

TREMENTIANANS HOED THEIR OWN ROW

By S. Omar Barker

“Tumbled Walls and scattered stones. Look upon them, wander among them and marvel. Pause a a low, doorless doorway; peer into utter emptiness. Surely the advance disintegration of these runs must measure back hundred, even two hundred years.”

The town of Trementina might be in ruins but ghosts aren't needed.

SOME OF THE ORIGINAL CITIZENS ARE STILL
AROUND!

ANCESTORS INDEXED HEREIN, CIRCA:
1860s - 1950s

ANCESTOR'S LOCATION:

NEW MEXICO

COLORADO

GENEALOGY NAMES INDEXED w *
INDICATING PICTURE:

APODACA

BARKER, Elsa

BARKER, S. Omar, Author

BLAKE, Alice, Miss Allie, "Angel of Trementina" *

BLEAS FAMILY

CASTILLO

CORDOVA

CRUZ, Emitterio, Reverend

DURAN, Julian, Reverend

DURAN, Rosa, wife of Reverend Julian Duran

ENCINIAS

ESQUIBEL, Alfonso, Reverend

ESTRADA, Abelino *

ESTRADA, Emma, wife of Tony Estrada

ESTRADA, Gabriel, son of Abelino Estrada

ESTRADA, Gonzalita Gonzales de Encinias, mother
of Abelino Estrada

ESTRADA, Juan

ESTRADA, Julian, father of Abelino Estrada

ESTRADA, Mrs. Jose L. Estrada, sister-in-law of
Abelino Estrada

ESTRADA, Rosa, wife of Abelino Estrada

ESTRADA, Tony, son of Abelino Estrada

GONZALES, Estephania Elvira

GONZALES, Mary Frances

JARAMILLO

MADRID

MAES

McCONN, Jean, teacher-missionary assistant

MEDINA

MENVOOR, Laura, teacher-missionary assistant

MIDDLETON, Charlie *

MIDDLETON, Nina

RENDON, Gabino, Reverend

SALAZAR

SANDOVAL

VALDEZ

VALVERDE

VIGIL, Juan, of Guadalupita

PICTURES AND DESCRIPTIONS w *

INDICATING PICTURE:

Picture 1: Miss Alice Blake, the “Angel of Trementina” in her younger years. *

Picture 2: Painting of Trementina Church by Mary Frances Gonzales, also New Testament, hymnal and prayer book. *

Picture 3: Trementina Church in later years. *

Picture 4: Flat benches where crops were grown along Trementina Creek. *

Picture 5: Trementina Church and several houses still roofed and standing. *

Picture 6: Abelino Estrada at age 86. *

Picture 7: Not a roof remaining in a later photo of the Trementina Church and houses. *

Picture 8: The “Angel of Trementina,” Miss Alice Blake in her later years. *

Pictures 9 and 10: Charlie Middleton finds a small prayer book in the mission ruins and a close up of the three books (inset). *

PLACES AND THINGS PROMINENTLY
MENTIONED w * INDICATING PICTURE:

