th St.

My father's Sunday School class
Christmas party invitation



Post cards from Caroline to my father

1908

Mr. R. M. Bank,
San Jose,
825 South B. Cat.
Yuba Co.

4. Editor, Publ. Los Angeles, Cal. No. 114, Aug. 2, 1900.

My Dear Willie - 1909.
Mother wants
to know if you can
do a little piece of
work for her or if you
are busy all the time.
Please just call up or
the phone if you cannot.
Yours, Caroline Pittman Carlton

