

A VISIT WITH THE LAST PRIVATE OWNERS OF QUAIL HOLLOW RANCH

Harry and Maude Owen – Quail Hollow 1957 – 1974 *By Richard James and Jim Bahn*

In November of 1957, Hayward, California rancher Harry Owen and his wife, Maude, purchased Quail Hollow Ranch from Sunset Magazine owner Larry Lane. Harry Owen, a descendant of an old time California ranching family, sold his Hayward, California ranch as urban development and businesses began to encroach on his property. Harry sought out a more suitable property to continue his ranching business and the property of Quail Hollow Ranch was an almost perfect fit.

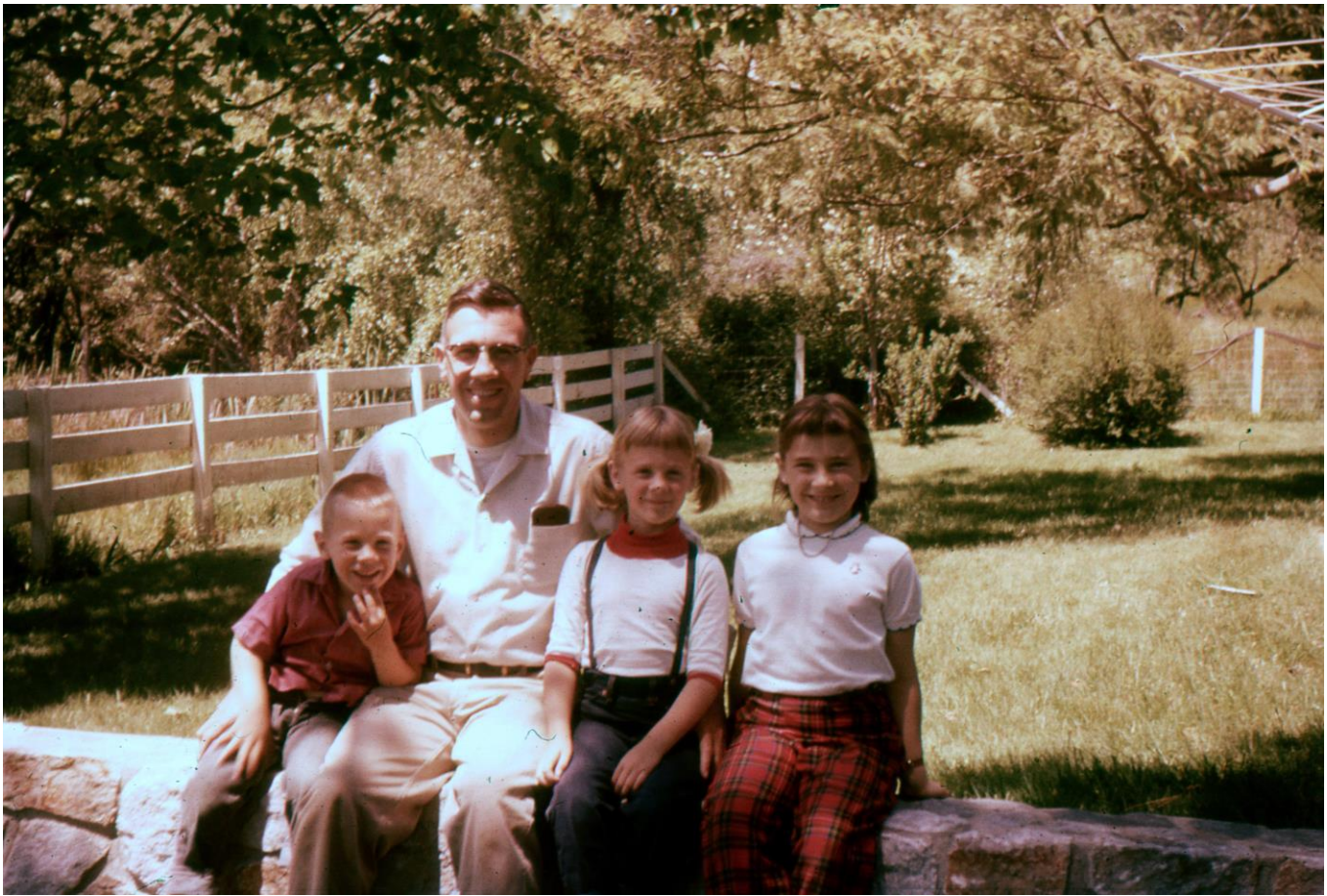


Maude, Harry, and Ethel Owen

Harry's mother, Ethel May (Craig) Owen, lived with Harry and Maude at Quail Hollow until she passed away on November 4, 1962 at the age of 87. During their ownership of Quail Hollow Ranch, Harry and Maude had free range beef cattle, kept working horses, grew vegetables, fruit, and crops, and operated Quail Hollow as a working multi-purpose ranch in Santa Cruz County, California.

Sharing the property with the Owen family was Gene, a Filipino laborer who lived in a separate house on the property, helping maintain the ranch, especially as Harry aged. Gene had worked for Harry when the Owens owned the ranch in Hayward. The Owens also had several dogs keeping them company, and Harry also considered some of the cattle as his pets – being reluctant to send them to market. The barn and wild berry bushes were full of feral cats, with Maude occasionally taking food out for them.

