

Tuesday, May 20, 1980 - Jack Carruthers interview of Bill Bowden, a member of one of the pioneer families of San Dimas, being done for the City of San Dimas and the San Dimas Historical Society.

Jack: Bill, we'd like to ask you about your family background, where your family came from, what brought them to San Dimas, and the approximate date of their arrival.

Bill: Well, I'll give you what I can remember My present address is Goldsboro, North Carolina, and I actually left here in 1939, but have been back here at periodic intervals since that time. The old family place was down on the corner of Cataract Place and Cienega Avenue and it was purchased originally by my grandfather, William M. Martin, who originally came from Canada and is of Scottish ancestry. He married my grandmother Mary N. McClain in 1883. He had previously come to the States in 1873 and then went back to Prince Edward Island and married her and then came on West. His first work here was with the railroad up in the Utah area. My mother was born in Utah in (I think it was) 1883 or 1884. When she was 4 years old the family moved to Lordsburg, which is now La Verne. They came here in 1891 to San Dimas and purchased the property at the corner of Cienega and Cataract Street. It apparently had been a barley field, and he put in deciduous fruit and finally settled it to navel and valencia oranges. Later on, I understand, some lemons were planted along the side. In fact, when I was a youngster, they were all lemons and oranges. I was born on the property in 1914, March 29, 1914. Shortly after that, my father, and the Martin's daughter, who was my mother, Marian Ruth Bowden, (my father was Jere C. Bowden) moved to South Pasadena. We lived in Santa Ana and Pomona. For ten years we lived away from San Dimas and then in 1924 my grand-father died, leaving my grandmother running the ranch. Then we all moved over to San Dimas. By that time I had a sister Betty, who is now Mrs. R. D. Graber, and a brother Jack, who is Jere C. Bowden, Jr. He is living in Burbank at the present time.

In 1924 I started school at San Dimas Grammar School, which was the old square building, before the latest one. I guess there was one before that - I was in the middle one. There was one later that burned down, I understand.

My father's family all came from Missouri, and before that from Virginia and North Carolina. My father was born in Springfield, Missouri, and he moved with his father, who was an attorney to Clarksville, Tennessee. When he was about 8 years old, his father died. His mother came West and met E. H. Wheeler, who was for a long time the manager of the San Dimas Fruit Exchange. My Dad went to four different high schools - Bonita, Long Beach, Pomona, and a year in Burlington, Vermont, where the Wheeler family was from. He arrived here about the time of graduation from high school and probably went to Bonita his last year. He went to Stanford for a year. He surveyed all through northern California. Then came South and met my mother and they were married.

Coming back to San Dimas in 1924, I stayed here through grade school and graduated from Bonita High School in 1931. I went to Chaffey and ended up at the University of Washington, then came back here for 2 or 3 years before I joined the U. S. Air Force in 1939 and served for 30 years with USAF.

Jack: Your'er retired now and you are living in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Do you know what first brought the Martin family to San Dimas?

Bill: My grandfather apparently wanted to get away from the cold weather of Prince Edward Island so he came to the States. He ended up here in 1873 and worked with railroads and so on. He was a mill-wright in Utah for a while and then just moved on West and came down to southern California and worked in Lordsburg, or La Verne for a few years, in an orange grove over there. Eventually, I suppose, he saved enough money to buy a piece of property here.

Jack: They were related to the McDonald family. Which family came first?

Bill: You'll have to ask my sister on that. My grandmother's sister was Mrs. McDonald, my Aunt Maria. I think they came here about the same time.

Jack: Have you ever heard them say anything about the number of people that lived in San Dimas when they arrived? Or what their most vivid remembrance might be of the early days of San Dimas?

Bill: I don't remember a whole lot. I know it was real small, for it was small when I lived here. I think probably 1200 people when I came.

Jack: Your mother also went to grammar school here?

Bill: My mother went through the schools here and then to Occidental College.

Jack: Did she graduate from Bonita?

Bill: I don't know whether she graduated from Bonita, or from some girls' school. Betty can tell you that, too.

Jack: What about their church activities?

Bill: My grandfather was probably one of the founders of the Baptist Church. He was the Treasurer. Then when the Community Church was formed, they moved over to that church. The family was always a member of the Community Church when we lived in San Dimas. Your great-grandfather, James Walker, and my grandfather had a little difference as to where the church should be located, and that may be the reason my grandfather left it.

