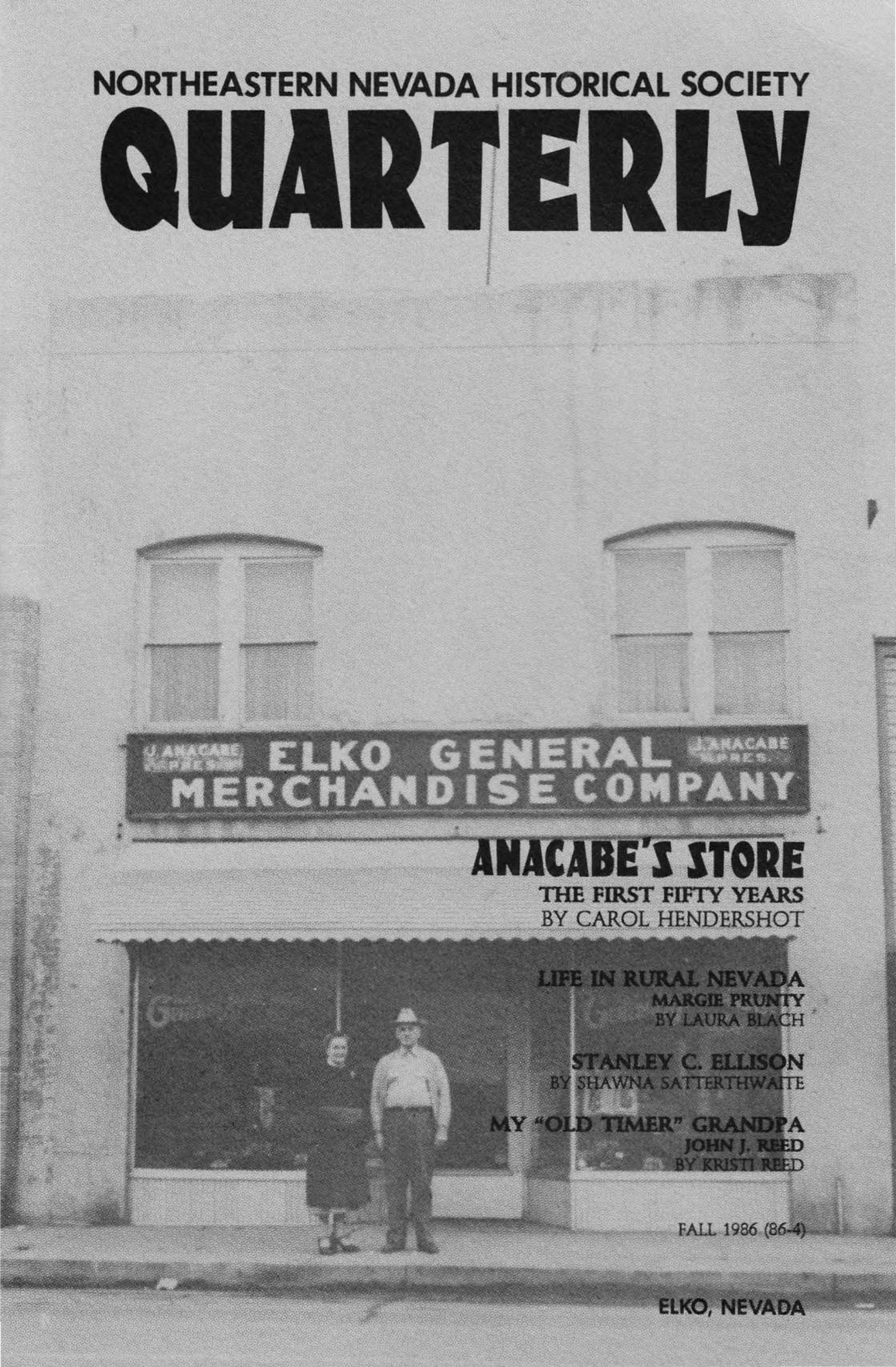


NORTHEASTERN NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

QUARTERLY



J. ANACABE PROPRIETOR **ELKO GENERAL MERCHANDISE COMPANY** J. ANACABE PROPRIETOR

ANACABE'S STORE