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Bell Ranch

Chacon, New Mexico

Charles Ilfeld Company, Las Vegas, New Mexico *

Corazon Hill

Cuervo, New Mexico

Denver, Colorado

Guadalupita, New Mexico

Las Vegas, New Mexico

Meadow City, New Mexico

Mora, New Mexico

Pablo Montoya Grant

Presbyterian Church in Las Vegas, New Mexico

Presbyterian Women's Board of Home Missions

Rociada, New Mexico

Sanchez Mill, Mora, New Mexico

Sapello Creek

Trementina Church *

Trementina Creek

Trementina, New Mexico *

THE TRUE WEST

Frontier Times

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January, 1973

KING
OF THE
YUKON

50¢

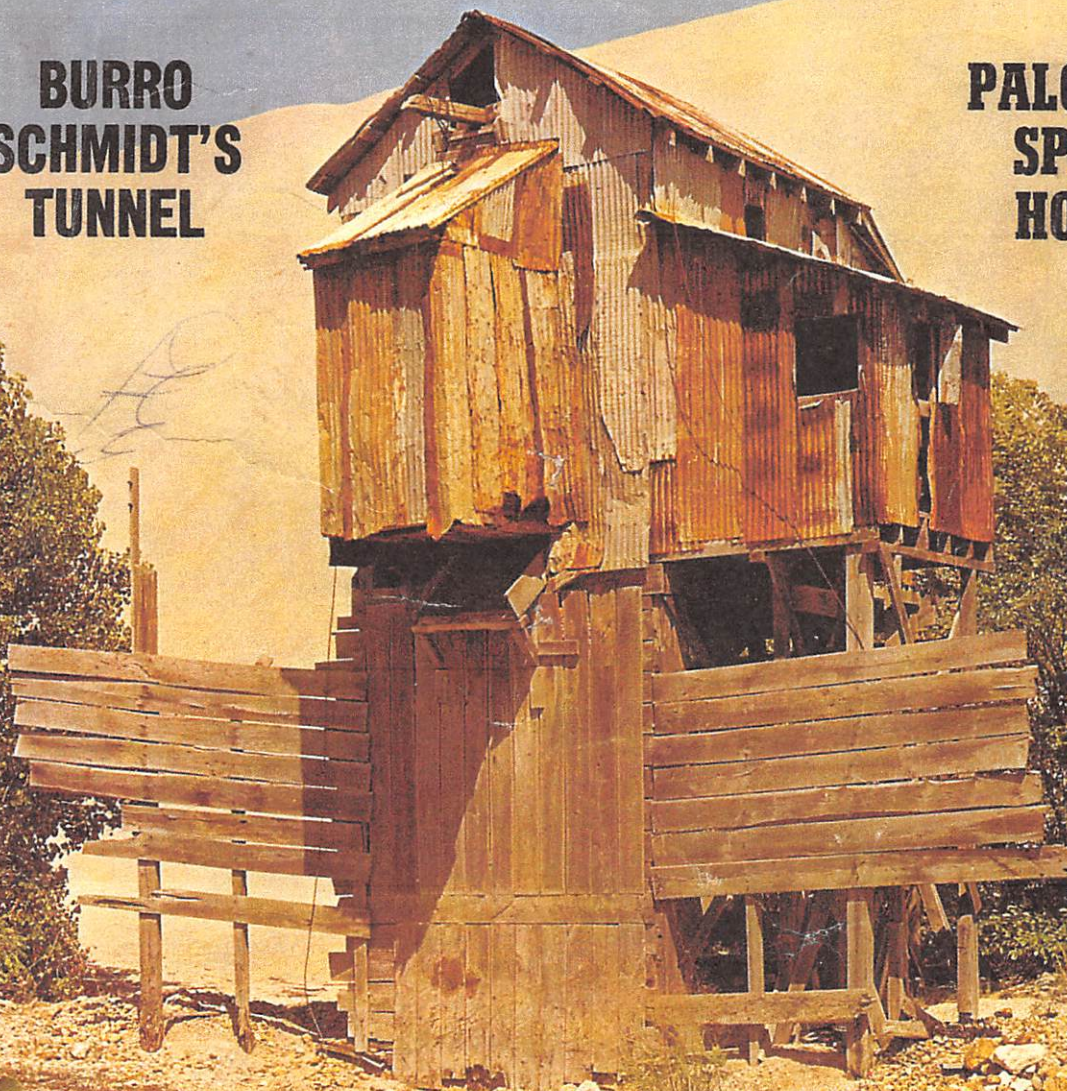
GHOST TOWN OF THE INDIANS



GHOST TOWN & MINING SPECIAL!

BURRO
SCHMIDT'S
TUNNEL

PALOMINO
SPIRIT
HORSE



TERRIBLE JIM McLAUGHLIN

CHRIST

IN BULLFROG

M193876 3772-12 FEB 73
DR
UT 84

BY S. OMAR BARKER

Photos Courtesy Author

TUMBLING WALLS and scattered stones. Look upon them, wander among them and marvel. Pause at a low, doorless doorway; peer into utter emptiness. Surely the advanced disintegration of these ruins must measure back a hundred, even two hundred years. Incredibly, this is not so.

Trementina, ghost of a village and of a mission, dead though it is, has not been dead so long. There are still many who remember, some of them born there and not yet old. Among the older ones is Abelino Estrada, now living in Las Vegas, New Mexico with his wife Rosa. At eighty-six Don Abelino is a gray-haired, genial gentleman with a rich store of memories and that ineradicable look of the sun-country outdoors.