My grandfather was a member of both the Lemon Association and the Orange Association, but I don't know whether he was on the Boards. When he died, we came here, so I don't know about his activities before that. I think he had about 20 acres in citrus. When the railroad went through, he sold the right-of-way to the Southern Pacific, and that split the property right in the middle. The P.E. used the same tracks.

Jack: Do you recall your grandmother or grandfather saying anything about transportation in San Dimas?

Bill: Yes, a lot of stories about their taking horses up to Lytle Creek Canyon - no, San Dimas Canyon. That was a pretty good trip to go by horse and buggy in those days. I remember we had an old Oldsmobile touring car and we traveled around in that quite a bit. My mother, and I think your mother, too, were two of the earliest drivers around San Dimas as far as women were concerned. I remember my grandfather got an electric car, probably around 1920, and built a garage with a big transformer on the side to charge it up. He would cruise along downtown in his electric car. This had to be before 1924. It was a fancy-looking little thing. We had a team of horses to do all the farm work in those days. I used to like to get on the back of a horse and ride around the orchards, but not for transportation.

Jack: I guess you remember riding on the old red street cars.

Bill: We lived in Pomona at that time, and I know when I was under ten, my folks would put me on the Red Car. I would ride the Red Car to San Dimas. The house was just above the station, and they'd put me back on again when it was time to go home. Every Christmas was a big event, because the whole family went into Los Angeles on the Red Car to do their Christmas shopping.

Jack: Do you remember getting a Sunday pass and riding all day long for a dollar?

Bill: Oh, yeah. And of course in the 20's the theaters used to have passes for Ocean Park and Venice. They had a whole series of strips of free rides. We'd get on the Red Car and go to the beach and ride all day long on the roller coasters, etc.

Jack: What about vacations?

Bill: The earliest one I remember when I was maybe about 5, my sister was 2, we went to Forest Home. That's up above Redding. We've got pictures of riding donkeys up there. I remember one time our dog got tied up in an oven with a skunk and that was a family disaster. In the summertime we'd head down to Ocean Park, that was in my early teens or earlier. We'd spend the summer fishing and on the beach.

Jack: A couple of summers we were at Playa del Rey. I visited with you at Ocean Park and you were over at our place.

Bill: Then of course, summer camps in the mountains - Jenks Lake, YMCA camp. Two Lakes, Boy Scout Camp, I served as Counselor up there one year. I won a high jump in a grade school meet and I got a free trip to summer camp at Jenks Lake one year.

Jack: Do you recall anything about your grandparents' vacation trips?

Bill: No, not the early days. I do remember at one time we headed out in an open touring car, it must have been the Oldsmobile. We spent all day driving and ended up somewhere near San Juan Capistrano at the beach there. The sole purpose of the trip was to see an eclipse of the moon, or maybe the sun. We spent all night there,

on the beach.. It took us all day to drive down, all day to drive back. We went up over Box Springs, and down probably through Temucula. I remember my mother, grandmother, and sister all went through the Panama Canal to Prince Edward Island. My Dad, brother, and I went to Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear. We traveled around quite a bit. We went into Los Angeles to see the Hindenburg.

Jack: Do you recall the names of any friends, neighbors, relatives that might have been here when your grandparents first came?

Bill: There were a lot of them. I don't think I remember any of the early ones except for the ones that you know, that are recorded in the history.

Jack: Your Dad was with some of the big rock companies for a good many years.

Bill: He was with the San Dimas Quarry Company up in San Dimas Canyon early. That might have been before he was married, or right after. Then he was with Consolidated Rock, the Rock Association in Redlands, the Rock company in Riverside. My earliest recollection of him before we came here, was that he was a Buick salesman in Pomona. I think he stayed over there and worked as a Buick salesman after we moved here. I remember back in the 20's playing golf at Mountain Meadows. I used to caddy when I was a youngster. That was a long hike in the summertime to make 75¢, but we used to do it. My Dad was a real fine golfer and was President of the Southern California Golf Association a couple of years. I think one year he won the State Seniors, at Monterey Peninsula. My Mother for her age, was always a good golfer, too. She is still living at 93. She's not in too good shape, but she's still alive. I was interested to see in the Profiles of San Dimas that the Bridge Club started in 1910, then changed to Auction Bridge in the 1920's. I got a real good start playing bridge in those days, then I used to play with Compton and some of those boys at Red Hill Country Club after playing a round of golf before I went into the Service. I got enough bridge that I now enjoy playing tournament bridge and duplicate bridge, and have played in several national tournaments. But I got my start playing with some of the local bridge players. That's been real interesting.