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS
BY CAROL HENDERSHOT

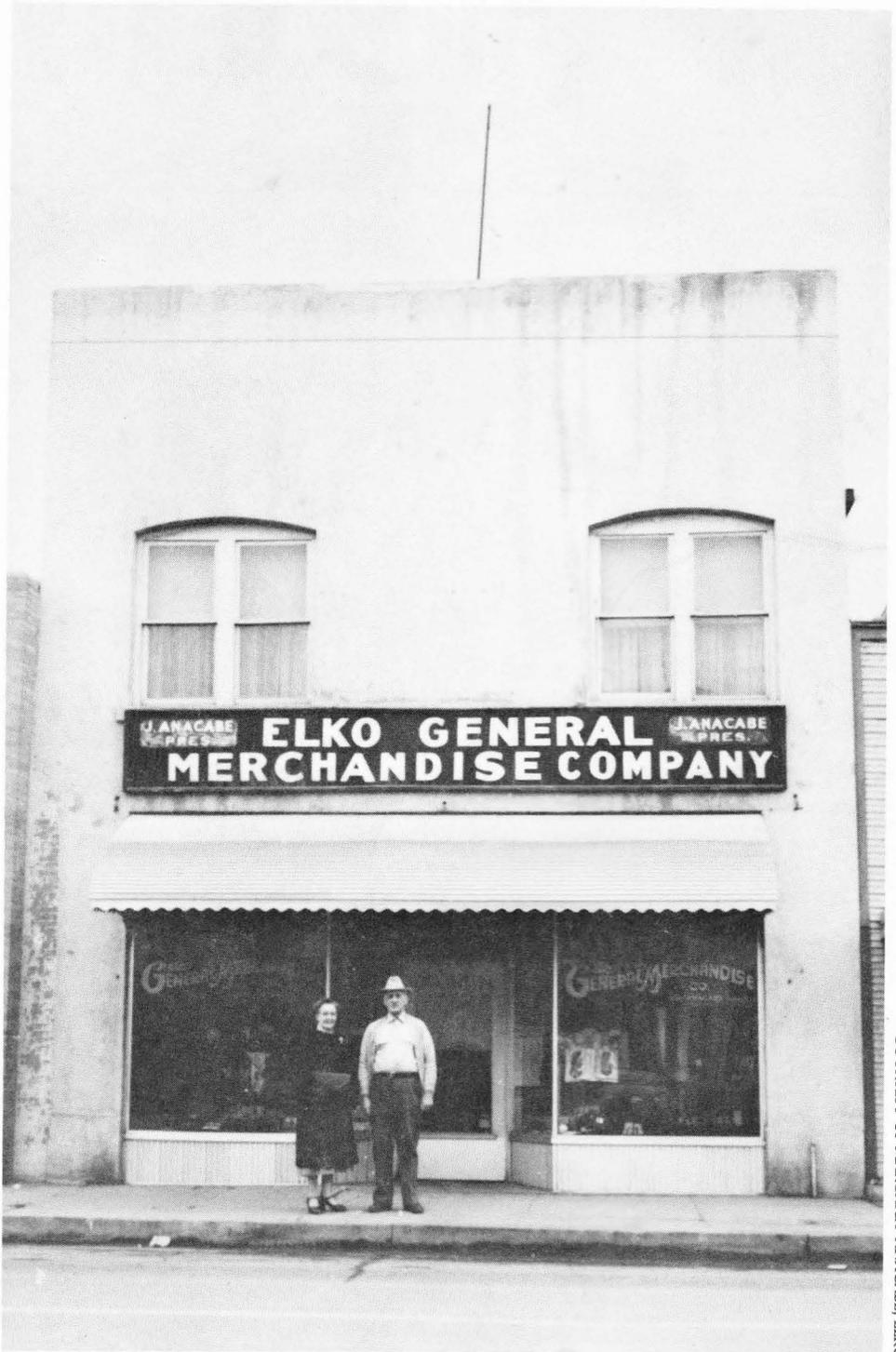
LIFE IN RURAL NEVADA
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FALL 1986 (86-4)

