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# Obituaries

## Emma Clara Knight

Emma Clara Knight, whose Santa Cruz County riding stables were monuments to her life-long passion for horses, died in Merced Sunday at the age of 97.

Fifty years ago, Mrs. Knight started the Roseacre Riding Academy on the Santa Cruz-Watsonville Highway, then moved on to start the Felton Dude Ranch, Chequito Riding Stables in Boulder Creek and finally the Branciforte Stables in Santa Cruz.

At the age of 78, she closed the Branciforte Stables, but continued to ride her beloved horses until past the age of 90.

During the 40 years of running the stables, Mrs. Knight enthusiastically taught hundreds of young people how to ride and care for their horses.

For years, parents felt safe in sending their teenagers for an overnight at one of her stables, because they knew she ran them with an iron hand and did not allow any drinking or swearing.

Although Mrs. Knight was grandmotherly in appearance during her later years, she maintained a tight rein over her horses and stable business.

"I train horses that have taken bad habits, like people that do everything wrong and nothing right," she had remarked.

She appeared in three Hollywood films during the 1930s — riding and jumping and hunting in movies starring Robert Taylor, Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray and Claudette Colbert.

In 1934, she rode in a Janet Gaynor movie, filmed at the little white-steepled Congregational Church in Soquel.

Local parades almost always featured Mrs. Knight dressed in historical costumes, playing the parts of pioneers on horseback. In 1954, she was commended by county officials for her portrayal of the first woman settler in the Boulder Creek area during the dedication of Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.

Mrs. Knight had begun her love affair with horses at the age of one when her father first plopped her atop a horse on the family farm in Carol County, Miss. By the time she was 13, she was already working alongside her father to break in the horses.

In 1934, she moved to Soquel and started the Roseacre Riding Academy. By the time she hung up the reins at the Branciforte Riding Stables about 18 years ago, she had owned as many as 23 horses at one time.

Her Chequito Riding Stables in Boulder Creek were named after a difficult horse she had once trained.

One of her favorite horses at the Branciforte Stables was Don "Chita" Quixote," named after the original Chequito.

Horses were not Mrs. Knight's only passion. She was also a dedicated gardener who turned the Branciforte Stables into a floral showcase. Passersby could not help but admire her rambling roses flowing over the fences there, all carefully tended to by her aging hands. Even the barn was covered with roses.

After selling the Branciforte Stables, Mrs. Knight lived in Aptos until 1974 and then moved to Turlock to be near her only son, Dick Knight.

Her son said she had always wanted "to wear out, rather than rust out."

Even at the age of 95 she could be seen in her garden attacking the weeds with uncommon zeal.

Besides her son, who lives in Livingston, survivors include two granddaughters, Marilyn Durkin of Woodland Hills and Janice Gomes of Prunedale; and two great-grandchildren.

Funeral services will be conducted on Wednesday at 2:30 p.m. at the Wessendorf Chapel, 223 Church St., with Harold Johnson, pastor of the Messiah Lutheran Church, officiating.

Visitation will be held in the chapel today until 9 p.m. and on Wednesday morning until the time of the service. Burial will take place at Oakwood Memorial Park.

Flowers may be sent or contributions may be mailed to the Emma Knight Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 1437, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95061.