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Saying good-bye to a Clarksville treasure



Madeleine Petersen Mosely, seen here in Clarksville in 2008, grew up in the Gold Rush community on the south side of El Dorado Hills. Photo by Mike Roberts

El Dorado Hills lost a pioneer on Oct. 3 when Madeleine Petersen Mosely died peacefully in her home.

Madeleine's unique connection to El Dorado Hills — a place she never lived — is through the hardscrabble ranch hamlet Clarksville, which provided basic roadside amenities for travelers between Sacramento and Placerville from the Gold Rush into the 1960s.

Now a ghost town, the remains of Clarksville lie hidden beneath oak trees on private property, but can be seen in part from Highway 50 south of the Bass Lake Grade, the most notable feature being a Kinkadee-worthy red barn nestled into the pastoral viewscape.

At this point Madeleine would interrupt. “Everyone calls it a barn but that’s my school!”

And she’d be right. The barn was formerly Clarksville Union School, organized in 1869. Madeleine was in its final graduating class, circa 1940.

phone and electrical service until the mid-1940s, the Petersen Café, had a generator, a pay phone and a reliable vehicle. It became the community provisioner, message center, relief agency and social center.

Madeleine was Clarksville’s “Gal Friday” from 1937 to 1952. For most of that time she ran the only business in town, a combination gas station, store, beer and burger joint known as the Petersen Café. In a place lacking

Arthur Petersen bought the business, which included a grand, two-story home on the property, to get his asthmatic daughter Madeleine out of the San Francisco fog. Highway 50 ran right by the front door at the time. Business was good at first.

His wife Cruzita didn’t adjust to the isolation and rigors of rural life well, however. She became despondent and within a year of their arrival, argued with her husband, walked out the door and was struck and killed on the highway.

The job of identifying the body fell to 11-year-old Madeleine, who demonstrated the strength of character that became her hallmark.

Highway 50 moved to the current alignment in 1941, bypassing (and dooming) Clarksville. Again, the Petersens persevered. Arthur tended bar in Folsom to make ends meet, leaving his daughter to

mind the store.

The family's next travail came in 1948, when a spark from the well pump ignited the family home. Madeleine and Arthur fought futilely, then watched their home burn to the ground.

Their ill fortunes continued on Oct. 12, 1949 when a nervous 20-year-old walked in the café, robbed 22-year-old Madeleine of roughly \$25 and fatally shot the man seated beside her. The bullet missed Madeleine by a couple inches.

Madeleine married Johnny Mosely and left Clarksville, but became its loudest cheerleader, keeping tabs on the ranch families, organizing reunion picnics and when the Clarksville Region Historical Society formed in 2006, making sure it fully appreciated Clarksville's rich history.

Madeleine remained active in the society until the end, attending a presentation just five days before her death.

For the past two years wide-eyed Oak Ridge High School history students have enjoyed unofficial field trips to Clarksville with Madeleine, who provided a vivid picture of pre-El Dorado Hills life.

The longtime Folsom resident was much beloved in her adopted community. She regularly attended City Council meetings and had opinions on matters of consequence. Following her death, a commemorative plaque was placed on Madeleine's favorite seat in council chambers.

A well-heeled crowd of about 75, including the entire City Council, witnessed a moving graveside service by St. John's pastor, Fr. Sylvester Kwiatkowski, at Lakeside Memorial Lawn Cemetery on Oct 12.

Madeleine told her story to Access El Dorado's Bill Thorpe in a 2010 video titled "Madeleine Petersen Mosely Remembers Clarksville," which is airing on Comcast channel 18 and accesseldorado.com. View it at youtu.be/SDeDmXT-o2I.