ELKO, NEVADA



COURTESY OF MARGARET ANACABE, ELKO

Tomasa Argoitia and Balbino Achabal in front of Elko General Merchandise Company, 416 Idaho Street, Elko in the 1950's. The store has remained at the same address for fifty years.

ANACABE'S STORE

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

BY CAROL HENDERSHOT

May 15, 1987 will mark the 50th anniversary of Elko General Merchandise, Anacabe's Store, at its Idaho Street location in Elko.¹

Why did this store survive when so many others didn't. Owner Joe Anacabe said it was his belief in three things: honesty, quality merchandise and a friendly atmosphere.

Joe was born February 12, 1889 at Berriatua, Vizcaya, Spain in the Anacabe farmhouse. The house stands on land that has belonged to the Anacabes for 2,000 years. The structure itself has burned and been rebuilt at least three times in the last 600 years. It is presently owned by another Joe Anacabe. On a clear day, it is possible to see the coast of France from the house. The home overlooks the Bay of Biscay.²

Joe was the sixth child in a family of nine children. He came to New York in 1901 with a neighbor boy named Jaca. Immigrating to the United States was considered a great opportunity and Joe's family somehow got together the \$350 fare for him to make the trip. He came by ship to New York and then rode the train to Winnemucca, Nevada. He spoke no English and was only eleven years old.³

Contrary to popular belief, Basques were not shepherds in the Old Country. Some of them had never seen a sheep until they came to America. They were, however, good strong farm boys who was accustomed to hard work. They became excellent herders in their new country.⁴

Joe was met in Winnemucca by a cousin with whom he had a contract to herd sheep. He fulfilled his three-year contract and then went on to other pursuits. He worked as a buckaroo on the Spanish Ranch, drove the Winnemucca-Boise Stage for a time and then went into ranching on his own.⁵

While ranching near Paradise, Nevada he met Fabiana Guenaga who came from Ondarroa, Viscaya, Spain, only a few miles from where Joe was born. They had never met until both were in Paradise.

Joe and Fabiana were married November 9, 1912 in Nampa, Idaho. Their only child, Frank, was born in 1914 in the Martin Hotel at Winnemucca.⁶

From about 1917 through 1924, Joe and Fabiana had a ranch in the McDermitt area. There is still a field there known as the Anacabe Field where he grazed his stock.⁷ Ranching, however, was not to be Joe's forte.

In 1924, Joe sold his cattle to Jack Swisher of Elko, telling him he never intended to be broke again. He opened his first store in McDermitt with the money from the cattle sale.⁸ When he closed the store in 1929, he stated that he had a key to every building in McDermitt — he owned them all!⁹

He went to Spain with his wife and son, wanting Frank to go to school in the Old Country. They stayed two years, then moved to Berkeley, California. After graduation from the University of California, Frank studied aeronautical engineering. Joe and Fabian opened a store in Berkeley and stayed for six years.¹⁰

Joe's move to Elko was announced on page one of the *Elko Independent* on March 26, 1937:

"Joe Anacabe, former resident of McDermitt and Paradise says he will open a general merchandise business on Idaho Street in the store formerly occupied by H.C. Stevens Company. His wife and son will come to Elko from Berkeley, California, in the near future."



COURTESY OF MARGARET ANACABE, ELKO

In 1936, Joe, Fabiana and Frank Anacabe.

