

Phebe M. Rideout,

National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

OROVILLE, CALIFORNIA, IS A COMMUNITY IN THE Sacramento Valley of northern California about 70 miles north of the city of Sacramento. A century ago it had a population approaching 4,000 people. Although she actually never lived in Oroville, Phebe M. Rideout served as the first and only president of the Rideout, Smith National Bank of Oroville from its founding in 1912 until its sale to the Bank of Italy a decade later.

Phebe Mason (Abbott) Rideout was born in Weston, Missouri on May 3, 1841. Her father joined the California Gold Rush in 1849, returning to Missouri to bring his family back to California. Years later she recalled, "My first long trip was by covered wagon in 1852 when as a little girl of 10 I crossed the plains from Weston, Mo. to California." They settled in Yuba County north of Sacramento where her father became a rancher.

On September 18, 1858, at the age of 17 she married Norman Dunning Rideout who was then 26 years old. Born in Maine, he had come to California in 1851 and become a storekeeper in Yuba County. The same month as his marriage, he established his first bank and for the next half century was to be an important banker in northern California. At his death in San Francisco in July 1907 at the age of 75, he was an owner and president of seven different California banks. One of them was the Rideout, Smith & Co. bank in Oroville, established from an earlier bank with then partner William Smith, in the 1860s.

None of his banks were national banks.

Phebe Rideout inherited control of this banking empire. A 1934 account noted, "Mrs. Rideout was a woman of exceptional business ability, and her name became known and revered in financial circles of the Pacific Coast. From early life she took an active part in all public affairs and maintained this interest until the last."

In 1912 a sister bank in Oroville was founded - the Rideout, Smith National Bank of Oroville (charter number 10282) as a commercial bank while the Bank of Rideout, Smith & Co. continued as a savings bank. Phebe M. Rideout was president of the new national bank. During the



Phebe M. Rideout in 1929. She had sold her banking empire earlier in the 1920s. (Courtesy The Fremont-Rideout Foundation)



Building which housed the Rideout, Smith National Bank; views from the 1880s and 1920s. The second story was added in the 1890s. The Bank of Italy replaced it with a new building later in the 1920s. (Courtesy James W. Lenhoff)

BANK OF RIDEOUT, SMITH & CO, E.W. FOGG, CASHIER.
OROVILLE, CAL.



decade of its existence, the Rideout, Smith National Bank issued \$283,900 in National Bank Notes - 22,712 Series 1902 notes in ten and twenty dollar denominations.

In the early 1920s, Mrs. Rideout, now 80 and with the overall banking industry affected by the post World War I economic problems, decid-

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AND

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AFFILIATED BANKS,

COMBINED RESOURCES \$1,300,000

ed to sell her banks. The purchaser of the banks was the famous banker, A. P. Giannini. They became part of his growing Bank of Italy empire, which in 1930 was renamed the Bank of America.

The Bankers Magazine noted that with "the purchase of the six Rideout banks of Northern California, he [Giannini] acquired a large chapter of California history as well as a half a dozen thriving institutions with total resources of nearly \$8,500,000." (As Rideout banks, her banks had been chain banks, that is each was a separate bank, but as Bank of Italy banks they became branches of his growing banking empire. The purchase brought the total number of his branches to 45 in 34 California cities.)

She stayed somewhat active in banking becoming, for example, Chairman of the Advisory Board of her former banks in Marysville and Oroville. In that capacity, she wrote an article in the *Bankitaly Life* for December 1922 entitled, "California Women As Bankers" in which she said, "The progress that women are making in this particular economic movement [banking] may yet lead the banking public to place as much confidence in them as has been shown men, who for centuries have controlled financial activities in the world of commerce." Surprisingly, she did not make mention of her own important banking career.

At the age of 87 she took a round the world trip which included an airplane flight over Java, and at 90 she motored to Texas to check on her oil holdings which she had purchased after the sale of her banks. She died in San Francisco after a period of six months of ill health in May 1932 at the age of 91. She had outlived her two adult sons, and was survived by her daughter and family.

The Bank of America still has a presence in Oroville, with an office that is a "descendant" of the banks Phebe M. Rideout owned there nearly a century ago.

First ad for the new Rideout, Smith National Bank in the *Oroville Daily Register*, Oct. 30, 1912.