Jack: Your grandfather you said died in 1924. Your grandmother passed away when?

Bill: I was at the University of Washington. That was in 1936, I guess. My Dad passed away in 1964. I was in Korea I came back for the funeral. They are all buried in Evergreen Cemetery in La Verne. So I still have fond memories of San Dimas and some of the old days and the things we used to do. The people I ran around with - yourself, "Pink" Teague (Crawford Teague), Bob Platt, Dave Nusbickel, Bill Hosford, Doug Mann, are all spread around, but I'm sure we all have ties to San Dimas and fond memories of San Dimas.

Jack: I'm sure of that. Frequently some of them come back for a visit and we get to see them. Do you think of anything else?

Bill: Bonita High School - I graduated in 1931 and there were about 70 in my class. The school probably had about 350 in it. We were the scourge of the Tri-County League in those days. We won and we lost a lot, but had a lot of fun. Those whose names I mentioned - we'd gather at the Teagues on a Saturday and play football in their front yard. If the day was rainy, we'd play cards inside and bother Mrs. Teague. Then we'd go up to Nusbickle's and play "three shots and you're dead" around the front of the house. We all were Boy Scouts with Dallas Walker in Troop 1. In the early days when there weren't very many roads around, we'd head out to Puddingstone before there was a Puddingstone Lake. We'd go down to Puddingstone Falls back behind the old Walker place, follow the trails there, then climb out up over the mountains and hike around the mountains. Before the Lake was built there was just a stream there then. There were wild horses up there we'd chase around. There was a lot to do in those days. We'd run around barefoot when the sun got warm. We'd talk our folks into letting us go to school without shoes. That was summertime then. There were many celebrations down around the old bandstand downtown. Somebody would have a town band that would blast out. I remember when Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic. Most of us were Boy Scouts then, in 1927. They put out a call for all the Boy Scouts to come up because the flags had to go out. Somebody had a truck that would drive down the street, with all the Boy Scouts. We'd get the flags out and stick them in the holes in the pavement.

Jack: Yes, I helped. Some of the holes are still there, although of course now all the sidewalks, practically, are wooden sidewalks.

Bill: Nobody knew Lindbergh at the time. I think we wondered what we were putting the flags out for. I heard somebody say that some guy flew across the Atlantic in an airplane and that was the first we knew about Lindbergh and the things he was doing. I remember working for the old San Dimas Press occasionally, wrapping and folding papers. When I was in high school, I covered some stuff for them. I used to write a column every now and then for them. I was a great admirer of C. C. Compton and J. H. Hoover in the old days.

Jack: Do you remember some of the old merchants?

Bill: Yes - old tall, thin Cy Wright, and Carl Naegele who had the markets. Henry Henger, who had quite a time during World War I because he was German, had his clothing store where he sold all the workmen clothes. Of course Charlie Fairbanks at the Drug Store. After football practise we'd hitchhike on home and when we'd get to San Dimas, if you were lucky enough to have saved a dime from your lunch money, you'd go in there and have a ten-cent soda with Charlie Fairbanks. Before dinner, incidentally. I'm glad our folks never did find out about it. Faye Marchant was at the Bank. Ollie Way was the Postmaster. The Post Office was at the corner of Monte Vista and Bonita at the time. That's where the hardware store is now. And the old Bluebird Theater? We saw silent pictures at the Bluebird Theater in the middle of the block, on Bonita West of Monte Vista. (Jack - That's where the Train Stop is now.) Right next to the blacksmith shop. As kids it was always a thrill to go up there and watch the blacksmith perspire and work. There were enough horses around that he was busy all the time. I think he was the only

blacksmith in town. The Bluebird Theater, silent pictures, and somebody beating away on the piano down there.