Except for the kind cooperation of Reverend Julián Durán and Abelino's sons, Gabriel and Tony, and Tony's wife, Emma, it is from Abelino's own reminiscences that I trace this tale of the Trementina.

The ruins are spread on a stone-bodied ridge and gentle slope fifty miles east of Las Vegas, and about a mile off State Road 65. This is "below the mesa," which means about 1,500 feet lower than the Meadow City. Here, in 1898, the Presbyterian Women's Board of Home Missions began to set up a mission consisting of a school, a hospital, a church, a community house and a laundry, all built of random-shaped flat stones with adobe mortar and plaster. Originally a settlement of only two or three houses, Trementina soon grew into a village of some thirty families who came to be near the mission school which, at its peak, enrolled as many as seventy-five pupils.

Inspiration for the mission and its location, as well as its nurse, teacher and general overseer for over thirty years, was Miss Alice Blake. There was great warmth and respect in Abelino Estrada's voice as he told me about her.

"Although the church had many fine minister-missionaries through the years," he said, "it was Miss Blake who was the guiding star and mistress of the mission. She had a hand in its business affairs; she helped her teacher-assistants in the two-room school; she was nurse and doctor in the hospital; she served as postmaster. She conducted services when no minister could be here. She led us in hymns in both Spanish and English. In 1901 she headed off a diphtheria epidemic with a new medicine, anti-toxin. She was truly a kind and great lady."

In my own boyhood I had known "Allie" Blake, since her family lived up-canyon from ours on Sapello Creek. I remember her as somewhat chubby, with rosy cheeks, lots of energy, an alert sparkle in her eyes, and a firm manner of speaking. She taught school at Rociada while still in her teens, then entered the work of rural missions to which, except for time out to qualify as a registered nurse and graduate teacher, she dedicated almost her entire courageous, big-hearted life.

There was a time of snow, belly-deep to a horse, when Reverend Gabino Rendón on a visit to Trementina asked Abelino to take him to Las Vegas to catch a train for a church meeting in Santa Fe.

"I'm sorry," Abelino told him, "but even a four-horse team couldn't pull a wagon up Corazón Hill and across the mesa snowdrifts to Vegas. But if you think you could catch a train at Cuervo—"

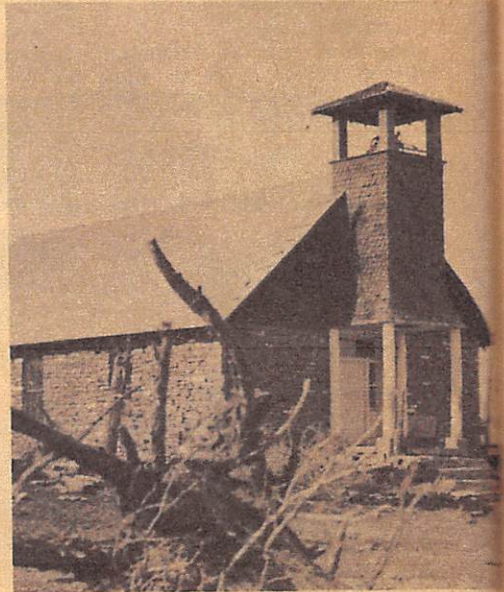
Cuervo was forty miles away across low hills and meandering arroyos. With four horses hitched to a light wagon, the two men were ready to set out when Miss Blake came hurrying out of her cottage with a small carpetbag.