The building Joe selected for his store had, in the past, several tenants in it including Warren Ford and the Gaiety Theatre.¹¹ Anna Tremewan of Mountain City remembers playing in the downstairs part of the building when it still had clowns painted on the walls from its theatre days. As an adult, she worked for H.C. Stevens in the same building from 1931 to 1936.¹²

The grand opening of Joe's store was announced in a one-quarter page advertisement in the *Elko Independent*, May 14, 1937:

"HAVE YOU HEARD THE NEWS? It's Open House tomorrow, Saturday, May 15 at the General Merchandise Store. Complete Line of goods. Quality at a savings."

The interior of the store was plain and practical. There was a wooden floor and most of the merchandise was easily accessible. Two silver mirrors, that are still in used, were in the back of the store. The had been brought from the Berkeley store. A sliding ladder was, and still is, used to reach the floor to ceiling stacks of goods.

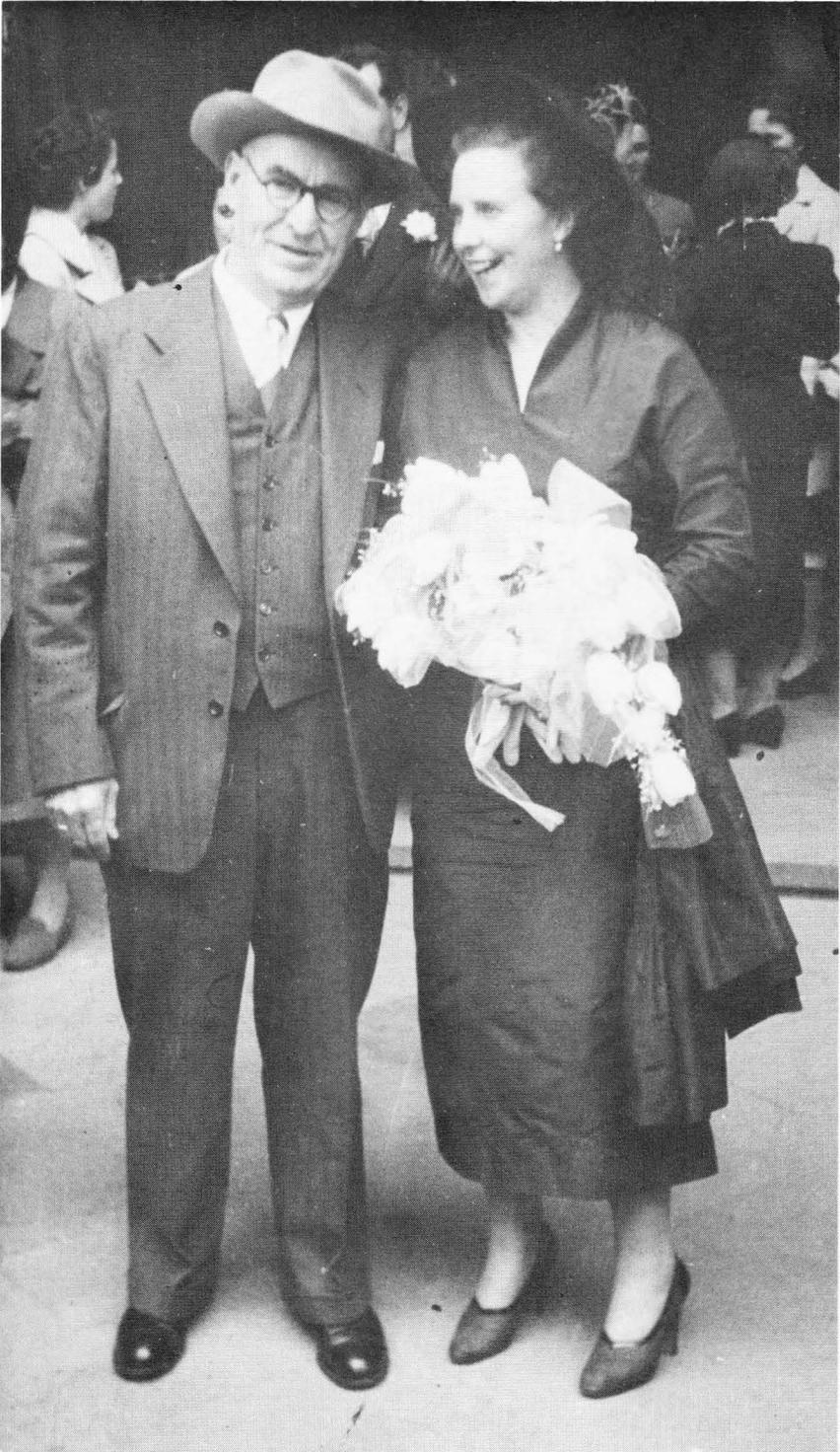
Joe's early advertisements stated, "The finest Cowboy garments money can buy, at prices you can afford to pay." He also had silk and gabardine cowboy shirts from 95 cents to \$7.50. He sold "ten-gallon" hats and neckerchiefs and, for \$1.75, a customer could buy Levi Strauss overalls.¹³ The first Levi 501's, so popular now, probably were sold in Joe's store.

