

OCCGS REFERENCE ONLY  
**MILDRED CARDOZA**  
 by Anne Williams

CARDOZA  
FAMILY

I first heard of Mildred **Cardoza** in 1999, when her daughter, Helen **Cardoza Banks**, contacted the City of Sonora about having a marker placed on her mother's grave in the Old City Cemetery. She had already had the worn stone on her father's grave replaced. The sexton of the city cemeteries could find no record of her burial, so he passed the request along to the Tuolumne County Genealogical Society.

I found three records of the burial, two obituaries, in *The Banner* and the *Tuolumne Independent*, and an item in the O'Beirne Funeral Home records, all stating that she was buried in the Old City Cemetery in Sonora, although the location of her grave is unknown.

I contacted Ed **Wyllie** of the Sonora Building and Planning Department, telling him of Helen **Banks'** desire and that I had given her his name as the person to contact concerning placement of the marker. Mr. **Wyllie** recommended to Helen that, since the location of her mother's grave was unknown, a plaque in her memory be placed near the entrance to the cemetery and in time this was done. The plaque reads:

In Memory of My Mother  
 Mildred SCHLENKER  
 CARDOZA  
 October 16, 1904 - March 30, 1929  
 YOU ARE LOVED

Since the only requirement for being included in this *Golden Roots* is burial in the Old City Cemetery in Sonora and we have proved that she is buried there, here is her story.

Mildred's maiden name was **Schlenker**, sometimes spelled **Schelinger** or **Schilenker**. She was born in Illinois about 1905. She had a younger sister, Dorothy, who was living in Cave City, Kentucky, and attending high school there in 1929, when Mildred died. A letter from Dorothy to her friend, **Bessie Seals**, in that same year mentions their father. She said that both she and Mildred had run away from home about the same time, but separately, and that she planned to come to California to be near Mildred's daughter. Mildred's marriage license notes that her father gave permission for her to marry since she was underage.

Mildred **Schlenker** of Merced, Merced County, was married to Anthony John **Cardoza** of Cathey's Valley, Mariposa County, in Merced November 1, 1921, by Frank M. **Farrar**, Justice of the Peace. Tony was 25 years old and Mildred was 17. James T. **Schlenker**, a resident of Merced, was a witness. Her parents, given on her death certificate, were James **Schilenker** and **Carrie Bremmer**. Since the spelling of the last name on the marriage license must have been given by those who would have known, I accept as fact that the name was spelled **Schlenker**.

Helen Mildred **Cardoza**, daughter of Mildred and Tony, was born in the Merced County Hospital July 31, 1922.

Mildred wrote a letter February 3, 1929, return address, "L. Smith General Hospital, French Camp", to **Bessie (Seals)** saying she expects to leave there to go to Tuolumne in a few days, that she is feeling good and sends love to **Bessie** and baby **Helen**. She had, several years previously, been in a sanitarium in **Murphys**, Calaveras County.

Mildred **Cardoza** died in Sonora, Wednesday, March 20, 1929, of tuberculosis and pneumonia. She was a widow, 24 years old, and left a six-year-old daughter, who was living with Mr. and Mrs. **John D. Seals** in Yosemite Valley. Helen has a vague memory of her mother's funeral, remembering being "on a hill, but the graves that were not covered with headstones were between two little mounds."

Helen's grandmother, **Anna Cardoza** petitioned the Mariposa County Court on April 15, 1929, to be appointed her guardian. The action was denied when **Bessie Seals** presented a sworn statement to the court that the **Seals** along with Helen, were residing in Merced County, and therefore the Mariposa County court had no jurisdiction over her.

On September 2, 1942, Mrs. J. D. Seals (Bessie) signed a sworn deposition in Merced County, stating that "during the year 1924 I took care of Helen Mildred **Cardoza**. This care was part time in my own home. From September 1926 until the death of Mrs. Mildred **Cardoza** in March of 1929, I took care of Helen Mildred **Cardoza** in my own home on a full time basis. At the time of the death of Mrs. Mildred **Cardoza**, she requested that I take her daughter, Helen, and bring her up. I have adhered to this request and raised her in my own home as my daughter. She assumed our family name, hence the difference between the name on her birth certificate and her application for employment."

