

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jabez William Churchill and Ida May Barkis

by Nancy T. Conzett - 2009

A tiny steep road in Salmon Creek that runs from in front of the cabin now called Ro-Co-By at Keefe and McChristian down to Bean is called Churchill Street. It was named for Jabez William Churchill. Pictured with his wife Ida May Barkis Churchill; they are my grandparents. Jabez was born in Stockton in 1863, Ida was originally from Kentucky, born in 1881. Married in Stockton in 1890, they had three children, Jabez Frank, Abbie Mae and Clara Elizabeth, my mother.



The family moved around California, starting in Stockton, living in Oakdale, Santa Rosa and Cotati. My mother used to refer to her father as a "little man". Her meaning indicated that he never achieved wealth, position or notoriety; that he farmed and he worked for others. Sometime around the first decade of the 1900s he brought the family to live in Cotati, where he worked in Ross' General Store. My mother married Robert M. Tapscott in the house there in 1917.

Sometime after that, because he suffered from what was called "Valley fever", the doctor suggested he move to the coast. He bought an outbuilding of the former Ocean View House at Salmon Creek - perhaps an old hen house - from George McChristian and built a home from its basis for him and Ida. Later he assisted McChristian with the installation of the first water system that served the small community of cottages that existed at the time. It originated from the well on the McChristian property.

Ida May died in 1925 (Ida May Barkis b: 7/11/1861 Kentucky - d: 9/15/25 Santa Rosa). I don't know how long Jabez lived in Salmon Creek after that; I do remember sitting on his bony knees on that front porch looking up at his lovely white hair with its prominent widow's peak in 1936 when I was three, the year he died in Santa Rosa at my uncle's home (b: 4/2/1863 Stockton - d: 12/29/36 Santa Rosa). That was also the year we began driving up from Marin County to spend summers at the cabin. We used the accessories he'd left behind - furniture, wood cooking-heating stove, pendulum clock (hasn't missed a beat in 108 years), kerosene lamps (electricity wasn't brought to Salmon Creek until around 1940-41) and, of course, the unforgettable outhouse.

Those of you who remember Amadeo Fomasi will appreciate what he said when I asked whether he remembered my grandfather. "Jabez? Yes ... I delivered some gravel to him once. He was a LITTLE man, wasn't he?" I'm just barely over five feet tall and I was looking down into Amadeo's big blue eyes as he recalled my tiny grandpa.