



A Schoolteacher's Life

By Gilbert Gia
Copyright © Gilbert Gia, 2009

Louisa Jewett was the first teacher paid from Kern County taxes. Arthur Crites remembered his mother, "She was always a through lady, never in any way descending to any levity or informality. She was indeed learned and kept herself well-informed all the days of her life. I never recall having asked her a question in grammar, or the spelling or definition of a word, that she was not able to answer immediately. While never stingy or unfair, Mother was frugal and saving to the extreme. Even today we have cloth (and in excellent condition) purchased by her before her marriage in 1870, for the purpose of making it up into dresses and aprons for herself." ¹

"Mother brought us three boys up in the very strictest manner. No parties, no card playing, no swearing, and no dancing. She always impressed upon us the strictest morality and instilled in us the highest respect for our parents and our seniors and of females generally ... All her life, Mother was very much the puritan. Around our home on Sundays there was no work done excepting that which was necessary. We children were never permitted any recreation. Each Sunday morning she held a Sunday school and read the Bible to us."²

Louisa Marie Jewett's life was not an even one. She was born in 1833 to a well-to-do Vermont family.³ Her mother, Fidelia Bell Jewett, died when Louisa was

¹ Arthur S. Crites, *Pioneer Days in Kern County*. Los Angeles, CA, Ward Richie Press, 1951.

² Ibid

³ Solomon Wright Jewett (b 1808, Weybridge, VT, d Santa Barbara, CA, Oct 30, 1894) married Fidelia Bell in 1831. She died in May 1838, and Jewett married, in Sep, Mary Catherine Marv (b 1819, d 1891). Jewett was a leading farmer of Addison County; active in local politics; a member of the Vermont Legislature in 1838-9; and was in his party's consideration for state governor. In the early 1840s Jewett was a representative of the US in France and Great Britain, and in 1851 he was US Commissioner at the World's Exposition, London. In 1859 he sent home a selection of merino wool sheep. The freight alone was \$9K, or about \$250K today. Largely to his

five, and her father remarried four months later. Louisa showed an early interest in books, and she was sent to the best Vermont schools then available for girls.⁴

credit the wool industry in New England became the US standard. In 1860 Jewett visited California and brought Merino sheep to Rio Bravo ranch. (*History and Genealogy of the Jewetts in America...* vol 2. Frederic Clarke Jewett. Grafton press, NY, 1908); <http://www.archive.org/details/historygenealogy01jewe>; *Kern County Great Register of Voters, 1866-1877* shows Solomon Wright Jewett, 58, from Vermont, farmer on Greenhorn Mt, reg Sep 24, 1866, "cancelled, left county"; Solomon Jewett, 31, from Vermont, stock raiser, Bakersfield; Philo Dennis Jewett, 29, from Vermont, stock raiser, Rio Bravo.

⁴ Crites, op cit



Louisa M. Jewett, 1849

Louisa Jewett graduated (about 1850) from the female seminary at Middlebury, Addison County, Vermont. Her teacher there was Emma Hart Willard (1787-1870) who'd come to Middlebury in 1807 to direct a girls' school. In 1809 she married Rev. John Willard, and in 1814 they opened, in their home, the Middlebury Female Seminary. Its purpose was to prepare women for careers in teaching, and her pupils' achievement proved that women could master classical and scientific subjects. Willard's Female Seminary at Middlebury became a model for teacher-training schools in the United States.⁵

After graduation Miss Jewett moved to Virginia and taught at the Female Academy at Clarksville.⁶ By 1855 she was at Gonzales County, Texas, where she was governess and tutor for a wealthy, planter family. The Census of 1860 shows 27 year-old Louisa Jewett as a public school teacher at Racine County, Wisconsin.⁷ In 1866 Miss Jewett, by then 33, made a trip to California. In autumn 1866 she was aboard a steamer for the Isthmus, in late December she was at San Francisco, and soon after that she was on a southbound stagecoach in the San Joaquin Valley. Miss Jewett's destination was Bakersfield and the Rio Bravo Ranch of her father and her stepbrothers at the mouth of Kern Canyon. She arrived January 17, 1867.⁸

⁵ Alfred James Morrison, *The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860*, Richmond, D. Bottom, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1917; *Martin's Gazetteer of Virginia*, 1834, (Google Books online); http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/people_willard_emma.html