"She wouldn't listen that we might get

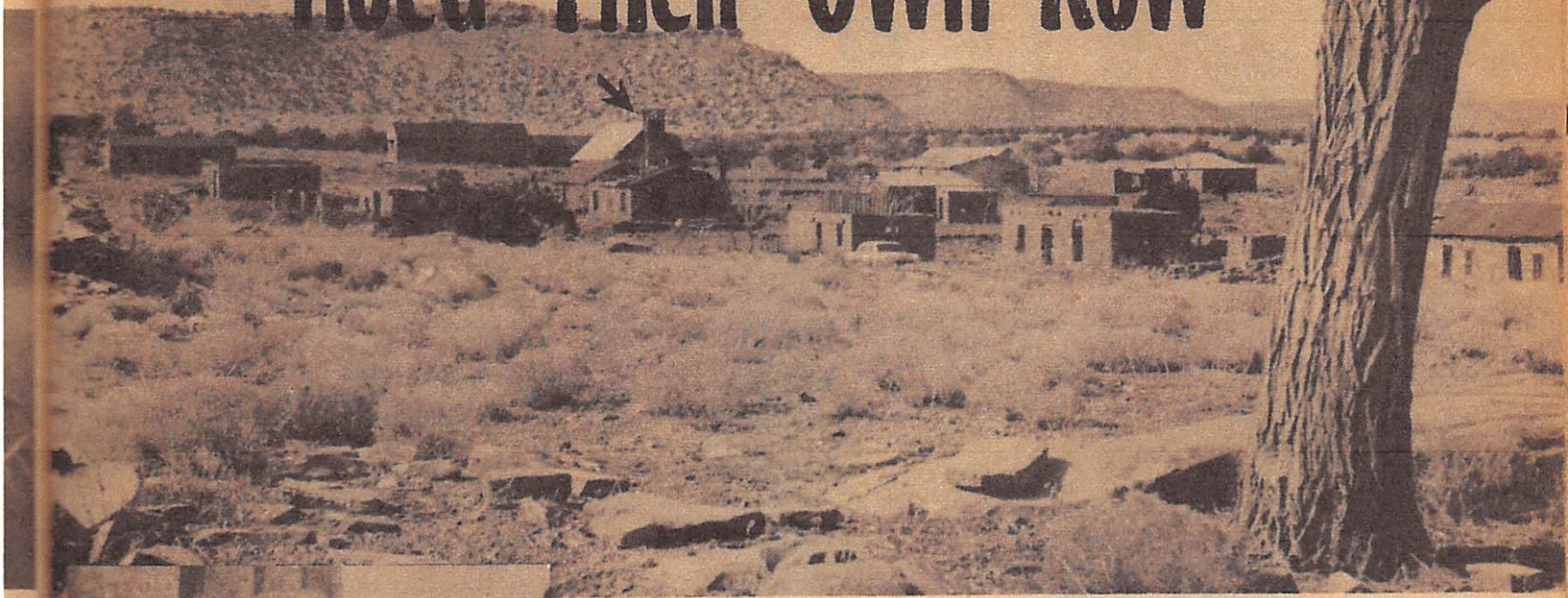
stranded in the snow," Abelino recalls. "She was determined to attend that Presbytery to seek support for her mission, and nothing could stop her. The snow was so deep that the wagon axle pushed it up on the horses' heels, but *gracias a Dios*, we made it."

ALICE BLAKE was born in Iowa in 1867. In Denver in 1950, her funeral services were conducted by Reverend Al-

Opposite page: Trementina church (arrow), and several houses still roofed, standing about 1959. Bottom (left): One of the flat benches along Trementina Creek where the Trementinians once raised watermelons and sorghum cane; (right) Not a roof remaining in 1972 photo. Middle (left): Painting of Trementina Church by Mary Frances Gonzales, also New Testament, worm-eaten hymnal and prayer book discovered in the ruins about 1960; (next) The second church still in use about 1959; (right) Abelino Estrada at age 86. Top: Miss Alice Blake, the "Angel of Trementina" in her younger years.



Trementinans Hoed Their Own Row



And they still do! The town may be in ruins but ghosts aren't needed. Some of its original citizens are still around...

fonso Esquibel whom she had befriended as a boy, and who is now co-pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Las Vegas. Alice Blake's mission work merits a story of its own. This, for now, is mainly a tale of Trementina folks and their way of life as recalled by Mr. Estrada.

Although adjacent to the huge Pablo Montoya Grant, this area was not grant land. Its settlers were homesteaders. Among the earliest were the Bleas and Abelino's parents, Julián and Gonzalita Gonzales de Encinias Estrada, who homesteaded in 1872 a few miles south at Variadero where Abelino was born in 1885. Still retaining their original land, they moved to Trementina about 1892.

"Nobody rich, everybody worked hard, nobody went hungry," Abelino told me. "A few horses, some cows, sheep or goats to pasture the grasslands. On the random low benches of fertile land strung out along Trementina Creek we raised corn, beans, *chile*, watermelons, tomatoes, and most of all, sorghum cane."