Joe and Fabiana worked together in the store. Fabian also did alterations for customers.¹⁴ Frank came to Elko in 1950 following a top security clearance career during World War II with Lockheed Aircraft, owned by Howard Hughes. He joined his parents in running the store.

Then, on April 16, 1952, Fabiana died following a stroke. She was 59.¹⁵

Joe decided to return to Spain for awhile. He left his sister, Tomasa Argoitia, and Frank in charge of the store.¹⁶

While in Spain, Joe met Margaret Olabe and they were married there on April 7, 1953. She wore a black wedding dress, very much in style at the time.¹⁷



COURTESY OF MARGARET ANACABE, ELKO

Joe Anacabe and Margaret Olabe Anacabe on their wedding day, April 7, 1953.



Tomasa Argoitia, left, and Agnes Rockwell.

owners knew they'd pay up as soon as they could.²⁴

Joe could size up a person and fit them without measuring. If the pants were a little long, he'd say, "You roll them up a little. They'll shrink a little when you wash them. Looks okay."

With only a third or fourth grade education, he invented his own division system. No one could beat him for speed and accuracy.²⁵

Statements were usually mailed out once a year to the big outfits and once a month to cowboys and herders. Jess Goicoechea of Elko remembers that it didn't do any good to ask about your bill. Joe got around to it when he could.

"I'd forget I had a bill there, it would be so long. Then it would come. Handwritten. I never questioned any of the bills. I just knew he was honest and they were right," Goicoechea explained.

"I took my new boys there because Joe knew what they needed, even if they didn't," Goicoechea continued. "They could have whatever they wanted and he'd bill them a month or so later. He knew they came to this country without any money. He always gave tokens of appreciation, like a pocketknife or a pair of gloves when they paid their bills. A couple of times, when I paid my bill, he gave me a heavy winter coat."²⁶

Elkoan Agnes Rockwell worked for Joe from October, 1952 until October, 1956.

"Joe Anacabe was the most honest person I ever met and the nicest person I ever worked for. He liked it if his employees showed an interest in the business and I liked to help him order. We'd vie for shirt sales. He ordered what he liked and I ordered what I liked and we'd see which shirts sold first. He carried basic things —



Left to right, Blackie Arano, Marie Merkley, Joe Anacabe and Agnes Rockwell in 1953.

COURTESY OF AGNES ROCKWELL, ELKO

bedrolls, shoes, good sturdy clothing, but he liked fancy wool shirts,” Mrs. Rockwell said.

“Joe was thrifty, hard working and as honest as the day is long. He told me when I left, if I wasn’t happy with my new job I could come back anytime,” she recalled.²⁷

Joe loved to talk about coming to America and the things he’d seen and done. He was interested in everything. He was very health conscious and, for many years, ate brown rice for breakfast, a steak for lunch, and more brown rice for dinner. No fast foods were tolerated.