⁶ Established in 1836 in Mecklenburg County. (Alfred James Morrison, *The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860*, 1917); *Martin's Gazetteer of Virginia*, 1834 (<http://books.google.com>)

⁷ US Census 1860. The Jewett family removed from Vermont to Wisconsin years earlier. In 1850 Philo D. Jewett graduated from Racine College. *History of Racine and Kenosha County*. Chicago, 1879, p 415, (Google Books online)

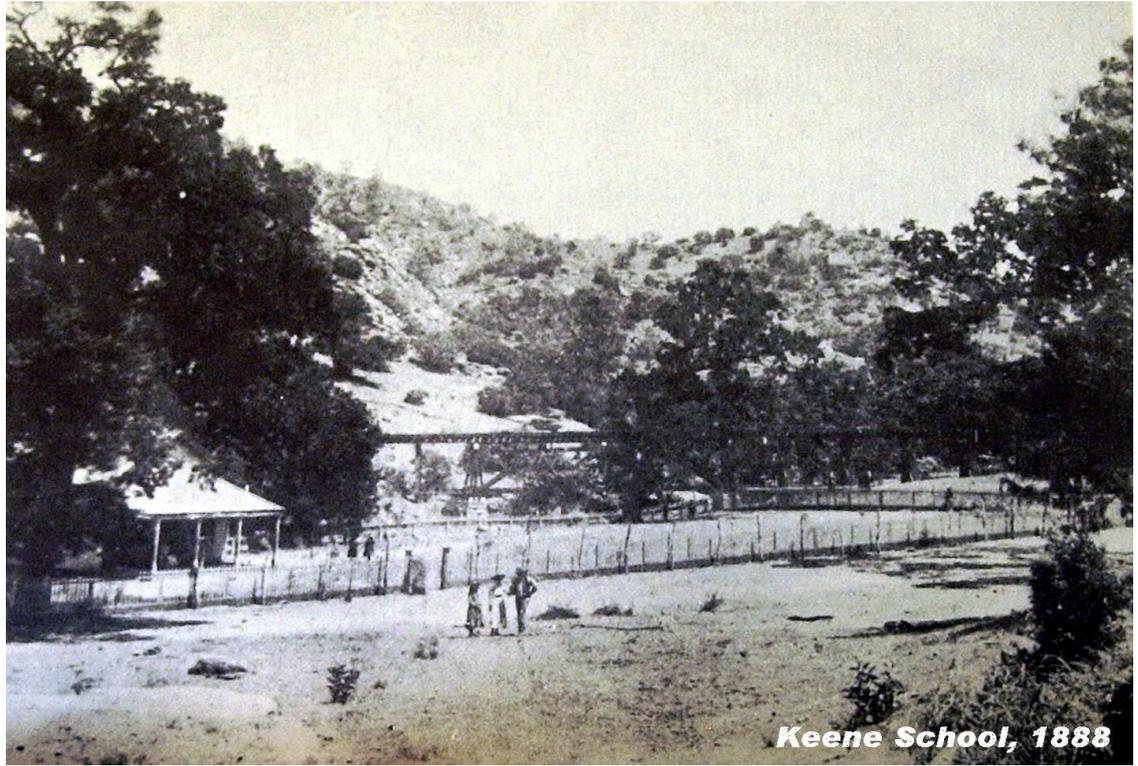
⁸ The Jewetts established the Rio Bravo ranch in 1860. Louisa's father visited the ranch in May 1861, and he returned several times. (Louis J. Rasmussen, *San Francisco Ship Passenger Lists, V.2* San Francisco Historic Record and Genealogy Bulletin. Colma, CA.), (*Jewett Diary*, Jan 27, 1862. Kern County Library, microfilm); Louisa's father said he was at Kern Island in 1862, (*Kern County Californian*, Dec 18, 1880).



In the spring, Miss Jewett's opened a three-month school house at Tehachapi for 26 children.⁹ The new teacher boarded with the Doziers, but when their house was destroyed by fire she lived with the Wiggins. From there she rode horseback to school.¹⁰ Not long into the term, the school year was stretched to five months. About a year earlier, Kern County was formed from portions of Los Angeles and Tulare Counties, and people at Tehachapi were still adjusting to the new county's rules. When parents learned that five-month schools were funded from county taxes, they extended the school year.

