

## 66. ROBERTS INTERMISSION

I think I am more or less at the halfway point in my hodgepodge of reminiscences and stories concerning Phantom Canyon Ranch and Livermore. In celebration thereof, I have taken an undeclared intermission over the last several months to catch my second wind.

**Coming Attractions.** At the beginning of the Covid epidemic, I was sidetracked by my neighbor and long-time friend, DL Roberts. Result: I have some thirty hours of recorded conversations with DL. He has an astonishing memory.

David Lee 'DL' Roberts, now 89 (b. 1933), is the fourth of five generations to live on the Roberts Ranch since 1874.<sup>1</sup> Circumstances have disinherited him and his sons of the family property – unfortunate in many ways, but perhaps, a blessing in disguise.

**Roberts Ranch Preservation Trust (RRPT).** After the death of his father, J. Evan Roberts (1908-2002), DL's stepmother, Catherine Roberts (née Allison, 1921- 2016) conveyed conservation easements on the ranch and ultimately placed the ranch in a charitable trust.

The attendant multi-year, intrafamily struggle was tortured, disagreeable and often public. In the end, Catherine passed on to her reward; DL and his sons emerged battered, holding the short end of the stick but with one seat on the Trust's five-member board; the professionals that had represented Catherine's interests and now held power in the Roberts Ranch Preservation Trust, had been roughed up, too, and emerged in no mood to cut DL or his sons much slack.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the politics of the situation, it looked like DL and the boys could use someone in their corner, so that's kinda where I ended up.

Over more than seventy years, I have known Roberts family members of four of the five generations that have inhabited the Roberts Ranch. I have

shared boundary fences and irrigation ditches with them for the better part of fifty years.

My executive summary is: The Roberts family occupies a spectrum from charming, through difficult, to disturbingly dysfunctional. On that spectrum, DL occupies the civilized and agreeable portion to a great extent than any other Roberts of my acquaintance.

At the opposite end of the 'Roberts spectrum' were DL's grandfather, George, and great-uncle, Ernest. They did time in Leavenworth...

**The United States of America vs. George F. Roberts, Ernest W. Roberts...** In the course of visiting with DL, the subject of his grandfather's and great-uncle Ernest's dealings with homesteaders came up. DL knew little more than the rumors I had heard, so I decided to do a little digging. After an eighteen month wait, *The National Archives* unloaded a 600-page Federal District Court trial transcript onto my hard drive – I believe that I may now know more than most anyone still living on this subject. I promise three or four more chapters on this saga.<sup>3</sup>

Somewhere in the middle of the 'Roberts spectrum', lies DL's father, Evan, who likely didn't want to be a rancher, but got stuck with the job in the end.

Evan was a gifted and innovative mechanic. Unfortunately, his determined struggles to build his **American Alabaster Company** through the depths of the Depression came to an abrupt end with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

DL has many vivid memories of his father's alabaster venture. The burned-out hulk of the alabaster shop behind the main ranch buildings and traces of his stone quarries in Cambell Valley are testimony to this frustrating and disappointing phase of Evan's life. My spinning of that yarn should be good for another two or three chapters.

This will bring us up to **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, which was the year that the Phantom Canyon Ranch project took a surprise sharp turn, followed by lots of unexpected consequences.

Be sure to stay tuned for the **Phantom Canyon State Park**, featuring dirty, rotten scoundrels and politics. Don't miss further misadventures with **Halligan Reservoir**. Then there's the 'strange bedfellows' episode with **The Nature Conservancy**; more than one bad accident; Ed Eisenman and the **Meadow Creek Cabins**; the **Monroe Diversion Showdown**, starring Manuel Pineda; low-fat, grass-fed **Phantom Canyon Beef** in national distribution; **Jim Reidhead Plan 'B'** and ear tagging tires; the **Phantom Canyon Art Project**; and so much more...but most of all (hang on to your hat here) in the end the forces of darkness are foiled just in the nick of time!

<sup>1</sup> DL is the second of the three generations of Roberts to be born on the ranch.

<sup>2</sup> I ended up being appointed to a seat on the RRPT board, also.

<sup>3</sup> The first two installments of the saga have already been told in Chapters 64 and 65. Since I have chosen to recount the story in a non-linear order, reviewing those previous chapters may reward the reader with a reduction in overall confusion.



DL Roberts in Cambell Valley with what's left of the homestead movie set from *Centennial*.