

1920-2015 REMEMBERING HENRY TRIONE

by **HOLLY A. HEYSER**, EDITOR

Henry Trione – a man who amassed great wealth, remained steadfastly humble and generously shared his riches with the waterfowl conservation and hunting community – passed away at his home in Santa Rosa on Feb. 12. He was 94.

Trione was one of the elder statesmen of the waterfowl world, the kind of man people would line up to visit when he was at public events.

“He always made time for people,” said his son, Victor Trione. “He really, truly loved people and as a consequence, people loved him.”

And his attitude toward his wealth was simple, Victor Trione said: “If you’re blessed with material things, it’s something you should share. We’re basically stewards on this planet.”

Henry Trione was fond of quoting industrialist Armand Hammer: “There are no luggage racks on a hearse.”

Trione was born June 11, 1920, in Fortuna,



>> Henry Trione

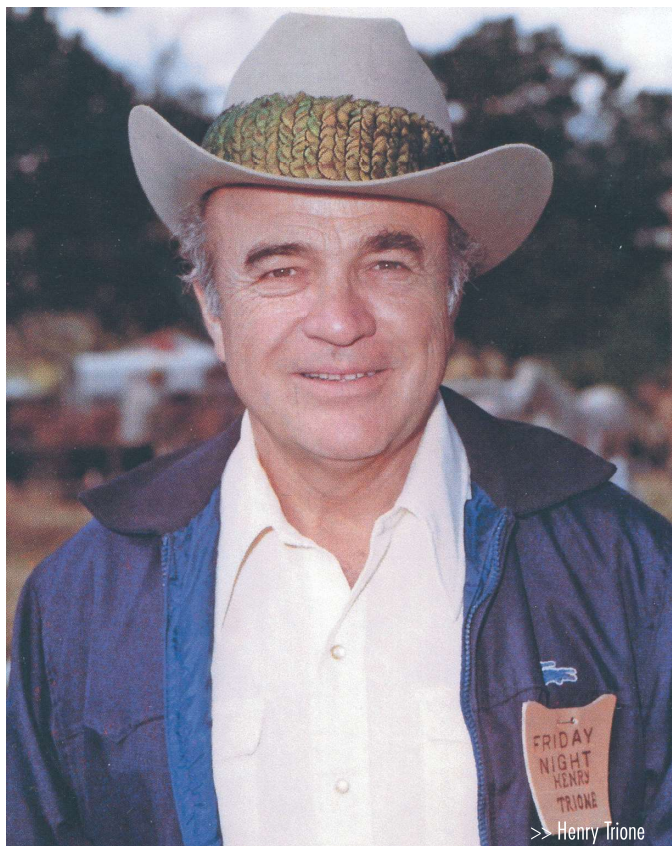
and spent most of his childhood there, working in his father’s bakery and sold hot dogs at the Humboldt County Fair. In high school, he was a sprinter on the track team, a violinist in the orchestra and a trumpet player in the marching band.

He went to the University of San Francisco and Humboldt State College, and ultimately graduated from UC Berkeley in 1941, just after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Instead of going straight into business, he joined the U.S. Navy.

He contemplated staying in the Navy after World War II ended, but decided against it. After a short series of jobs working for other people, he started the Sonoma Mortgage Corp. in Santa Rosa and began offering home loans at 4 percent, two percentage points lower than the going rate.

His timing was perfect, coinciding with the post-War housing boom, and within seven years he had 140 employees. In 1968, his company merged with Wells Fargo Bank, and he became its largest shareholder.

It would not be his only successful investment. In 1960, he invested \$50,000 in the new Oakland Raiders team. The Raiders would earn him three Super Bowl rings before he sold his shares back to Al Davis when Davis moved the team to Los Angeles.



>> Henry Trione

In 1961, he founded Empire College in Santa Rosa, a private university to which he later added a business school and a law school. In 1963, he bought a portion of Molalla Forest Products, which he later sold to the Masonite Corp. In 1982, he bought Geyser Peak Winery, whose wines he worked to improve until he sold the company in 1998. Trione and his sons Victor and Mark opened their own Trione Winery in 2008 in Geyserville.

Throughout all of this, he maintained a striking sense of humility. “Wealth comes from the growth of the economy,” he once said. “Good times make heroes out of very lucky people.”

And as his business successes piled up, so did his philanthropy. In 1969, he and his hunting buddy Joe Long of Long’s Drugs created the deal to save 5,000 acres in eastern Santa Rosa from development and create Annadel State Park. He put up \$1 million of the \$5 million it took to make the park happen, and when the park was threatened with closure in 2012, he put up \$100,000 to keep it running for a year. It remains open today.