⁹ May 20, 1867

¹⁰ Wallace Melvin Morgan, *History of Kern County, California, with biographical sketches of the leading men and women of the county who have been identified with its growth and development from the early days to the present*; Los Angeles, CA, Historic Record Company, 1914; One of Louisa's pupils was Eleanor (Nellie) Calhoun, later an actress and a Princess of Serbia.



Keene School, 1888



Keene School, 1890

The US Census taken in Bakersfield in August 1870 showed Louisa Jewett, 37, boarding at the home of her brother Solomon Jewett and his wife and child.¹¹ But within few months Louisa was married and living a pioneer life.¹² In the inscrutable ways of the world, Louisa Jewett's life had intersected that of a carpenter and millwright named Angus M. Crites.¹³ After the massive Kern River flood of January 1, 1868 had washed away the buildings at the Rio Bravo ranch and rearranged the landscape below Kern Canyon, the Jewetts hired a carpenter named Angus Crites to erect new ranch buildings. During that time he met Louisa Jewett.¹⁴ In August 1870, they drove a two-horse, spring wagon to Visalia, they were married,¹⁵ and the eastern-educated Miss Jewett with nearly 15 years of classroom experience suddenly was a frontier wife. Between 1872 and 1881 she had four children.

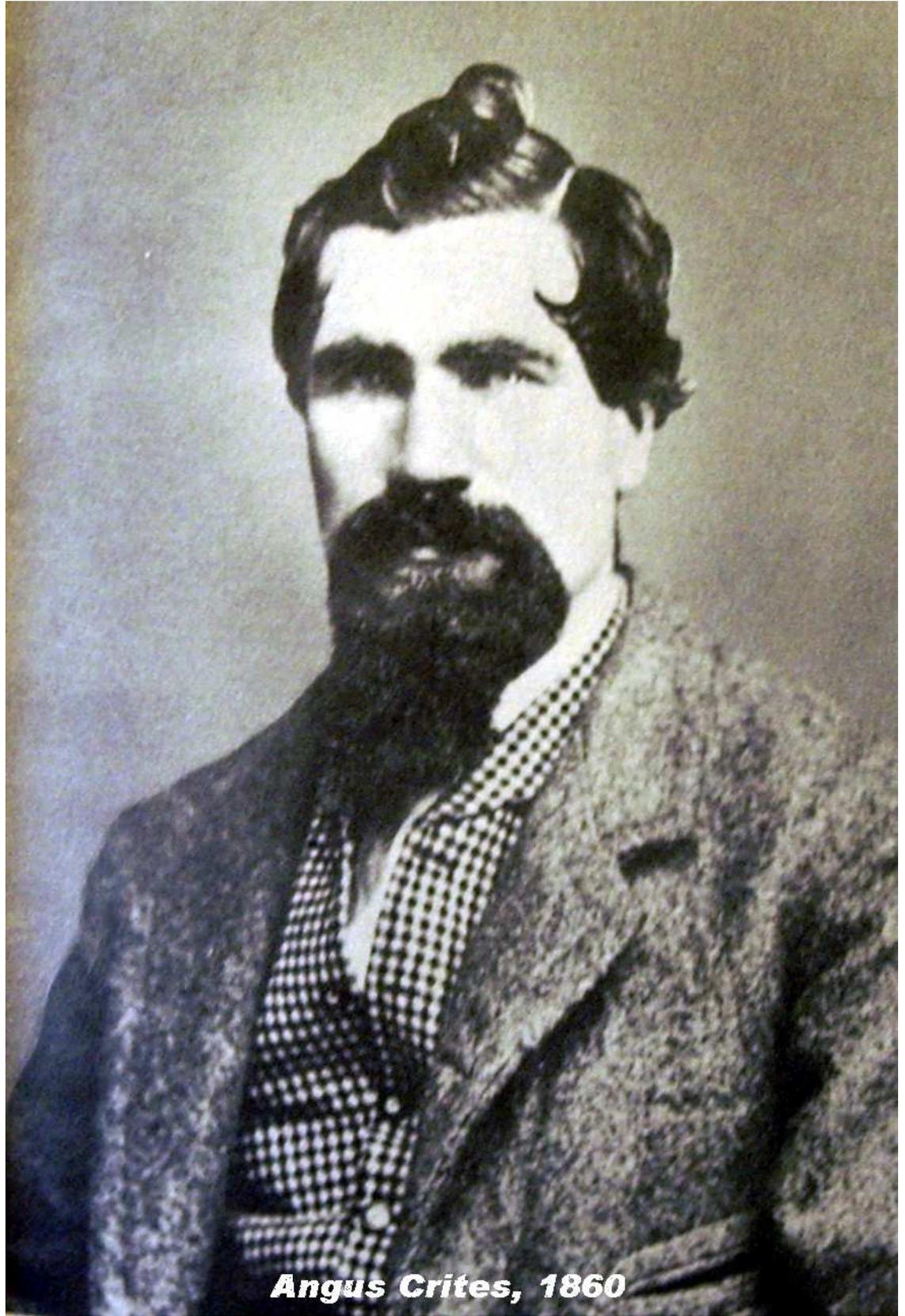
¹¹ Her step-brother Philo was also living there (1870 Census); Solomon Jewett (nmn) was an early founder and builder of Bakersfield. He purchased land from the Thomas A. Baker probate. Shortly before 1870 the Jewetts bought about 2,000 acres of choice land near today's Kern County Museum, (*Kern County Tax Book*, Jan 1, 1870, Genealogy Room, Beale Memorial Library, Bakersfield, CA); In 1872 Solomon Jewett was Kern County Supervisor, District 2. In 1874 he helped incorporate the Kern Valley Bank. The Jewetts sold the Rio Bravo Ranch in 1874 (*Kern County Weekly Courier*, Sep 19, 1874) and took some of their blooded sheep to their Bakersfield farm. Solomon Jewett died in 1902 in San Francisco. When the three Crites sons were grown, all profited from their family's relationship with the Jewetts.