"Cane?" In this altitude and latitude it seemed to me incredible.

"*Seguro que sí!* A hardy variety, very juicy. From it we pressed the good Trementina molasses well known in those days. We used to haul barrels of it and other produce all the way up to Mora, Chacón, Guadalupe—all the higher country—to trade for wheat, potatoes,

apples or anything else we needed, even lumber. Nobody had money. It was all barter. Often when we traded for wheat we would have it ground on shares at the Sanchez mill in Mora. One time my father left Trementina with a barrel of molasses and came home driving a nice bunch of cows. He had traded off his whole outfit as well as the syrup. Sometimes one wagon would go alone, sometimes several in caravan, then split up to trade at different *placitas*. We got along as good neighbors—*nada de lucha*. Sometimes some of us also worked as cowboys on the big Bell Ranch nearby."

Once Abelino and his father were stranded at Chacón by a deep snowfall. Then a boy of fifteen, Abelino volunteered to go with a local boy not much older to rescue some snowbound horses far back in the mountains. It was a hazardous undertaking, but they found the horses and brought them in safely, so starved that they had eaten the hair off each other's tails.

Abelino was making trading trips on his own while still just a kid. With a chuckle he told me about one horse trade he was proud of. Camped in the wagon yard of the Charles Ilfeld Company in Las Vegas, he noticed that Juan Vigil of Guadalupe was driving an ill-matched team—one big horse and one little one.

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Trementina

(Continued from page 31)

"My team was also a big horse and a little one," Abelino recalled, "so I managed to trade him my big horse for his little one. Then we both had matched teams—and I got two good cows and two yearling heifers to boot!"

Some years, between breeding seasons, sheep owners as far away as Corona rented Trementina grazing for their *carneros* (bucks), even though driving them that distance sometimes took two months.

"It was not a time of hurrying," Abelino said. "Not an easy life, but we were happy. Our lives were made even happier by the coming of the mission. It brought so many of us close together, both in residence and in religious brotherhood. We found joy in hearing the Gospel and in singing the Lord's praise in our own language. The bell in the church tower [later stolen by vandals] made a heart-cheering sound in what had been a lonely land."

"The mission brought many young folks together, not only our own kids but others from some distance away. Some boarded at the mission; others lived with local families to attend the school. While much Spanish was used in religious serv-

Frontier Times

ices, Miss Blake saw to it that the kids learned English in school. I myself went through its six grades, preparing me for further schooling at Menaul School in Albuquerque. It was not a public school, but the mission charged no tuition, and no children were turned away. We were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, some history and nature study and, of course, the Scriptures. Miss Blake believed in strict discipline, but she and her assistant teachers were kind. They liked to have older students help the younger ones. Local women gave freely of their time for whatever work was needed to take care of the mission buildings, cleaning, renewing the mud plaster when needed, using their bare hands as trowels."

Abelino could not recall the names of the various teacher-missionary assistants through the years, and the only two names I have been able to verify are Laura Menvoor and Jean McConn.

"MISS BLAKE liked to organize socials," my friend continued. "Parties in the community house where we played games, sang songs and had fun together, young and old. Although she didn't very much favor dancing, *bailes* were not forbidden. Lots of time practically everybody old enough to walk and not too old to stand would dance for hours to guitars and fiddles."

"There was the time the mission bought a secondhand piano. A piano tuner came with it over seventy-six miles of rough road from Tucumcari. It arrived on a Sunday morning. Some of us had never seen a piano. While the tuner went to work, the community room filled up with people eager to see and hear the wonderful instrument. In his work clothes, shaggy hair and need of a shave you might have taken the tuner for a bum. But when he finished tuning, he sat at the piano, played and sang some of the old hymns in such a sweet voice that there were tears in many eyes."

"Let me tell you a story about Reverend Gabino Rendón. He was a leading minister-missionary who sometimes served Trementina. Gabino and I were close friends. One time when he was about eighty he became very sick at his home in Las Vegas. When I went to see him, he took my hand and said: 'Abelino, my brother, I must tell you I am on my deathbed. Soon the Lord will take me.'

"Don't talk foolish!" I told him. "I promise you I'll help celebrate your one hundredth birthday!" Well, Gabino was living in Denver when I received the invitation. My son Tony arranged to take me; but just three days before his hundredth birthday, my beloved Christian friend passed away. I was one of those who helped lay him to rest in Las Vegas."

