



[Images obtained from 'History of Sacramento County California' in 1880, published by Thompson & West, Oakland, Cal. 1880]

Sacramento County Biographies

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MRS. ALICE M. VALENSIN

MRS. ALICE M. VALENSIN.--Among the prominent California women who have made a name for themselves and have added to the honors and laurels already won by their distinguished families, may well be included Mrs. Alice M. Valensin, a native of Independence, Mo., and the daughter of John F. McCauley and his good wife, who in maidenhood was Miss Caroline Wilson. Mrs. Valensin's maternal grandmother was a Davis, of the famous Davis family to which Jefferson Davis belonged, while her grandfather, also on her mother's side, was Thomas Wilson, a member of one of the first families to settle in Virginia. He was a native of Tennessee, and was sent to England for his higher education. Later he settled at Independence, Mo., and was killed in the Mormon War. His daughter, Caroline Wilson, also a native of Tennessee, grew up on her father's plantation, where he was a slave-owner, and she enjoyed the best of educational advantages of her day. Mrs. Valensin's father and paternal grandfather were both born in Abingdon, Va. They were also planters and were of good old Dominion stock.

John F. McCauley was a veteran of the Mexican War. Before that conflict his father had given him \$10,000 and a body-servant, and he traveled throughout the Middle West, and at length came to Independence, Mo., where he married Miss Wilson. He came from an old Scotch family whose genealogy reaches back into the high-lands of Scotland, some members of which migrated to the United States and settled in Virginia; and he had three brothers who lost their lives in the Civil War, fighting on the Confederate side for "The Lost Cause." As a result of his activity in organizing a company for the Mexican War, John F. McCauley was often called "Colonel," and although this was a purely honorary title, it befitted him splendidly, as he was a Southern gentleman of the old school. At the time he was a man of rare executive ability and no small amount of initiative. This was well brought out in 1852, when with several of his Mexican War comrades, he started across the great plains for California, accompanied by his wife and infant daughter, the subject of this review, traveling by way of the Salt Lake route, and stopping in San Joaquin County, Cal. William Hicks, Mrs. Valensin's step-grandfather, met this train, which included several hundred head of stock and a number of slaves, at Salt Lake City. Mr. Hicks had come to California in 1847, and had acquired a large estate in Sacramento County. He had a small settlement called Hicksville, all upon his own land; and he owned lands in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Sonoma Counties. He was a close associate of General Sutter, and kept watch many a night at Sutter's Fort, when trouble with the natives was expected, or actually had broken out. John F. McCauley later acquired a great deal of the Hick's estate, known at that time as one of the five largest properties in California. Mr. McCauley's experience in the Mexican War proved of value to him when he started on his trip across the continent. He was prepared to deal sagaciously and justly with the Indians. He had with him an abundance of gifts with which to win their friendship and could also make himself easily understood; and whenever the train was confronted with hostile savages he settled peaceably with them, and the train passed on safely without anyone being killed.

John F. McCauley brought a large sum of money with him to California, and upon settling here he loaned it to the State of California. Later, there was an attempt to repudiate the debt, and an interesting historical account shows Mr. McCauley's resourcefulness and strategy. To grant the payment of the loan made by Mr. McCauley, the state legislature had to pass a bill allowing a disbursement to that amount, but it was generally known that the governor would veto any such bill. At the time when this measure was up in the legislature, one of Mr. McCauley's Mexican War veterans was conducting San Quentin prison on a lease basis. Mr. McCauley secured this lease from his old comrade; and when the governor visited the prison on one of his regular inspection trips, he was induced to sign the bill for payment of the loan.

John F. McCauley settled in San Francisco, and there he always continued to reside, one of the picturesque figures of the metropolis. He was greatly criticized by the press in those early days for what he did, but it is a matter of record that through his management of the San Quentin penitentiary was made to pay its own expenses, for many stores and brick buildings in San Francisco were built through convict labor, at his suggestion. He had acquired 10,000 acres of land, in San Joaquin County, on Dry Creek and Mokelumne River, in Sacramento County, and also in San Francisco. The title to the estate in Sacramento County was finally cleared in Washington, after being entailed by counter claims set up by holders of the old Spanish grants which originally embraced this acreage, and then later some of the squatters had to be evicted bodily from the estate.

