

Chapter Three

THE RINDGE FAMILY

Frederick Hastings Rindge was the only surviving son of six children of the Rindge family of Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1883 he inherited his father's estate which was in excess of \$2 million. Four years later he married 22-year old Rhoda May Knight, and in the same year they moved to California.

In 1892 Frederick Hastings Rindge and May K. Rindge, the fourth and last owners of the entire Malibu Rancho, purchased this 13,330-acre Spanish Land Grant. They later expanded the ranch to 17,000 acres. It was the paradise Mr. Rindge had searched for in all his travels throughout the United States and Europe.

With the purchase of Rancho Malibu, Mr. Rindge realized his dream of the ideal country home: "A farm near the ocean, under the lee of the mountains, with a trout brook, wild trees, a lake, good soil, and excellent climate, one not too hot in summer." He built a large ranch house in Malibu Canyon (beneath present-day Serra Retreat) to serve as a headquarters for his Malibu Rancho. It was a working cattle and grain-raising ranch which through the many years of the Rindge dynasty was to become one of the most valuable large real estate holdings in the United States.

Mr. Rindge was a philosopher, poet, writer, and man of deep spirituality who loved to ride the reaches of his ranch, dream dreams and make plans. In 1898 he wrote a book, *HAPPY DAYS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA*, in which he recounts his interesting and spiritually satisfying experiences of living on his Malibu ranch, an experience which he envisioned Malibu as an "American Riviera," rivaling the seaside showplaces of Italy and France which he had visited.

The Rindge family consisted of three children: Samuel Knight Rindge, Frederick Hastings Rindge, Jr., and Rhoda Agatha Rindge. Their town residence was at 2263 Harvard Boulevard in Los Angeles and their ranch home was in Malibu Canyon which they visited on week-ends and parts of the summer when they were not vacationing in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

In 1903 their Malibu Canyon home was destroyed by a disastrous brush fire. Following the fire, the family built temporary tent houses and a cabin to provide kitchen and dining room for their Malibu accommodations.

Their idyllic days came to an abrupt stop two years later when Frederick Hastings Rindge died at the age of 48. He had accomplished much during his relatively short life. Soon after moving to California he donated land and funds to his native city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, for a public library, a city hall and an industrial school which later became known as the Rindge Technical School. In California he founded the Conservative Life Insurance Company which is now Pacific Mutual. He was a vice-president of Union Oil Company and a director of the Los Angeles Edison Electric Company (later Southern California Edison Company). His land investments

included reclamation of bottom lands near Stockton and real estate holdings in the San Fernando Valley, in Los Angeles, and in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico.

As a staunch supporter of the temperance movement, Frederick Hastings Rindge was an unrelenting foe of the "Demon Rum." He agreed to reimburse the treasury of the city of Santa Monica any deficit caused by the loss of saloon license fees when Santa Monica abolished saloons. He was President of the Harvard Club of Los Angeles and a member of many historical, archaeological, patriotic, and religious organizations which mirrored his interests. He established the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Santa Monica and wrote several books which were spiritual and meditative in nature.

May Knight Rindge had been a school teacher in Trenton, Michigan with a strong religious upbringing and beliefs. Following her husband's death in 1905 she took over the management of her husband's business affairs including the Malibu Ranch. She was involved in a number of bitter battles over nearly a quarter of a century in trying to keep Malibu intact. Her indefatigable spirit in these controversies earned her the legendary title of "Queen of the Malibu" from the press.

At the beginnings of her struggles, she was a widow with three teenage children. Toward the end, when the Coast Highway finally was built through her ranch, she was a 65-year old grandmother still intent on having a self-sustaining kingdom by the sea. To this end she started construction in 1928 of a great 50-room house on "Laudamus Hill" in Malibu Canyon overlooking the sea. There were to be three wings included; one for each of her three children and their families.

The same year she constructed a dam to store the precious water from Malibu Creek for use on the ranch. A few years earlier, she started Malibu Potteries (See Chapter Five) in an attempt to bring added revenue to her dwindling estate. Tiles made at Malibu Potteries were used extensively in the Rindge Castle on "Laudamus Hill" as well as in the ocean-front beach house built on "Vaquero Hill" (present Malibu Lagoon Museum) by her only daughter, Rhoda Rindge Adamson.

Over one-half million dollars in lumber, concrete, marble, tile and hand-carved mahogany were expended between 1929 and 1932 for her hill-top citadel by the sea. Due to financial problems the mansion was never finished.

