

61. THE ROBERTS FAMILY - LARGER THAN LIFE

Readers of these chronicles will already be familiar with the name *Roberts*, a family that has been around these parts since 1873. I've had the unusual opportunity to observe four of the six generations of Roberts that have left their mark on Livermore (see opposite for dates on gravestones). I've seen them up close and personal over the last seventy years, more than forty as over-the-fence neighbors. In recent years, DL Roberts (the 5th generation) and I have whiled away pleasant hours reminiscing in front of a tape recorder and often spend Sunday mornings together on short field trips.¹

DL at 88 (sharp as a tack and almost fit as a fiddle) is running true to family form. The Roberts men tend to be tough, stringy and hard to kill. His grandfather, George, lived to 103 after sundry misadventures² and his father, Evan, 94. Those two, like many of the clan, had high blood pressure. Evan, particularly, had a violent, hair-trigger temper³.

Mild mannered and easy going (most of the time), DL is an exception that proves the rule.

Evidence of the Roberts feistiness bubbles up through the public record in the form of numerous and sustained lawsuits. North Poudre Irrigation Company (NPIC), in which the Roberts were substantial stockholders, was a favorite target⁴. Friends and neighbors⁵, public officials and institutions were often in their sights, along with their own family members⁶.

Ethically challenged, rascals in business and sometimes on the wrong side of the law, the 3rd generation Roberts boys, George and Ernest, cut a wide swath through the Livermore Valley.

Both set out early to learn the cow business. In 1885, George dropped out of college and hired on for a big roundup with the Union Cattle Company, which operated the S and G⁷ Ranch on the

Cheyenne River where it crosses the Wyoming/South Dakota line. Ernest participated in a number of roundups east of Ault, through the Pawnee Buttes area and out to Nebraska. He had a reputation as a heel roper and fiddler – riding to and from area dances with his fiddle tucked under his arm.

Around the turn of the century, the brothers married well-to-do sisters⁸ and started assembling land by various means. Mostly they bought (presumably with their wives' money) odd numbered sections from the Union Pacific Railroad in the area between Steamboat Rock and Owl Canyon. However, they resorted to other means, some of which brushed up against the homestead laws and, as a consequence, in 1923 did a stretch in Leavenworth.⁹

After Ella, Ernest's wife, died of a burst appendix in 1930, Ernest was remarried in 1936 to Rosalie McIntyre (Julia Andrews' long-time companion – Chapter 26), thus catalyzing the family feud that broke up the ranch. The two 'camps' lived within hollering distance with a confused DL discouraged from visiting Ernest and Rosalie. In the end, it was mostly the ladies making the fuss. While the court battle was going on, DL remembers watching his grandfather and Uncle Ernest in friendly conversation out away from their wives.

The punch line is that between George and Ernest, Evan was the only heir, so the ranch was reunited by inheritance shortly thereafter.

Evan's inclinations and talents were more mechanical and artistic than agricultural, as manifested in his sculptural alabaster business. Circumstances forced Evan to give up his alabaster enterprise and he eventually took over the ranch – clearly with some regrets.

DL and his sons, Burke and Ben, became the heirs in succession. However, the next installment of the Roberts saga involves a stepmother...

The screenwriters of *Dallas* could have taken the Roberts correspondence course.

Thanks to DL and Ben Roberts for their generous help with this chapter.

¹ David Lee Roberts aka DL (b. 1933) was born and raised on the Roberts Ranch. He is the fifth generation Roberts. DL remembers working on the ranch with his grandfather, George, of whom he was very fond. At 88 (as of this writing) DL's memory is remarkable.

² In his mid-seventies, George was thrown from his horse, resulting in a steel plate in his head and partial paralysis. When DL got big enough (10 – 12), to saddle his grandfather's horse and help him up – “*Now, don't tell your grandmother!*” – they'd go off to check cattle.

³ On at least two occasions, Evan resorted to a shovel to express his feelings. A neighbor told of a branding where Evan killed a calf with a shovel before anyone could stop him. Another time he attacked Jeanne in our front yard. Fortunately, others present restrained him and took his shovel away. After a frank talk with Catherine (while Evan hid in the house), she made sure Evan never set foot on our property again.

⁴ The Roberts were embroiled in various legal disputes with NPIC continuously from 1908 through 1974. A case related to a forerunner of NPIC, *Scurvin Ditch Co. v. Roberts* (1914) made it to the Colorado Supreme Court to become one of the landmark cases in Colorado property law (the Roberts lost).

