

Interview of Mrs. Bancroft (Addie) Benner
October 2, 1986
Interviewer, Martha Glauthier

My name is Adeline Morris Benner. Morris is my maiden name and I've always used it as my middle name. My parents came to San Dimas in 1910. They came from Stillwater, Oklahoma. They had four children when they came and Mother had four more. One of my brothers died during the first World War in the flu epidemic. Five boys and three girls; Perry, Cecil, and Earl, and Edna and me, and Frances. I was right in the middle - my oldest brother was 10 years older than I was, and my youngest ten years younger.

We all went to San Dimas Grammar School, then through the old Bonita.

MG: What brought your parents to San Dimas?

Addie: I really don't know. My father was farming and I think it had just gotten so difficult that he decided to come out here. To seek his fortune, so to speak. When he first got here, he was a night watchman at the big old Lemon House, the one at Cataract and Bonita. Then he was nightwatchman for the town of San Dimas. Then when the Sheriffs came in as our law officers, he became a sheriff. Then he went to work in L.A. as a court bailiff. He died in 1941. My mother lived 14 years after that.

MG: Can you tell me the story of Mr. Funkhauser's murder when your father then took over his job as night watchman for San Dimas?

Addie: No, I don't know anything more about that. My father's name was Albert Morris. Mother's name was Hattie.

I can tell you something else about my father when he was night wwtchman. He killed a man. He was a very fundamentalist Christian, and oh, that was terrible, because you know the Bible says "Thou shalt not kill". I remember that very clearly. The fellow came at him with a knife and he meant to shoot him in the arm, but he killed him. I was quite young at that time.

MG: Where did you live?

Addie: We lived up on Fourth Street, 407 W. 4th St., which is just down the hill from the old Way place. We used to spend our time up on that hill, and down the other side. Always in the spring, after a big rain, there was a big stream that went down that gully. Between that hill that "San Dimas" (on the water tanks) and the hills to the north, that's really a wash. We always used to go out there and play in the water. It would only run for a short while, then it would dry up.

I went to the old brick school. There was an auditorium with a cafeteria behind it. We had that bell - I don't know where that is now.

MG: It's in a tower specially built for it at San Dimas High School.

Addie: The school had those steps up the front and it was 2-story. I can remember that school quite well.

MG: Did they have the Mexican school out back? Addie: Yes.

MG: When you went to the movies, were there separate seats for Mexicans?

Addie: Not that I remember. Looking back, I realize that the Mexicans were somewhat segregated. You should talk to Barbara Thies - her mother Mrs. Hosford did a lot of work with the Mexicans. She was way ahead of her time and she taught them and just did lots of things for them. That was a ghetto where the Mexicans lived.

MG: What do you remember about the classes?

Addie: We had some combination classes, but from about the sixth grade on, there was more than one class.

MG: Do you remember any of your teachers' names?

Addie: Mrs. May was the Principal. And Arma Shull - Banny had Arma Shull in the Fourth grade, too. Miss Tipton was one of the teachers. And George Perry - he lived down northeast of San Dimas Ave. and Cienega (what is now Arrow Highway) - his daughter taught and I had her in Kindergarten.

MG: What can you tell me about your time at Bonita?

Addie: I played tennis all the time. I was on the tennis team all through High School. When I looked back in the book, I wasn't on any other teams. We weren't allowed to have dances, because of the Brethren church. But we did, once a year, the Girls' League, or whatever it was called, would have a dance and the girls would dance together. I guess we had a Junior-Senior Prom - we had it up at Mountain Meadows. That was the place when I was growing up.

MG: What church did you go to?

Addie: I was raised in the Christian Church. We all went to the Christian Church. Then the Christian Church and the Union Church went together. We had a preacher who was very interested in getting a couple of these small churches together. The Union Church was pretty liberal. So they worked it out - Mr. Mallows I think was the preacher - Rev. Cordell was our preacher. This was about 1935, I think. We used both buildings. We had services at the Union Church - I don't know why, because the sanctuary was really large at the Christian Church. We stayed together for about 4 or 5 years. We didn't have communion every Sunday as you do in the Christian Church, and there were 2 or 3 people who didn't like that, so we broke up again. We stayed with the Community Church because we believed in the idea and Banny's parents went, too.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about Banny's parents?

Addie: His grandfather was a doctor in New England. His father was going to Dartmouth, just playing around. About his second year, his father said to him - either shape up or ship out - and Dad just left. He came out West. One time Banny and I were in a motel in Cody, Wyoming and the television wouldn't work. While the man was fixing the TV, Banny said to him "My father drove a stagecoach through here about the turn of the century." When the man left, I said to Banny "Why have you never told me this?" I knew his dad had been a cowboy in Wyoming, but he never mentioned this.

Then Dad had a first-cousin who was going to Pomona College and in San Dimas. In fact, he was sort of courting Banny's Mother. And Dad came down here and he took over. But he just wandered from one job to another. Banny never went to the same grammar school more than one year at a time. He never did find his niche. I always thought he was a very smart man. From the time Banny was 10 till he went away to college, they lived in Idaho. Banny went to the University of Idaho at Moscow. Then when Banny's grandmother got sick - at that time, you know, you didn't put them into a rest home - so the whole family had to come back to San Dimas.