Anthony John **Cardoza** was born January 15, 1896, in Cathey's Valley, to Jose Coelho **Cardoza** and Anna Fagundes **Cardoza**. Jose, or Joseph, was born in the Azore Islands. Two dates have been found for his birth--May, 1844 and March, 1849, the later from the 1900 census. His father's name was Antonio **Ramos**. The name **Cardoza** comes from that of a thistle plant, *cardo* in Portuguese. By 1875 he was in California and became a citizen in Mariposa County. He worked first as a shepherd. With frugality and hard work he accumulated his own flock and filed for a homestead in Cathey's Valley, Mariposa County. As he prospered he bought adjacent land and in time owned 811 acres, which contained several good springs.

Because he had prospered he was able to sponsor other people from the Azores to come to America. One of these was Anna **Fagundes**, born in June 1859 in the Azores, daughter of Frank L. and Mary Santos **Fagundes**. It was understood that the sponsors would be reimbursed in money or, if the young woman so chose, by marriage. Joseph and Anna were married in Hornitos, Mariposa County, November 6, 1882. Joseph was 33 and Anna was 23. They lived in a little cabin on Joseph's homestead in Cathey's Valley. Two of Anna's sisters had previously come to the area and lived nearby. Joaquina and Mary had married two brothers: Joaquina to Joseph **Gordo** and Mary to his brother, Antone.

Joseph and Anna had 12 children; Mary Agnes, born December 30, 1883; Anna, who died as a small child; Joseph; and then Annie; John, 1888; Minnie, 1891; Frank, 1892; Louisa, 1894; Antonio, 1896; Manuel, 1897; Isabelle, 1900; and Bernard, November 23, 1901. All the children were strong and healthy except for Manuel, who was afflicted with seizures from birth.

Joseph was a farsighted man and was always looking for ways to improve life for his family. Because there was no school nearby he collaborated with the county for the building of a schoolhouse. He would furnish the land, build the school and provide water if the county would provide a teacher and books. It was located on the southwest corner of the **Cardoza** property near what is now Highway 140 and was known as the Orange District school. All of their children, as well as their cousins and the other children in the area, received their education at this school.

When the family began to outgrow the original house, Joseph purchased and dismantled a rooming house and used the lumber to enlarge their home. A grandson, Earl C. **Gordo**, remembers his grandparents home as having a long dining table with benches that would seat 20 people, to accommodate the family and workers on the ranch, and that a shady porch surrounded it on three sides.

Directly to the north of their property was the road to Indian Gulch, earlier a small mining district, at this time a thriving community with stores, a post office, a school and a church. Joseph and Anna's little daughter, Anna, was buried in the cemetery near the little Catholic Church there. This historic church, although in time removed to Mariposa to the County Historical Center, was destroyed by fire.

Antone, or Tony, was the tallest child in the family and the only one to inherit his father's gray eyes. He was interested in photography and took and developed his own pictures. He was the only member of the family to serve in World War I.



Antone **Cardoza**

He registered for the draft on June 5, 1917, at Mariposa, when he was 21. His physical description stated he was tall and slender, with brown eyes and dark brown hair. At the time he registered, he was single and working as a farmer for his father in Cathey's Valley. Tony sent a post card to his sister, Annie, showing the camp on Angel Island where he was stationed, dated March 9, 1918, saying he did not know how long they would be



Army camp on Angel Island during World War I

there. Angel Island, in San Francisco bay, was a recruit camp during World War I. The official armistice date for that war is November 11, 1918. Helen has no other knowledge of her father's service record, but believes he served in France.

Four years later Tony married Mildred. They spent their honeymoon at Indian Gulch, which must have been a boomtown at the time. A year later, a little daughter, Helen, was born to them. Something went wrong with this marriage and Mildred left, taking Helen with her.

On June 16, 1925, Tony **Cardoza** was hit by a train in Los Angeles and killed. He was buried in the family plot in the Winton Cemetery in Merced County. At that time Mildred **Cardoza** was living in Merced. One of Helen's early memories of her mother was that, true to her German heritage her hands were always busy with crocheting or tatting, and friends admired the handmade lace on Helen's clothes. She also remembers a trip to Arizona to visit her mother's parents. They were displeased because of Mildred's, so called, mixed racial marriage.

Helen had no contact with relatives while living with the Seals and using their name. When she was in her early twenties, married and pregnant, and living in Merced, she worked for Montgomery Ward. Her department head, when he learned her name, contacted her uncle, John **Cardoza**, whom he knew. Her Uncle John convinced her to visit her grandmother, now living in Merced, who spoke no English. It was a difficult meeting because, having heard slurs on her Portuguese blood most of her life, she did not now want to hear the same of her German blood. After making her feelings known, there were no more problems. She was able to develop close relationships with some of her father's family, especially with her cousin, Elvera **Alcorn**, with whom she spent many hours pursuing the family's history, and was even induced to attend the annual family reunion held in Cathey's Valley. Because of this Helen developed great respect for her Portuguese emigrant ancestors, for their gentle spirit, strong work ethic and family unity. When her grandmother died she received her father's portion of the estate. Joseph **Cardoza** died December 12, 1922; Anna lived until May 22, 1950. They are buried in the Winton Cemetery.