Harry and Maude had no children of their own, but a nephew of Harry's, Jim Schuyler, lived in the Bay Area. Jim and his wife Leose had 3 children & they enjoyed coming out to the ranch for day trips.



John, Jim, Sue, and Barb Schuyler on the rock wall next to the kitchen

The children enjoyed playing in the large grassy area at the back of the house, going horseback riding and playing on the buggies that were kept in the stables. Imagine the thrill of having an uncle and aunt who could offer you horseback rides!



Maude and Barb, Harry and Sue, Jim and John

They often celebrated Easter at the ranch, with fun Easter Egg hunts and spent one memorable Christmas at the ranch, with a niece of Harry's and her 3 children. Maude played Christmas songs on the grand piano in the living room. She also made delicious cakes using duck eggs from the ducks on the ranch. Much of the time was spent in the kitchen/living room area which had a wood burning stove that warmed the kitchen.



Jim Schuyler yearned to fish in the Quail Hollow pond (photo from early 60's)

Many of the older wire and wood fences still onsite at Quail Hollow are remnants of the Owen ranching era and most of the trails we now walk along within the now County Park were once areas containing meadows and grassland where the Owen cattle free-roamed.

As the Owen Quail Hollow Ranch ownership years marched on, Harry and Maude Owen's cattle business began to be phased out due to new and more efficient ways to house and feed cattle. As cattle feedlots on larger ranches became a more cost-efficient solution to cattle raising, free-ranging cattle was proving to be more labor intensive and costly and was being eliminated in the industry. The days of being able to allow your beef cattle to roam freely through the countryside and feed on wild plants and grasses was rapidly coming to an end. Cattle could be fed faster, more reliably, and kept healthier, and housed cheaper in a feedlot type scenario.



Sue, Leose, and John Schuyler with a few of the Owens' cattle

Much of the area along our Italian and Chaparral Trails were within the cattle grazing sections, and it's sometimes fun to envision how much the area has changed since the Owen family ownership. Where we now see forest- land of sturdy oaks, chaparral bush and plant growth, and conifer trees, there once was open grassland with beef cattle grazing daily.



Barb, John, and Sue Schuyler enjoying the front lawn

As the San Lorenzo Valley became more populated, and residential housing and businesses were expanding into our area, Santa Cruz property taxes began to raise on a yearly basis, and in 1973, the Owen family decided to put their Quail Hollow Ranch on the real estate market. Harry and Maude

obviously loved their Santa Cruz County ranch and respected the 300-acre parcel they had called home, and it is at this time that Harry Owen became an important entity in helping preserve the parkland we now have. During the real estate sale, period Harry and Maude were inundated with offers from individuals and corporations to sell off the better portions of the ranch. No individual wanted to buy the entire 300 acres, most wanted a few acres to build individual houses, apartment buildings, and there was even an offer for a few acres of flat land to develop a small golf course. It was during this time that Harry and Maude steadfastly refused to carve up their beloved ranch. Their counteroffer was always “you buy it all or none at all”. They demanded the 300-acre parcel remain intact at the time of sale. This was a daunting requirement for the seller and buyer both, but Harry was firm in his demand and his representatives searched far and wide for an individual who would take the property in its entirety.

In 1974, a buyer was finally found, and it was the Santa Clara Board of Education. In the early 1970’s Santa Clara Board of Education was looking for a property where they could develop an experimental “science camp and outdoor teaching campus”. Their plan was to have a teaching center that offered students onsite learning in biology, farming, and sciences. The initial plan was to bus students from the Santa Clara school system to Santa Cruz County and Quail Hollow Ranch, where they would be able to spend a few days in a possible overnight situation and learn more about the sciences by being fully exposed to the rural and biologically rich area that Quail Hollow Ranch was. Santa Clara purchased the Quail Hollow ranch property, but their plans were fairly quickly extinguished. Before they could even begin development of their Quail Hollow campus, California’s Proposition 13 passed, which cut tax money going to public schools by about 58%. That catastrophic blow combined with gasoline shortages and high costs ended the Santa Clara remote teaching plan. The Santa Clara Board of education hired an on-site caretaker, placed a chain across the property entrance, and never once bussed a student to Quail Hollow Ranch or used the property for their intended purpose. After 10 years, Santa Clara was looking for a buyer for their remote campus, and finally Santa Cruz County purchased the 300-acre Quail Hollow Ranch as a new County Park. Santa Cruz County finally completed the property purchase in 1986 and plans were drawn up to develop the 300 acres into a County Park property.



The ranch entrance in the 60’s looked a little different from today

In closing the Owen chapter at Quail Hollow, we have come to realize that because of the demands that Harry and Maude had for a particular buyer to purchase all the property or none, they were very instrumental in guaranteeing that the 300-acre entity that we now know as Quail Hollow Ranch County Park would become a crown jewel park in the Santa Cruz system. We can thank the Owen family for allowing us to enjoy a 300-acre nature preserve, set within an extremely rare “sand hills environment”, with almost 5 miles of hiking and horse-riding trails, historical building and pioneer history, amazing plants, and animals (some of which are only found within this environment), and what has now become a beloved park for both locals and out of area visitors. Thank you, Harry, thank you Maude! And thank you, Schuyler family, for sharing your memories.



John, Leose, Sue, Jim, and Barb Schuyler, with Ethel Owen