

VENTURA COUNTY *Showcase*

Realtor recalls historic local pranksters

BY WENDY DAGER
SPECIAL TO STAR HOMES

Many people are under the impression that the precursor of modern television shows such as "Punk'd" and "Impractical Jokers" was "Candid Camera," the TV staple that baby boomers and their parents remember fondly.

But a few decades before Allen Funt hid his first camera in the 1940s and waited to record the reaction of the hapless victim of his practical joke, there were the Oliver brothers of Somis.

Way back in the 1920s, the brothers, John and George, and their friend Lee White, were bored on a quiet Sunday, and didn't have anything to do. So, according to the late Art Mahan, an early Somis rancher who passed down the story to his daughter Gwyn Goodman, the three young men decided to make some mischief.

"They caught a bobcat," said Goodman. "Then they put it in a suitcase."

And what to do with a bobcat in a suitcase? Why, put the suitcase on the roadside curve of Highway 23 going toward Fillmore, then hide behind the trees to see what happens.

"Cars kept going by—one, two, three, four... then one stopped," said Goodman.

One of the men inside the vehicle, apparently hoping for a windfall, leapt out, picked up the suitcase, tossed it inside the car, got back in, and the car took off.

"About 50 yards down the road, everybody came flying out of the car," said Goodman. "And that was the Oliver boys' Sunday fun."

Gwyn Goodman of Goodman Realty, Inc. is a lifelong resident of Somis and has plenty of fascinating stories to share about the town and its surrounding areas. As a member of one of Somis' founding families, she not only knows the community well, but also enjoys telling tales of days past.

The Oliver brothers were area ranchers who owned land on Stockton Road and were part of a tight-knit community of those who worked hard and sometimes played a little rough—as shown in the bobcat story. They often entertained their friends and neighbors on the porch while George's wife Mabel cooked and cleaned in



George Oliver, left, and Johnny, his brother, are seen here with George's wife Mabel, center.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GWYN GOODMAN

the kitchen.

"Mabel sometimes complained because she wasn't having any fun," said Goodman. "But I remember her well and she was a very lovely woman."

With a vast archive of vintage photos that include subjects with familiar pioneer names such as Mahan, Bernard, McElhane, Duncombe and more, Goodman notes that Somis and Moorpark—once homesteads with tents and

other rustic structures—have grown into thriving cities, thanks to the legacy of these families.

Today, the town of Somis remains a simpler way of everyday life. Located in the heart of a prime agricultural area of Ventura County, it merges rural with suburban as it segues gently into Highway 118 to connect with the city of Moorpark.

Like Somis, Moorpark is a desirable place to live and work, and, in addition to single-family

dwellings, it has agricultural property available for those who wish to live the country life, but still have access to city amenities.

Goodman specializes in assisting clients who buy and cell citrus and avocado properties in the Somis and Moorpark areas. To contact Gwyn Goodman of Goodman Realty, Inc., call 987-6695 or e-mail ggoodmanrealty@aol.com. Visit her on the web at www.gwyngoodman.com.