May K. Rindge died on February 8, 1941, at the age of 76. At the time of her death, her precious land was still in insolvency and she was practically without funds.

Her unfinished "castle" ai-id its 26 acres along with thousands of beautiful Malibu Potteries tiles, stored in crates, were sold in 1942 to the Franciscan Order for \$50,000 to become the Serra Retreat House. In 1970 the house and most of its irreplaceable tile were destroyed by a catastrophic brush fire pushed by the dreaded "Santa Ana" winds, which Mr. Rindge described in his book as:

"... the fierce autumn wind storms, - dreaded, to be sure, but zephyrs, compared with cyclones. Three days they blow, and often precede a rain."

The Franciscan Order rebuilt and continue to operate Serra Retreat as a haven of peace in the midst of modern-day California.

Though defeated by the pressures of population and progress (See Chapter Four), May K. Rindge left a legacy of spirit and courage that marks her as one of California's history-shaping women.

THE ADAMSON FAMILY

May K. Rindge's only daughter, Rhoda, as President of the Marblehead Land Company, regained what was left of the fabulous Rindge Ranch. Marblehead Land Company was the corporation formed in 1921 to operate the Rindge Ranch.

Rhoda Agatha Rindge grew up in Los Angeles but spent many happy days at the Malibu Ranch. She attended Wellesley College (where her parents had enrolled her at birth) for a year before returning to her beloved Malibu. Four years later, in 1915, she married Merritt Huntley Adamson. They had three children: Rhoda-May Adamson (Dallas), Sylvia Rindge Adamson (Neville) and Merritt Huntley Adamson, Jr.

Merritt Huntley Adamson, Sr. had grown up in Arizona and was the son of a rancher and legislator. The northern boundary of the Adamsons' ranch touched the Havasupai Indian Reservation and Merritt was made a blood brother of that tribe. Thus, the origin of his nickname "Smoke" by which he was known for the rest of his life.

He attended the University of Southern California where he became captain of the last rugby football team on the campus. After graduating from the USC Law School and passing the Bar, he became Superintendent on the Malibu Ranch of Frederick Hastings Rindge.

Merritt's interest centered in animal husbandry and dairying and so did Rhoda's. Following their marriage, the Adamsons founded the Adohr Stock Farm as a model dairy to supply Los Angeles with the purest of milk. They reversed the spelling of "Rhoda" in christening their dairy operation, "Adohr." Their eldest daughter, Rhoda-May, was the first "Adohr-able Baby," for their advertising campaign.

By 1926 Adohr Creamery Company products were distributed throughout Los Angeles County and Adohr stock and products consistently won many top awards year after year. For many years, Mr. Adamson was a Director of the California State Board of Agriculture and a member of the National Certified Milk Producers' Association.

The Adamsons built a beach house in 1929 on land given them by Rhoda's mother. The site was Vaquero Hill-so called because a cowboy shack once stood there. (This is the site of the present Malibu Lagoon Museum.) They used the home as a beach house maintaining their permanent home in the Hancock Park area of Los Angeles from 1924 to 1936. In 1936 the beach home became their permanent residence.

Rhoda, like her mother, had a strong influence on Malibu's future. She served the family interests with the same spirit and dogged determination which earned her a place of prominence in the history of Malibu. Like her mother she too had to take over the management of the family business. After her husband's death in 1949, she became President of Adohr Milk Farms.

Since her husband had been on the Board of Directors of Marblehead Land Company, she assumed his position also. By June of 1951 all the debts had been paid following the reorganization of the company. The remaining 4,000 acres (out of the Rindges' original 17,000 acres) reverted to Marblehead Land Company of which Rhoda Adamson was president.

Until her death in 1962, she remained at the helm of both the Adohr Milk Farms and the Marblehead Land Company. She proved a capable businesswoman, coping with many family as well as business responsibilities. It was under her able direction that Malibu affairs moved out of the shadow of the depression into the light of glowing achievement. The family businesses are now operated by her three heirs under the name The Adamson Companies.

Earthly paradises are fragile things often fought for with fervor to preserve. On the heels of her husband's death May K. Rindge was immediately plunged into a struggle to keep various interests from gaining access across her ranch land. The conflict occurred with the railroad builders and then the highway builders. The following chapter tells how she dealt with each, changing the course of her lifestyle and ultimately the course of the development of Southern California.