In 1981, he brokered the \$4.5 million deal



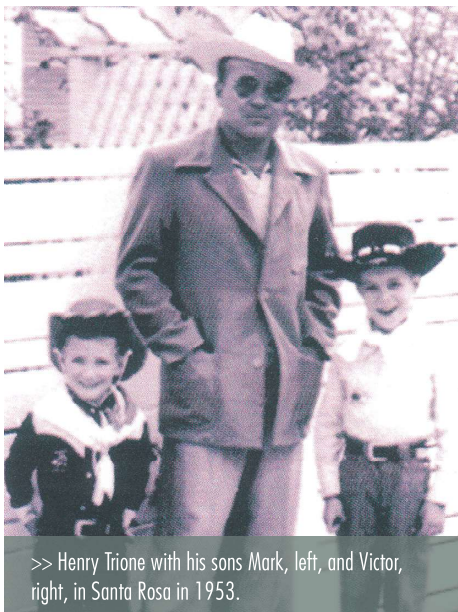
>> Henry and Madelyne Trione on their wedding day in 1946.

to buy the bankrupt Christian Life Center in Santa Rosa and turn it into the Wells Fargo Center for the Performing Arts.

In the 1950s, Trione took up two new pursuits with great fervor: duck hunting and polo, two loves that would ultimately combine when he hosted a series of polo game fundraisers for California Waterfowl starting in 2006.

In polo, Trione played on visiting U.S. teams around the world and ultimately founded two polo clubs in Sonoma County, and he was named to the National Museum of Polo Hall of Fame in 2008.

Trione's duck hunting was something that



>> Henry Trione with his sons Mark, left, and Victor, right, in Santa Rosa in 1953.

took place closer to home, and would in fact provide second homes for his whole family for weekends during duck season.

His first club was near Willows: Lambertville, whose makeshift village he described as an agglomeration of "trailers, Quonset huts and shacks."

"They were placed at random, not unlike a poorly organized mobile home park," he wrote in "Footprints of the Baker Boy," his 2014 memoir.

"After two years of going to Willows, it bothered me that I would leave (wife) Madelyne and the boys at home," he wrote. "With the cooperation of a builder friend of mine, Walter Pauley, we built a 1,200-square-foot, two-bedroom very modest cabin. ... We named it the Laughing Mallard Club. Madelyne and Victor and Mark, who were then 12 and 10 years old, could come hunting with me."

Trione took his sons out in the blind to watch and learn until they were old enough for their own shotguns. One of the most memorable hunts with them came on a Saturday when Trione put Mark in one blind and hunted with Victor in an adjacent blind 200 yards away. "A flight of snow geese flew over Mark's blind at a height of not more than 20 feet," Trione wrote in his memoir. "Mark fired one shot. And five geese fell."

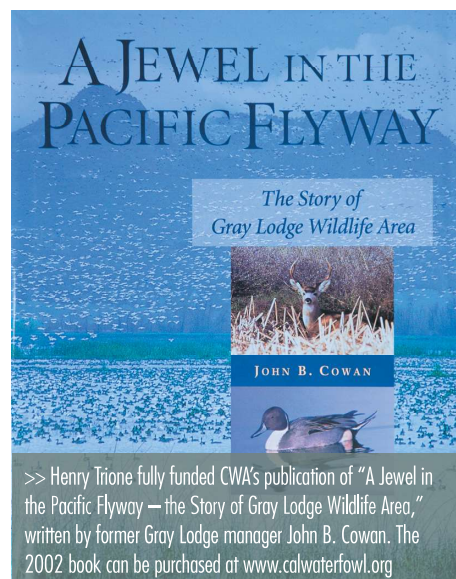
The family enjoyed Lambertville but Trione never really liked how close together the blinds were, so in 1964 he bought the Tule Goose Club in the Butte Sink.

The hunting there was better – it was, at the time, primarily a sprig club, back in the time when hunters could shoot a full strap of pintails. Back at Lambertville, Victor Trione said, "we were fortunate to get a couple spoonies – that was a great hunt."

The Trione family endured the 1920s-vintage cabin at the Tule Goose until an architect friend of Trione's visited and declared the abode "a shack in the middle of a mud-hole."

"He sketched out a two-story, six-bedroom house with a large dining room and quarters for the manager," Trione wrote in his memoir. "To me, the thought of my investing the amount of money needed to build the lodge was out of the question. But, as years went by, Madelyne, Victor and Mark insisted."

Many guests shared hunts with the family at the Tule Goose, Victor Trione said, one of the most memorable being Gen. Jimmy Doolittle of "Doolittle Raid" fame – the man who led the bombing raid over



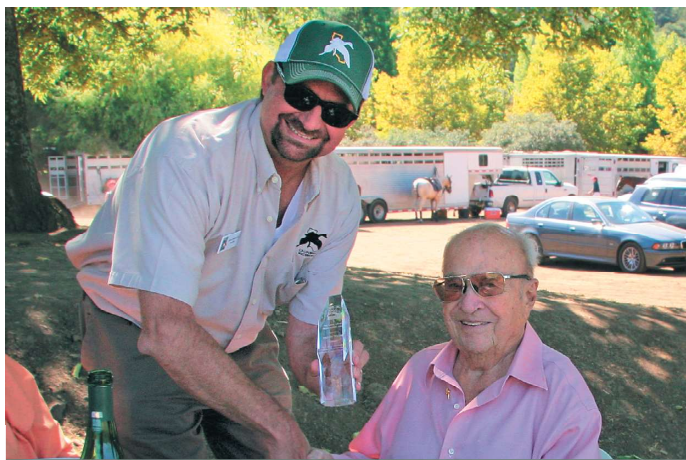
>> Henry Trione fully funded CWA's publication of "A Jewel in the Pacific Flyway – the Story of Gray Lodge Wildlife Area," written by former Gray Lodge manager John B. Cowan. The 2002 book can be purchased at www.calwaterfowl.org

Tokyo in World War II.