¹² In the 1870 Census (Bakersfield Post Office Township 5), Angus M. Crites was listed as a carpenter.

¹³ Angus McLeod Crites (b Massena Springs, St Lawrence County, NY, 1838, d Kern County, Sep 28, 1904). In 1853, 15 year-old Crites built a tool chest and left New York for the Isthmus of Darien in Columbia. He walked sixty miles across the Isthmus and took passage to San Francisco. He joined the gold rush to British Columbia. Unsuccessful, Crites returned a year later and worked in San Francisco as a carpenter. During the Civil War he built barracks at Fort Point on Alcatraz Island. A gold excitement drew Crites to Havilah in 1864. He mined some, but his income derived from construction of ore-crushers. Crites was never successful at mining, (*Pioneer Days in Kern County, op cit*)

¹⁴ Crites

¹⁵ Ibid



Angus Crites, 1860

Their first child was Fidelia Bell, born in 1872 in Los Angeles.¹⁶ But Louisa's next three children were born at home, and she delivered at least one of them without a doctor or midwife.¹⁷ Angus was born in 1874,¹⁸ Arthur¹⁹ in 1879, and George in 1881.²⁰ Before 1880, Crites had raised stock near Caliente,²¹ but about this time he built a family home on his quarter-section homestead by Clear Creek on the side of Bear Mountain.²² Arthur recalled, "The house was a three-room, up-and-down board-and-battened with a shake roof, Dad having made the shakes himself. There was no running water, no sink, no inside toilet or bathtub, no screens to keep the flies out, no carpets and no linoleum. It did have a cook stove, although that was somewhat of a luxury..."²³ Their nearest neighbor was 17 miles above at Tehachapi, and the nearest store and doctor was 30 miles below at Bakersfield.

On December 24, 1883, 11 year-old Fidelia Crites, then called Della, had ridden her horse to Caliente to get the Christmas packages her father had sent from Bakersfield.²⁴ Arthur wrote, "Some neighboring boys played a prank and scared her horse. She was thrown over backward, and her back, hip, and leg were broken. She lay in the road for hours before she was picked up by an ore-wagon worker who happened by and took her to Caliente. After many more hours she was taken to Bakersfield by train and given the care of a doctor, but she died three days later. Mother never got over the shock of the death of her only daughter. I was not five at the time, and yet I well recall how grief-stricken Mother was and how she read her Bible and prayed day after day."²⁵

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Crites, pp 37-42

¹⁸ Angus Dennis Crites mined with his father around Caliente Valley, Red Rock, and Sageland. When AD Crites was 23, he was hired by the Jewett and Blodgett Oil Company. Crites became superintendent of the Peerless Oil Co.

¹⁹ Arthur Saxe Crites was cashier of the First Bank of Kern.