She is also proud of her German heritage and regrets she knows so little about her mother's family.

Helen **Cardoza** married Robert E. **Condit** in Merced on November 6, 1943. They had two children, Irene Rose and Robert Edward. After 26 years this marriage ended. Twelve years later on May 29, 1982, Helen married her high school sweetheart, William **Banks**, a member of a pioneer family of Le Grand in Merced County. Helen worked all her adult life, including, for a

long period of time, for the Health Department in Stockton. She retired in 1982 after her marriage. Bill Banks died in 1988.

Sources: 1. Many letters from Helen Banks. 2. County of Merced, Marriage License, #105937, November 1, 1921; Birth Certificate #78; July 31, 1922. State of California Death Certificate #25-027465, June 16, 1925. 3. County of Tuolumne, Death Certificate #41, March 20, 1929. 4. County of Mariposa, Draft Registration #445, June 5, 1917. 5. Mariposa County Federal Census Records, 1900, 1910, 1920. 6. Mariposa County Great Register 1890. 7. Mariposa County Land Records, August 2, 1885; September 26, 1924; October 8, 1924. 8. County of Merced Sworn Statement signed by Mrs. J. D. Seals, September 2, 1942. 9. Gudde, Erwin G., *California Gold Camps*. 10. *Tuolumne Independent*, March 28, 1929, *The Banner*, March 22, 1929, obituary Mildred Cardoza. 11. O'Beirne Funeral Home Record, p 62, Statement Mildred Cardoza funeral, Estate Mildred Cardoza paid in full June 11, 1929. 12. Copy of letter from City of Sonora, Edward J. Wyllie, Community Development Director to Helen Banks, June 21, 1999. 13. Post Card, March 19, 1918, from Tony Cardoza, Fort McDowell, Angel Island to Annie Cardoza, Hornitos, Mariposa County. 14. Letter from Mildred Cardoza, French Camp, to Bessie Seals, Sonora, February 3, 1929. 15. Letter from Dorothy Schlenker, Cave City, Kentucky, to Bessie Seals, Raymond, California, November 5, 1929. 16. Mariposa County Courthouse and Mariposa County Library, copies of the Cardoza guardianship action in the Mariposa County Court, April 15-29, 1929. *Christine Claire--My Story*, by Christine C. Kirk, Merced, California, a Cardoza family cousin of Helen Banks. 17. Letter from Earl C. Gordo, Cathey's Valley, California, a Cardoza relative of Helen Banks.



## OLIVER COWAN AND FAMILY

by Anne Williams

I am indebted to Diane Cowan Leonardo, great granddaughter of Oliver Cowan, who contributed important material to this article.

Oliver Cowan was born in New York State on July 28, 1826. His parents were John Cowan and Sarah (Sally) Harding. His grandparents were David Cowan and Esther Leighton.

In 1832 John Cowan purchased 80 acres of land in the Barr Oak settlement in Van Buren Township, Indiana, near the Michigan border, after the U. S. Government had signed a treaty with the Pottawatomie Indians in 1828, opening the La Grange area to settlers. In 1835 he purchased another 80 acres. Enoch Leighton purchased 80 acres in the same area. The land was heavily wooded with hardwood trees and contained many small lakes.

John and Sarah Cowan had three sons: Oliver; Merinus (1828 NY--1912, bur. Greenwood Cemetery, La Grange, IN); and David. John Cowan died June 18, 1845, at 45, and is buried in the Eagley Cemetery in Van Buren Township, with other members of the Cowan and Leighton families, who remained in Indiana. John's father, David Cowan, born March 22, 1757, was a private in Co. L of the Mary, Rhode Island troops in the Revolutionary War. He died July 24, 1851.

Oliver Cowan came by wagon train from Indiana to Tuolumne County early in the Gold Rush. His cousin, Elisha Leighton, also came to California and settled on the coast at Pescadero.

The first record of Oliver in the county is in the 1854 tax assessors records, showing that he owned property in Brown's Flat and Sonora, including real property valued at \$300, personal property at \$1400 and improvements of \$1700. By 1858 he owned five lots in Sonora comprising



Sarah Harding Cowan