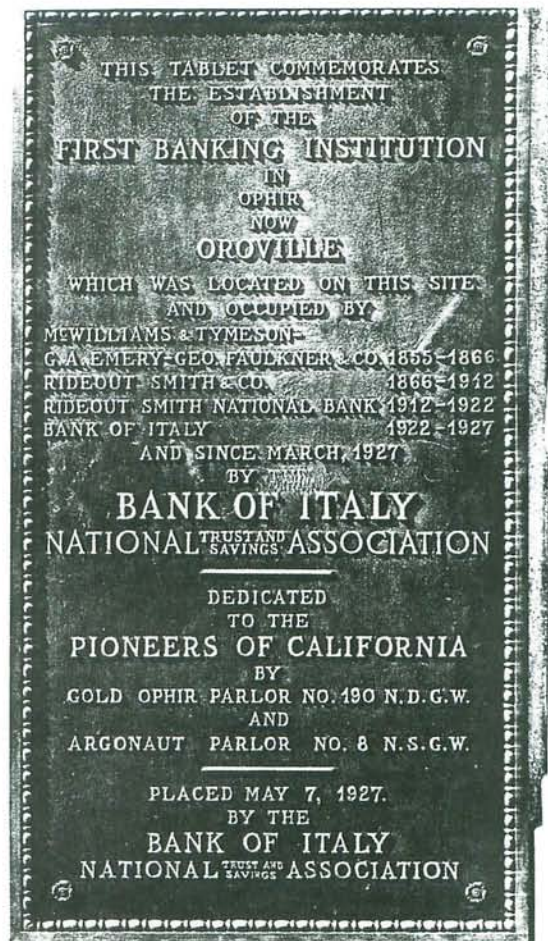


Above: Series 1902 Date Back \$10 National Bank Note of the Rideout, Smith National Bank of Oroville signed by Phebe M. Rideout as President and J. C. Boyle as Cashier. (Courtesy Lowell C. Horwedel)

Sources and acknowledgments

Biographical material on Norman Dunning Rideout is found in Peter J. Delay, *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties....* Los Angeles, Historic Record Company, 1924, pp. 1188-9; and the *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, new series, volume 1 (1934), pp. 343-4. Material on Phebe Mason (Abbott) Rideout is found in the *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, new series, volume 1 (1934), p. 344-5, and her obituary in the *Oroville Mercury Register*, May 17, 1932, p. 1. Her article "California Women as Bankers" is in *Bankitaly Life* for December 1922. Her reflections on her childhood trip to California, and an account of her round the world trip is "Woman, 87, on Tour of World," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 31, 1929, p. 5. Indispensable for background on the Rideouts, their times, and their children is Terald A. Zall's illustrated, *The Hospital, on the 90th Anniversary of the Founding of the Rideout Memorial Hospital* [in Marysville]. Marysville,

Far right: 1927 plaque placed on site of the Rideout, Smith National Bank. (Courtesy James W. Lenhoff)



CA, Galena Hill Press, 1998. The opening of the national bank is discussed in "Open Doors Today as a National Bank," *Oroville Daily Register*, October 28, 1912, p. 1. The purchase of the Rideout banking empire is covered in "Bank of Italy Purchases Rideouts Banks," *The Bankers Magazine*, September 1921, p. 616, and Marquis James, *Biography of a Bank, the Story of the Bank of America*, New York, Harper, 1954, pp. 133-135.

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Michael Reynard named Wait Memorial Prize winner

Dr. Michael Reynard, an SPMC life member, has been named recipient of the 2006 George W. Wait Memorial Prize for paper money research. The winner is authoring *Complete Guide to Check Collecting*. Reynard's prize is worth \$500, the contest maximum. "This book will have appeal for the general public and experienced check collectors, too," Reynard said. "*Complete Guide to Check Collecting* will hopefully stimulate interest and scholarship in the wonderful world of paper money," he added.

Reynard has previously published articles in *Autograph Collector's Magazine*, and a book *Money Secrets of the Rich and Famous* (Allworth Press, 1999), with anecdotes about the "rich and famous" illustrated by their personal checks. His book was also published in French and Chinese, and featured on CNN, Fox News and National Public Radio reports.

The Wait Memorial contest is open for book length research projects on any area of paper money. Rules for the 2007 contest will appear in the November/December 2006 issue of this journal.

— Fred Reed, Editor

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