²⁰ US Census 1870 (Bakersfield Post Office Township 5); Frederic Clarke Jewett, op cit; George Solomon was a supervising engineer at Tucson, AZ. Until the 1880s Angus M. Crites was in the sheep business and ranged his bands on the plains and around the hills east of Bakersfield. Crites served as a Kern County Deputy Assessor, and in 1876, when the railroad ended at Caliente, he was justice of the peace, (Morgan, op cit). Like many other early sheep men, Crites was forced out of the wool business by competition from Australian imports. He switched to the cattle business and built a large herd.

²¹ US Census 1870, Bakersfield Post Office Township 5

²² The Clear Creek home was four miles from Keene and 14 miles west of Tehachapi on the old Bakersfield-Tehachapi trail

²³ Crites

²⁴ In the 1880 US Census, Della was shown as "Tidelia".

²⁵ Crites

After Louisa married she probably saw little of her brothers. To the prosperous Jewett family, the Crites on Bear Mountain were shirt-tail relatives: Wrote Arthur, "There were times in the early nineties when, outside of the food we raised for ourselves, our eating was scanty. ...In the winter months meat and potatoes were about all we had for food. ... My dress, when I was a lad growing up, was a one-piece suit made by Mother from Dad's old overalls."

In the first pages of Arthur Crites' book *Pioneer Days* he thanked his parents for his early upbringing at Clear Creek, but other parts of his book suggest that his mother struggled as a frontier mother, a mother whose frequent expression was "God will provide." After Della died, Louisa might have been overwhelmed as a mother. Arthur recalled, "My hair was always cut short and never combed and I was never very neat and knew nothing of manners or politeness."²⁶ When Arthur was 13 and George 11, the two went on a week-long, deer hunting trip on top Bear Mountain. "I took the old .44 caliber Winchester," said Arthur, "and he the .22 caliber." Arthur often mentioned his father but much less so his mother.

God provided for the Crites, but the family scraped to get by. Arthur wrote that his mother usually had some kind of paying work to help with the family's finances. In 1893 Mr. Crites and his boys split cords of wood for the Southern Pacific Railroad in order to pay for Arthur's term at Kern County High School in Bakersfield.

While there, Arthur roomed and boarded with his mother's wealthy step-brother Solomon Jewett, and in return Arthur cared for the Solomon's stable, chickens and pigs.²⁷ "I had to get up every morning at four o'clock and had the horses fed and curried and the stable cleaned out, have my breakfast (which I ate with the men employed on the ranch), then change my clothes and be ready to start to school [a three mile walk] by eight o'clock, with ample chores to do when I got home in the evening. "²⁸

In 1901, 64 year-old Angus Crites was hitching a colt to a wagon when the animal suddenly jumped forward, hit the old man's leg, and knocked him to the ground. The impact fractured two bones in Crites' right leg and dislocated his knee..

²⁹ Crites lived three more years. In 1932, Arthur's mother died at his Oleander Avenue

²⁶ Ibid, p 43

²⁷ Arthur was at KCHS at the same time as his uncle's son. Young Jewett was conspicuously wealthy.

²⁸ Crites, p 107

²⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 8, 1901

home.³⁰ Louisa Jewett Crites was just two months shy of her one-hundredth birthday.

³⁰ *Bakersfield Californian*, Nov 7, 1932; US Censuses 1910, 1920, 1930

courtesy George Gilbert Lynch

LOUESA M. CRITES DIES JUST SHORT OF CENTURY MARK

11-7-32

Member of Historic Family
Lived in Kern County
for 65 Years

FIRST WOMAN TEACHER

Came to Kern From Vermont
Home When County Seat
Was at Havilah

ON SUNDAY morning at 3 o'clock Mrs. Louesa M. Crites, widow of the late A. M. Crites, mother of Angus, George and Arthur Crites, passed away at the home of the latter son on Oleander avenue at the advanced age of 99. Had she survived until January 19, 1933, she would have reached the century mark. She was a sister of the late Solomon Jewett and the late Philo Jewett, outstanding pioneer residents of this county.

The funeral will take place from Flickinger chapel at 2 p. m. on Tuesday, the pallbearers being immediate members of the family, Angus J. Crites, Arthur S. Crites, Angus D. Crites, Harry M. Conron, Hugh S. Jewett and Philo L. Jewett. Interment will take place in Union cemetery.

Early Pioneer

With the death of Mrs. Crites there

** ** * * * * *