

## Narcissa Pena



1918 - 2008

Narcissa Pena, the great-granddaughter of pioneer Juan Felipe Pena was among the first women to attend UC Davis. She died Monday, May 26, 2008 at the age of 89 years.

Arriving in California with their families in 1841, Juan Manuel Vaca and Juan Felipe Pena had come overland via the Old Spanish Trail from New Mexico and applied for a land grant through Mariano G. Vallejo of Sonoma. They were granted ten square leagues to be selected within a much larger area designated on a crude map that accompanied the application.

The two families built adobe houses in the Lagoon Valley of 23"x10"x3" adobe mud bricks and hand-hewn redwood timbers that still support the upper floor and are believed to have been cut in the hills near Napa and brought by mule team to the Adobe. The door and window lintels are of the same hand- hewn redwood. The Vaca Adobe was shaken down by the earthquake in 1892 and the Pena Adobe now stands alone in the valley as a monument to our beginnings.

Juan Felipe Pena's son, Gavino, and his wife, Ruperta Vaca, sold their ranch in Lagoon Valley to Elsie Buckingham and moved to the northern end of their land grant near Putah Creek in the late 1800s. When Gavino Pena died in 1902, his widow sold their ranch and moved to their home in Davisville.

Her son, Jesus Pena, married Lucy Zuniga and they had five children - one boy and four girls. Narcissa was born on Oct. 29, 1918, in Davis - just one year after the city incorporated and lived her entire life in the same house at Fourth and D streets.

Narcissa never married, but became like family to the Phi Delta Theta fraternity members who lived next door. She served as their house mother for more than 20 years, ironing shirts, making home-cooked dinners and helping 'her boys' with any problems. In return, the fraternity members would help with chores and take her to the market or church.

Narcissa recalled a time in Davis when she rode by horse and buggy on dirt streets and paid 15 cents to see a movie. Her father worked for the University Farm Division and later for the city of Davis, using a water wagon to sprinkle water on the unpaved, dusty streets. Narcissa and her siblings attended Davis Grammar School on C Street, between Third and Fourth streets, where Central Park stands today, and Davis Joint Union High School, now City Hall on Russell Boulevard. She talks about looking forward to the Picnic Day celebration at UCD and traveling by buggy over the new Yolo Causeway to attend the circus or go shopping with her mother in Sacramento. Before the causeway was built in 1915, Tule Jake Road was the only way to get to Sacramento. Flooding made the road mostly impassable except during the summer.

Narcissa never learned to drive, but a buggy or bicycle was sufficient to get around Davis. She was one of the first women to attend UCD, earning a degree in home economics in 1939. She was a mail carrier in Davis and she worked at a sugar refinery in Woodland during World War II. She worked alongside Hattie Weber, Davis' first librarian, for 11 years. Later, she worked for 30 years as a secretary for the university, first in the registrar's office, then in the botany department and finally at the School of Veterinary Medicine. She also traveled extensively, to places like Mexico, Guatemala, Spain, Europe and Hawaii and filled her home with mementos from her travels.