He kept a great deal of reading material in the store. One of his favorite magazines was an issue of *Life* magazine that showed diagrams of the human body and how it functioned. Joe showed this to his friends and customers, explaining it at length and giving suggestions on how to stay health. Everyone always listened politely, even if they’d already heard about the subject before from Joe.²⁸

Joe made a visit to the store fun. It had a friendly atmosphere and was a home away from home for many homesick Basque boys who came to Elko. There was always someone with whom to talk and the men sat around a big shortwave radio and listened to Cuban radio stations which most of them could understand.²⁹

Pete Amestoy remembers a potbellied stove with a railing around it.

“The heat came to the railing and you could go in and sit with your feet on the railing and talk, talk, talk. Whole families came in to shop or just visit. Children and old-timers, too,” Amestoy reminisced.³⁰

One oldster in his 90’s, Charlie McNab, came in often, bringing ice cream for Agnes Rockwell and co-worker Marie Merkley. Casimiro “Blackie” Arano, who was Dr. Shaw’s chauffeur, was another frequent visitor. Blackie also worked at the Blue Jay Bar and for Pete Amestoy.³¹

Talk was important because many of Anacabe’s customers didn’t speak English and they needed a gathering place where they might meet someone who spoke the same language they did. Finding another person who spoke your language wasn’t always easy. There are at least 26 difference Basque dialects.

COURTESY OF AGNES ROCKWELL, ELKO



In 1953, left to right, Marie Merkley, Charlie McNab and Agnes Rockwell.

COURTESY OF MARGARET ANACABE, ELKO



Surrounded by merchandise, Margaret Anacabe in the 1960's.



COURTESY OF MARGARET ANACABE, EIKO

Anita Anacabe and Whitey in 1961.



In Anacabe's store in 1986, left to right, Margaret Anacabe, Anna Hachquet and Dominica Arostegui.

For instance, Pete Amestoy is French Basque. He spoke French and French Basque when he came to America. He worked for time in New Mexico and learned some Spanish. But, when he came to Elko, he did not speak Spanish Basque or English. He went to Anacabe's to visit because he knew, sooner or later, somebody would come in to whom he could talk.

He went there to shop because, "He had the best clothes for the working man, country stuff, can't get it anywhere else. Western blankets, jeans, jackets."

"Besides," he grinned, "Us Basques stick together!"

Soon after he arrived in Elko, Amestoy bought a blanket and a gray metal cash box with a lock, from Anacabe's. Thirty-five years later he used the blanket to cover potatoes in his garden and the cash box is now a tackle box he keeps in his truck to hold fishing gear.³²

Jess Goicoechea remembers that his "boys" liked to go into Anacabe's for the atmosphere. Many of them had younger brothers and sisters in the Old Country.

"They got such a kick out of Anita," he said. "She was so little and she spoke such good Basque. She was just a little thing, wandering around the store with her white dog. Everyone like to see her and talk to her."³³

After spending many years in the family business, Frank Anacabe died on September 19, 1976.³⁴

Joe had died September 30, 1971 at age 82, but his basic beliefs are still evident in the store today.³⁵

"We don't have sales," Anita says. "Working cowboys and herders can't make special trips to town for sales. They just know if they come here, the prices will be fair. We try to give a good fit and top quality without unreasonable mark-ups and mark-downs."



PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROL HENDERSHOT, ELKO

Three generations, left to right, Anita Anacabe Franzoia, Teresa Franzoia and Margaret Anacabe.

"We still get the working cowboy," she continued. "We get very few of the drugstore type. Some people come in looking for lizard boots and things like that, but we just don't carry them. We carry oil-tanned leathers, working clothes."³⁶

Jeff McCormick, T Lazy S buckaroo, is one of many contemporary working cowboys who shops at Anacabe's.