⁵ Including yours truly (Chapters 56 and 60 – the Roberts lost)

⁶ Topping off a decade of family bickering, Ernest sued to dissolve the partnership. The suit went to the Colorado Supreme Court with Evan joining the suit against both his father and uncle. After a second hearing, the Supreme Court reversed its earlier decision (Evan won).

⁷ The 'S' is for the *Sturgis* family (think motorcycle rally).

⁸ Asa Sterling (1842 – 1919) was an early pioneer cattleman and wealthy Greeley banker. His only heirs were his nieces, the Williams sisters, Ella, Mattie and Kate. Ella married Ernest in 1901 and Mattie married George in 1903. Kate married Norman Latsch, the manager of the Fort Collins sugar factory, but that's another story...

⁹ A certain elderly sobduster gave George, Ernest and brother-in-law Norman more than they bargained for (worth of a *Sopranos* episode).

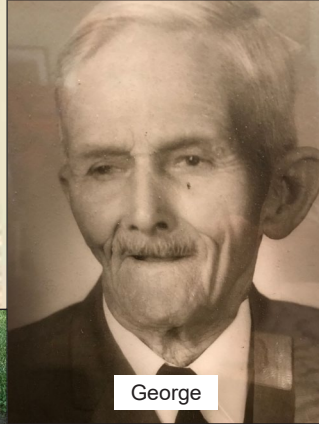


Mattie

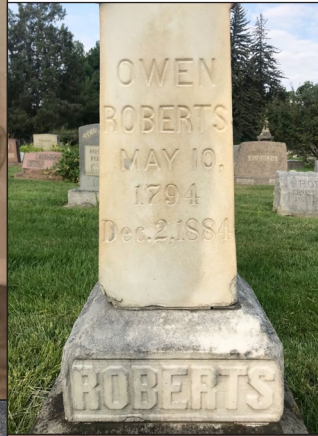
Evan



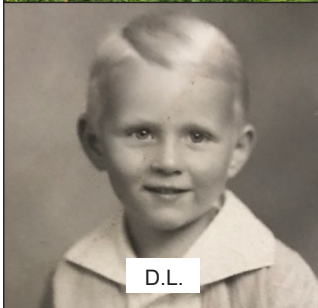
Burke



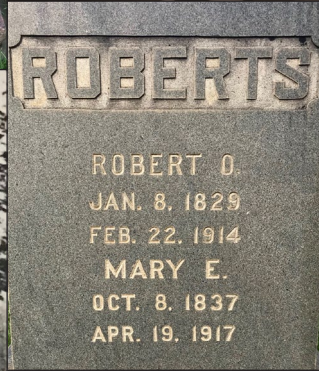
George



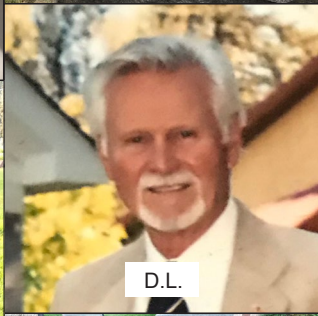
George



D.L.



"Cricket"



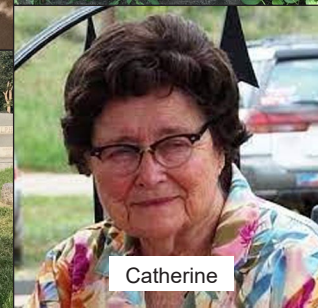
D.L.



Evan



Ben



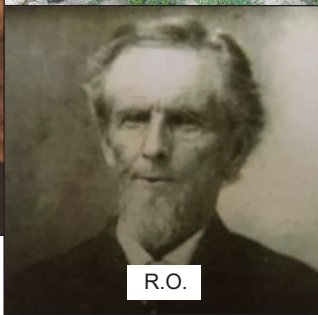
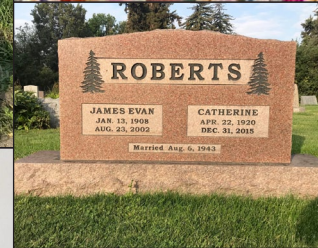
Catherine



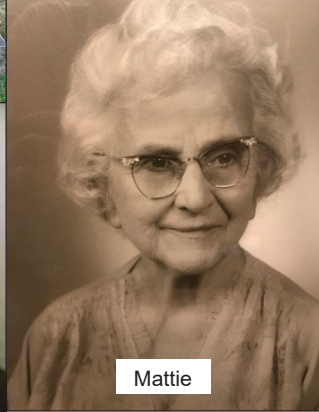
Evan



Ernest



R.O.



Mattie



George