FOR A LONG TIME, Abelino told me, water for both village and mission was laboriously hauled or carried from nearby Trementina Creek which is little more than a seep except in rainy weather. Later a well was dug for the mission. Not long after the first mission church burned, destroying all mission records, a new church was built with this dedi-

cation inscribed on a big stone at its entrance: *Erejido a la Memoria de Santiago Blea y Juana T. de Blea 1912.*" The Bleas had been loved and respected leaders in the community and had owned the land on which mission buildings stood—land now owned by Abelino's sister-in-law, Mrs. Jose L. Estrada.

At one time four families of Estradas resided at Trementina, those of Abelino, Juan, Julián, and José L. Among other respected Trementina names, either as ministers, elders or residents at one time or another were Córdova, Valdez, Durán, Castillo, Maes, Gonzales, Medina, Cruz, Salazar, Jaramillo, Valverde, Madrid, Sandoval, Apodaca, Esquibel, Encinias. Their many descendants, some of them born there, are now widely scattered, but their fond memories of Trementina seem to be unanimous.

Year after year crops failed during the dust bowl drouth of 1929 and the 1930s. No more delicious watermelons, no more molasses. Wagons drawn by grass-and-hay-fed horses were giving way to gasoline-fed automobiles that required money. Barter, even if there had been anything to trade, would no longer provide a living. One by one, families began moving away from the dying village and mission. With the change, Alice Blake retired and went to live out her last years in Denver.

"Thus it was finished," Abelino told me with a nostalgic sigh.

Reverend Julián Durán, now living in



The "Angel of Trementina," Miss Alice Blake in her later years.

Charlie Middleton finds a small prayer book in the mission ruins about 1959. Note size of the lone remaining viga overhead. Closeup of the three books (inset).



Albuquerque, succeeded Miss Blake and served as the last custodian of the mission from 1930 to 1933. His wife, Rosa, daughter of a former minister-missionary, Reverend Emeterio Cruz, had been one of the many Trementina babies brought into this world by Alice Blake.

Although the church continued in limited use until its dwindling congregation merged with the two Presbyterian churches in Las Vegas, the Trementina of "the good old days" was no more.

In 1959 Charlie and Nina Middleton and Elsa and I visited Trementina. The church still stood in fairly good order. One house was still occupied and there were still roofs on two or three others. But even then the mission ruins looked at least a hundred years old.

Poking among the rubble we unearthed a weathered New Testament, a Montgomery Ward catalogue, a very old prayer book with two inscriptions still legible: "Laura Menoor by M. E. E. S. Dec. 31, 1858" and "Estephania Elvira Gonzales," (no date), and a worm-eaten hymn book in which excellent Spanish versions of familiar hymns were still quite readable. Among them were *Tal Como Soy* ("Just As I Am"), *Estad Por Cristo Firmes* ("Stand up for Jesus"), *Díos Os Guarde* ("God Be with You"), and even *Nitido Rayo Por Cristo* ("I'll Be a Sunbeam").

On impulse we stood on the rim of Trementina Creek and sang a few Spanish hymns, trying to imagine how poignant they must have sounded in the worship of days gone by.

Now in 1972 the church itself and all buildings in the village are roofless, tumbled rubble. There have been several published articles about the "mysterious Trementina ruins." There is no mystery about them except why they have come to look so ancient in such a short time. The explanation is simple. Departing villagers, ranch neighbors from roundabout, and in many cases vandals, hauled away roofing, lumber, roof beams, doors, windows, even some building stones—everything usable elsewhere—leaving mud-mortared walls vulnerable to the weathering of sun, wind, rain, snow and frost. Time has taken its toll in an unbelievable hurry.

One minor mystery may still remain: whence came the village name? No one seems to know for sure, except that *trementina* (turpentine) is also New Mexico Spanish for the gum or resin exuding from all kinds of pine trees. In the old days this was often mixed with mutton tallow and used as a salve for chapped or work-roughened hands. There are *piñon* pines at Trementina, and up on the rimrock at the head of Trementina Creek there are many big Ponderosas oozing pine gum.

Whatever the reason for its musical name, Trementina brought a song to the hearts of the many good folk who called it home.

See Page 5