

Eleanor Cavitt, matriarch of pioneer ranching family dies

By Robert D. Dávila, Sacramento Bee

Eleanor M. Cavitt, matriarch of a historic Northern California ranching family, died March 22 in Sacramento. She was 103.

Mrs. Cavitt was the widow of James Henry Cavitt, whose family traveled by wagon from Iowa to Truckee during the 1840s and later homesteaded 10,000 acres in Placer and Sacramento counties that became Cavitt Ranch. She married at age 16 and had three children by age 20.

She kept house on a working ranch and pitched in with the family's dairy and beef operations, including the J.W.S. Butler Ranch near Folsom and a summer range at Sattley in Sierra County. She cooked for cowboys, milked cows, cleaned barns, rounded up cattle and raised 4,000 turkeys for market every year.

"She was very devoted to her family," said her daughter Dorothee Cavitt Mull of Sacramento. "She never stopped working. She washed and ironed and always kept a clean house."

Mrs. Cavitt was born in 1908 in Sacramento, one of 11 children born to German immigrants Carline and George Spahn, a railroad worker.

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