

Norris Millican Bailey House

By Phil Pezzaglia Photos from the Rio Vista Museum

Rio Vista historian Phil Pezzaglia completes his two-part series on noted architect and builder J.P. Mortensen. The installment in our last edition covered J.P. Mortensen's early life and career. This second and final installment covers his accomplishments from the 1930's on.

The home located at 128 South Second Street is one of the oldest homes in Rio Vista. The home is located on lot 8, of Block 4, of the original map of Rio Vista, dating from March 1862. The home is historically referred to as the "Bailey Home," for the Norris Millican Bailey family which occupied the home from the late 1800's through the 1920's.

Norris Millican Bailey, of South Carolina arrived and took up residence in the small township of Rio Vista, during the 1880's. For his first several years in town, Mr. Bailey was a bachelor, and then he met Miss Marion (May) Elizabeth James, a native of Paris, Ontario, Canada, whose family had relocated to the nearby Morning Light District, just a few miles outside of Rio Vista. After a courtship Norris took Marion, as his wife in a ceremony held at the home of J.C. and Agnes James, the bride's parent's, on October 10, 1894. Norris' brother Rev. J.E. Bailey, of Santa Rosa, officiated at the ceremony. From this union two children were born; James Colson, Haidee Agnes. It is known, from a photograph, that the Bailey family was living in the home, when the children were very young.

When N.M. Bailey initially arrived in Rio Vista he noted that there were several fine general merchandise stores in town but there were no watchmakers and jewelers. This would be the business venture and service that he would provide for the rapidly growing community. He opened a store in a building on the south side of Main Street, between Front and Second Streets. He shared this building, with his shop in the front while the back portion of the building was occupied by a barbershop.

And a fine shop his was, with its glass display cabinets and ornate clocks hanging on the walls. He advertised himself as a Watchmaker, Jeweler, and Engraver. He was a dealer of watches (Elgin, etc.), clocks, jewelry, diamonds, spectacles, etc. In keeping up with the times, in May 1891 he added a new service to his business, that of silver and gold electroplating. He could plate watch cases, chains, knives, forks, and plates with quality equal to any plated ware that could be purchased in the larger cities of that period.

Mr. Bailey was a very handy man when it came to mechanical devices. He found great enjoyment in repairing bicycles and other small equipment, which the local townsfolk would bring to him. Besides these mechanical activities Mr. Bailey also acted as an agent for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, as well as insurance agent for German Alliance and Atlas Insurance Companies.

N.M. Bailey was a fair man with an even temper, the type of man who made only friends and no enemies. He was always there to help the local townsfolk with their needs. However, he also believed in attending to his own affairs, and spent time with his family and around the house, rather than joining clubs and committees.

Unfortunately, on April 8, 1927, while Mr. Bailey was engaged in his normal routine of opening his jewelry store, his first customer of the day, a stranger to him, came up to the counter to purchase a small can of oil. A few moments later, while the jeweler was attending to wrapping the customer's purchase, the stranger attacked him, and while its proprietor lay unconscious on the floor, robbed the store.

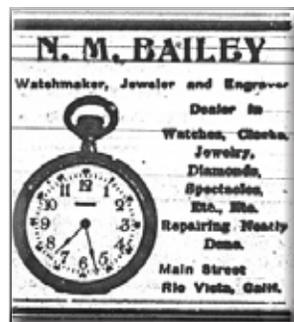
Not long after the attack and the stranger's escape, a young patron walked into the store to pick up a watch, which was being repaired by Mr. Bailey. The young lad was surprised to find the store unattended. He waited for several minutes and then proceeded to open and close the door to ring the bell attached to the door. Within minutes the injured Mr. Bailey appeared in the doorway. Local physician, Dr. L. A. Anthony was summoned, and upon his examination of Bailey, an automobile was brought round, and the doctor rushed his patient up the river road to Sutter Hospital in Sacramento. Mr. Bailey passed away eight days later at the age of 61. This

was truly an unfortunate event and loss in the history of Rio Vista.

Mrs. Marion Bailey remained in the home, for several years. After her passing the home was used for rental property, eventually falling into disrepair in the 1980's. Luckily the home was purchased in 1997 by a contractor, who remodeled the home with a new foundation, shingle siding and a modernized interior configuration. The home was featured on the Soroptimists Home Tour in May 2008.



Bailey house.



N.M. Bailey newspaper ad, 1927.



Interior of Bailey's Jewelry Store.