The photo of that hunt was lost, along with the entire lodge, in a fire in the 1990s. Trione rebuilt, even expanding the building a bit, and "today it remains a very comfortable lodge enjoyed by all the family during the season," Trione wrote in his book.

Interestingly enough, this club, which Trione purchased as a haven for family and friends, also turned into a profitable investment, without even having to sell it: The federal government paid him for agreeing to keep the land wild in perpetuity. And around the same time, a natural gas company began leasing space at the Tule Goose and other Butte Sink clubs to store natural gas, resulting in annual income that exceeded the initial purchase price of the club.

"It has been suggested," Trione wrote, "that the Tule Goose is the one that laid



>> California Waterfowl President John Carlson, Jr. presents CWA's Ray Lewis Lifetime Achievement Award to Henry Trione at its 2014 polo game fundraiser.


a golden egg.”

Trione supported the hunting and conservation world as generously as he supported community assets in Santa Rosa: with contributions, by hosting fundraisers and even fully funding “A Jewel in the Pacific Flyway – the Story of Gray Lodge Wildlife Area,” a book written by former Gray Lodge manager John B. Cowan.

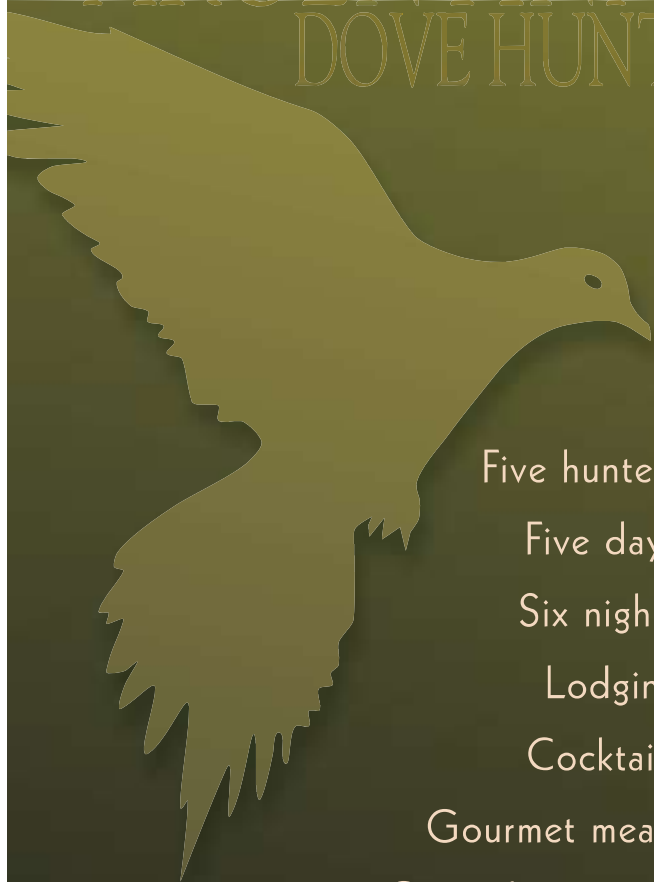
California Waterfowl President John Carlson, Jr. said Trione was one of the first major donors he met when he became president in 2010. “At that time, Henry was in his late 80s, but his passion for waterfowl, wetlands and hunting heritage was solid and inspirational, and his passion had rubbed off on his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren,” Carlson said. “He was a salt-of-the-earth, genuine guy, and I am glad I got to know him and learn from him over the last four-plus years.”

In a 2011 interview with CWA Development Officer Katie McCarty about Trione naming CWA one of the beneficiaries of a trust, Trione said the reason for the gift was simple: “Waterfowl hunting has given my family and me so much pleasure and satisfaction,” he said. “I was looking for a way to ensure that others will have the same opportunity in the future.”

Trione, a CWA Ruby Benefactor, was awarded the organization’s Ken Hofmann Youth Education Award in 2008 and its Ray Lewis Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014. This year, Trione has been nominated posthumously to join the California Waterfowler’s Hall of Fame. There is little doubt the honor will be bestowed on him this summer by the California Fish and Game Commission.

Trione was predeceased by his wife Madelyne in 2002, and he is survived by his wife Eileen; his sons and daughters-in-law, Victor and Karen Trione, and Mark and Cathy Trione; his grandchildren and their spouses, Hank Trione, Denise and Kris Hicks, Sally and Josh Grigg, V. Henry Trione and Madelyne Trione; eight great-grandchildren, and his stepsons and their wives, Jim and Kellye Ryan, John and Karen Ryan, and Kevin and Martha Ryan. 

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