MG: What year were you married?

Addie: 1932. We had three children, two girls and a boy. I have 8 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

MG: You've been active, I know, in the Wednesday Afternoon Club. Anything else?

Addie: I worked with the Red Cross a lot. I worked on the Blood Banks for 25 years. I belong to the San Dimas Book Club, and none of us has reviewed a book in years. We usually have 8 or 9 at our meetings. The members are Marie Bender, Libbie Brownsberger, Lois Carruthers, Ethyl Day, Emily Hertz, Hazel Hooper, Margaret Jensen, Peggy Johnson, Ellen Moran, Janet Reitz, Ann Tillman, Faye Spencer.

My children all went to Bonita, too. Buz graduated from S.C., Janet graduated from U.C. at Santa Barbara, and Harriet got her degree at E. Lansing. She has her Master's in Library Science. When she came out here she couldn't get a job, so she took the Civil Service exam and she's working for the Social Security office.

MG: Do you have any memories of the packing houses?

Addie: When my dad was night watchman, we'd go down there at night, get on those rollers and ride them down. I can remember how it smelled downstairs from whatever they do to the lemons. One summer when I was in high school I got a job working in the Lemon House taking out culls. That was the most monotonous thing. I worked about two weeks and I got a terrible case of mold poisoning on my arms. So I had to quit work and I was never so glad to lose a job.

MG: What about transportation? Did you family have a car?

Addie: We didn't have a car until around 1940. My Dad rode the Red Cars in to his job as a Bailiff. We used to have that little Jitney. It came from the Rock Quarry - the Rock Quarry was about where Al Batchelor lives, or farther up. (Al Batchelor lives at 503 N.Hallock) It ran at an angle, down past 3rd Street, down to Lone Hill. There it met the Red Car. He'd take that little thing in the morning to meet the Red Car. It was very small - just like a 'Toonerville Trolley'. It ran on a rail. After that stopped running, there was a bus that came around and down Acacia down to Lone Hill.

My daughter Harriet got on the Red Car by herself when she was 3 years old and went to Pomona. She used to play outside and never left the lot. This one time, we were having dinner with Banny's parents (they lived right around the corner) and she went outside to play. It began to get a little toward dusk, so I went out to get Harriet and she wasn't there. We hunted all over and finally got the Sheriffs. She had gone by herself down through the groves to where the station was. She got on that streetcar with a group of people. Luckily it wasn't one that went to San Bernardino, it only went to Pomona. When everybody got off, she was still sitting there. They asked her her name and she knew her name and her telephone number, so they called the Sheriffs in San Dimas. That was really frightening.

MG: When you and Banny were married, where did you first live?

Addie: Over on First Street there was a little duplex and we lived in that until we moved over to Monte Vista where we lived all our married lives. When we moved there, Jack and Mabel Johnson lived there on Second Street and we were neighbors almost 50 years. We lived for about 6 months out at Malibu Lake when Banny first went to work for the Fire Dept, and that's the only time in my life that I haven't lived in San Dimas. Until now, when I'm in this mobile home park in La Verne.

When Banny came down here from the University of Idaho, he went to Chaffey another year. He had planned on being a Forest Ranger. When he joined the County Fire Dept., it waan't a Fire Dept., it was a Forestry Department. When the area built up, then it became a Fire department.

When he started to work there were 4 Divisions, and he had to work 6 months in each one of those. That was why we moved out to Maliby but that was for just 6 months. Then he was here in San Dimas until he got to be a Captain. Then he had to do what they call "suitcase duty". He didn't have a regular assignment, just had to fill in for people. Then he went all over the County. The night we took him to the hospital (and he was dying) he was talking to those paramedics and telling them that they didn't have paramedics. They were all supposed to know how to do things. He was out of the Fire dept. before they had regular assigned paramedics.

He was a fireman and engineer in San Dimas and all the years he was there, he did all the cooking for his shift. Then when he retired he did all the shopping for us.

I remember when they put the sidewalks in, and the reason I remember was I skated. We had always skated just on the streets, that was pretty bumpy. We'd go over to the Plummer's hill and go down that hill (N. San Dimas Ave. at Gladstone). And Oh, when they got the sidewalks in, it was just wonderful. And then I remember also, when they put the street lights in. Before that, of course, it was all dark.. My sister would go down to the Library at night and walk home without ever thinking anything about it. The Library was on the South side of Bonita, across from the Carruther's big house.

Shirley Plummer was my Sunday School teacher all through High School. In fact, my social life was all around the Church. She was a wonderful teacher. She didn't have any children of her own and she sort of mothered all of us. I have a picture of our class and the girls in it are Stella Smead, Evelyn Huston, Pearl Smead, Shirley Plummer, the teacher, Louise Hinkle, Harriet Benner (later Morris, she married my brother) Hattie Hoover, Louise Hoover and me.