Mrs. Alice M. Valensin was one of four children in her parents' family. Two brothers, John William and Richard McCauley, are now deceased. The other brother is George B. McCauley, of Forest Lake Ranch, San Joaquin County, who also has a home in Santa Cruz and Oakland, and maintains a home at Independence, Mo. He has one daughter, Caroline. Mrs. Valensin first went to the school kept by the Sisters of St. Vincent, in San Francisco, and later she attended the Notre Dame Convent at San Jose. When the Civil War broke out, John F. McCauley, having sprung from old Southern stock, naturally showed his sympathies for his native section, and things were made exceedingly unpleasant for him in San Francisco, where he and Dr. William Scott, a Presbyterian clergyman, were hanged in effigy, as "Southern Sympathizers." Mr. McCauley, after some difficulty, succeeded in boarding an English vessel. and sailed with his family for Europe. At that time, our subject was a little girl, with a child's enthusiasm and a child's non-understanding; and because she sang "Dixie" in a San Francisco Hotel, she was charged with treason and a warrant was issued for her arrest. When confronted by the warrant officers, her father asked them if they wished to hear the young musician sing the song, and he proceeded to place Alice at the piano; and with such innocent spirit did she sing that the officers, seeing the folly of such a silly warrant, went away laughing. During the war, Mr. McCauley outfitted a company of some 500 men, whose purpose was to reach the South and actively lend what aid they could to the Southerners; but although they made several attempts to run the Federal Blockade in Texas and Arizona, they did not all succeed in reaching their wished for goal. In Europe, the McCauley's made their home in Paris; and there our subject attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and in the French capital finished her education. Grandfather McCauley lived to be nearly one hundred years old, and both Mr. and Mrs. John F. McCauley almost reached their ninetieth year.

While in Europe, the McCauleys went south into Italy, and at Florence, Miss Alice met Julio Valensin, and they were married on February 19, 1873. Mr. Valensin was born in Egypt, a son of Moise Valensin and Elena Del Valle Valensin, the former an Italian banker and successful business man who had two banks, one in England, and the other in Florence. In the case of Julio's mother there was an interesting combination of Spanish, Scotch and Italian blood; and because Julio Valensin was what he was, the McCauley's moved in the society of the royal family, and mingled with diplomats and scholars. Mrs. Valensin not only traveled throughout Europe, but she personally drove a four-in-hand over the mountain roads of Switzerland. Her husband had fine horses, and he took great joy in seeing his wife handle them. He had been educated by private tutors. In California, he lived on the ranch where he trained his horses; and he was the owner of "Sidney," then the fastest trotter in the United States. He died in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1892, while on a visit there with race-horses. Mr. Valensin was a very handsome man, was a good linguist, and spoke English so fluently and with such an excellent accent that one might have taken him for an English instead of an Italian gentleman.

In 1874, Mr. and Mrs. Valensin came out to California on a trip, but they returned to Italy intending to remain. However, Mr. Valensin's passion for trotting-horses brought him back to stay. He had purchased property at Pleasanton, and was an enthusiast for blooded race-horses. Mr. and Mrs. Valensin always called the McCauley Rancho their home, and she has resided upon the home-place ever since her return. Upon her father's death, she received 4,000 acres of land in Sacramento County, to which has been added 2,000 acres, and also 2,000 acres of range land at Burson, Calaveras County. During the life of her husband, the ranch was devoted to the raising of race-horses; but after his death she converted the entire ranch into a cattle and grain farm. For some time she has maintained a herd of from 1,500 to 2,000 head of cattle, and from 100 to 200 head of horses. During the "Boxer" rebellion in China, she sold many head of horses to both the English and German governments.

Mrs. Valensin has one son, Pio Valensin, who, on attaining his eighteenth year, while still continuing his studies, assumed the management of their large estate. He was born in Florence, on November 26, 1873, and was privately tutored by Monsignor Capel, a noted Roman Catholic Prelate and scholar; and on December 1, 1917, he was married at Oakland to Katherine Koster, who was born in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, the daughter of Jerry and Doris (Heinz) Koster. Her father was a sea-captain of French descent, who had an adventurous life at sea; while her mother was of German descent and came from a family of farmers. Her parents are living at Castroville. In 1890, the family came to San Francisco; but her father soon removed to Franklin, in Sacramento County, where he bought land and there farmed, in time becoming naturalized. He later retired and removed to Castroville. The worthy couple had four children: Margaret, the eldest, has become Mrs. Booth of Florin; then came John and Mrs. Pio Valensin; while the youngest is Emma, of Sacramento. Katherine Koster Valensin attended the Franklin district school, and now she supervises the educational training of their only son, Pio Valensin, Jr. The Valensin family are staunch Democrats, and Pio has been often urged to run for the legislature; but owing to his many and pressing duties on the ranch, he has steadily refused. He has been for years past a member of the Democratic County Central Committee. Mrs. Alice M. Valensin is a devout member of the Roman Catholic Church, and about as interesting a conversationalist, with her great fund of reminiscence, as one may anywhere find. She has all sorts of stories to tell, and not a few are in one way or another echoes of her old family days. It is interesting to relate, for example, that Elizabeth Pia Matthews, their colored maid, was born, thirty-four years ago, on the Valensin ranch, and has ever since remained with our subject. Elizabeth is a refined, well-educated young woman, an honor to her race as well as to the family in which she has been reared. She is the daughter of an old pioneer California family, her grandparents having come to California as slaves, and she has always been most loyal to the McCauleys, so long among the Matthew's best friends. Her grandmother nursed George McCauley when he was a baby.

Sacramento County cannot fail to feel a pride in this worthy representative of an old American family, whose annals tell again the abounding story of how a nation once fell out, on account of a family misunderstanding, and luckily fell into line again, since when, now for many years, it has presented to the once skeptical world a united front of impregnable strength.

Transcribed by Sally Kaleta.

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