"I needed a lightweight, warm jacket, reasonably priced. They carry Carhartt bush jackets which are good quality. I find what I need here," he said.³⁷

To the old-timers of Elko it must seem like *deja vu* to go into Anacabe's. Talk, talk and more talk still goes on. Margaret and her friends gather often to visit.

Once again there is a little girl wandering around, this time with a black dog. She speaks good Basque and charms everyone. Her name is Teresa Franzoia, born September 28, 1985 to Anita and her husband, Mike.³⁸

She and her mother and grandmother are doing business as usual at Elko General Merchandise, Anacabe's Store, just as her grandfather would have expected the to — honestly, selling quality merchandise in a friendly atmosphere.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ *Elko Independent*: May 14, 1937, p.10

² Interview, Anita Franzoia and Margaret Anacabe, February 26, 1986

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Interview, Jess Goicoechea, May 30, 1986

⁵ Franzoia and Anacabe, May 26, 1986

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Telephone interview, Roberta Munger, May 22, 1986

⁹ Interview, Agnes Rockwell, May 29, 1986

¹⁰ Franzoia and Anacabe, May 26, 1986

¹¹ *Elko Independent*: December 3, 1937, p.3; telephone interview, Milo Taber, August 21, 1986

¹² Interview, Anna Tremewan, May 23, 1986

¹³ *Elko Independent*: August 13, 1937, p.3

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROL HENDERSHOT, ELKO



Elko General Merchandise, Anacabe's Store, today.

- ¹⁴ Interview, Pete Amestoy, May 22, 1986
¹⁵ *Elko Independent*: April 17, 1952, p.1
¹⁶ Rockwell
¹⁷ Franzoia and Anacabe, May 26, 1986
¹⁸ *Ibid.*
¹⁹ *Ibid.*
²⁰ *Ibid.*
²¹ *Ibid.*
²² *Ibid.*
²³ Interview, Julio Arostegue, May 20, 1986
²⁴ Goicoechea
²⁵ Franzoia and Anacabe, February 26, 1986
²⁶ Goicoechea
²⁷ Rockwell
²⁸ Franzoia and Anacabe, February 26, 1986
²⁹ *Ibid.*
³⁰ Amestoy
³¹ Rockwell
³² Amestoy
³³ Goicoechea
³⁴ Franzoia and Anacabe, February 26, 1986
³⁵ *Ibid.*
³⁶ *Ibid.*
³⁷ Interview, Jeff McCormick, February 26, 1986
³⁸ Franzoia and Anacabe

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Anacabe, Margaret and Franzoia, Anita; February 26, 1986, Elko residents
 Anacabe, Margaret and Franzoia, Anita; May 26, 1986
 Amestoy, Pete; May 22, 1986, Elko resident
 Arostegui, Julio; May 20, 1986, Elko resident
 Goicoechea, Jess; May 30, 1986, Elko resident
 McCormick, Jeff; February 26, 1986, Battle Mountain resident
 Munger, Roberta; telephone, May 22, 1986, Elko resident
 Rockwell, Agnes; May 29, 1986, Elko resident
 Taber, Milo; telephone, August 21, 1986, Elko resident
 Tremewan, Anna; May 23, 1986, Mountain City resident



Carol Hendershot

Carol Hendershot was born in Joliet, Illinois and raised in Denver, Colorado. She and her husband, Jerry, moved to Carson City in 1971 and then to Elko in 1972. He is a land law examiner with the Bureau of Land Management. She is a part-time telephone operator at CP National Telephone Company. The couple has three children, a daughter, Marie, and two sons, Jerry and Kerry.

This is her third article published in the *Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*. Her first, *Bing Crosby and Elko, A Mutual Admiration Society*, was printed in the Summer 1984 issue. Hendershot's second monograph, *Dinner Station*, was published in the Summer 1985 edition. She has also written several newspaper articles.

Back issues of the *Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* always needed as donations.