Jack: Nellie Funkhouser played it for years. All the Mexican people sat on one side, and all the white people on the other side.

Bill: Or up in the little balcony. It was really segregated, I know. The San Dimas Press was on Monte Vista at the time, and then it moved down to one single building down there.

Then on the other side, Joe Walterscheid, Rouses, and Mike Alexander and the Barber Shop. Then on the other side, Carl Dean opened a Barber Shop. Bernard Bays had a Jewelry Store next to Carl Dean. Agnes Ferry at the Library.

Jack: I think you are mistaken - Agnes worked at the Bank. Mildred Hoke was at the Library.

Bill: That was later - who was Charlie Fairbanks old friend? Helen Rees - she was at the Library. I used to go in there and read Owen Wister, The Virginian, and all of the old stories of Hopalong Cassidy and the Western stuff.

L. E. Belknap came in later. Ira Morter - I'd spend hours watching Ira Morter in the shoe store - I was just entranced. He used to let all the kids come in and polish their own shoes. He had a great following of kids. He's let us all sit around in there and watch him, and all the things he did were just fascinating to a bunch of kids. Stitching the soles on, then putting the glue on, then grinding the heels down, then polishing.

There was old Mr. Foresman at the Hardware Store, before Jack Campbell took it over. I worked for Jack Campbell for awhile.

Do you remember old man McDonald, my uncle? He had a long white beard, long hair, and he always chewed tobacco. He was always losing his pipes and so on. Every once in a while, he'd lose his false teeth. Everyone had to go all around the barn - he'd go out there where he had a team of horses - and they'd chase all over the barn to find his false teeth. He'd put them away when he was pitching hay, or doing some hoeing. We had quite a clan of people, including the McDonalds. There were Bob and Sam who both fought in World War I in the Marines, and Etta, and the old McDonalds, my Aunt Maria and Mac himself. And another sister of my Aunt Maria lived there with them. Every Christmas or Thanksgiving we'd get all the Scotch ancestors together and get in our front living room and build a big long table out of several tables, set the fire going, and somebody would bring in a Yule log. We'd have the Nicholsons and the MacLeods and the Martins, and the McClaines. We'd get together and have a real old-fashioned Christmas. They'd tell a lot of stories of early history that were interesting.

I remember another thing. When we were about in the sixth grade, in 1925, the President Harding broadcast was the first national radio broadcast of a Presidential inauguration. My whole sixth grade class, because we lived about a block from the school, whipped on down to the house and sat around on the living room floor and heard the historical first trans-continental broadcast of a Presidential inauguration.

We talked earlier about church and Sunday School. T. Roe Hobbs was our Sunday School teacher and we always used to enjoy it when T. Roe would go to a citrus meeting some place and we'd get John Clum to come in. He'd tell us old Apache stories and we had a real good time on Sunday listening to his old Indian tales and the days that he had down in Tombstone, Arizona.

Going back to the Boy Scouts again, when I first joined, their meeting place was in the basement of the First Christian Church. Things kind of died out for a while. Then Dallas Walker picked it up and we built the Scout Hut down there on San Dimas Avenue towards the Dam. They had a big article in the Christian Science Monitor. Dallas was such a real fine ScoutMaster. He'd spend weekends with us and we'd travel all over the mountains of Southern California, it seemed like, and camp out and do the things that Boy Scouts are supposed to do.

I remember one time going to Pomona when I was real young. I had a little sailor suit on and I was going to a movie. The American Theater burned and we all rushed out. Nobody got hurt, but it was quite an experience.

There are a couple of things that I don't know whether it was stuff that I was told or that I really remember. I have a clear vision of WWI in that I can remember going to Santa Anita where they had a balloon training base and seeing the balloons up in the air. I was about 4 years old at the time so I imagine that I did remember seeing the balloons. That was probably my first recollection of flying in any way. I can also remember being in San Diego Nov. 11, 1918, at the Armistice. I don't know why we were there, but I can remember the parades and the ticker tape, etc. Everybody was real happy.

I have an old insurance policy that my sister had. This shows a little bit about inflation and the value people placed on things. My sister has an original copy of an insurance policy sold to my grandfather, Wm. M. Martin, in May, 1897, issued by the Corporation of the Royal Exchange Assurance Co., London, England. It was a 3-year term, costing \$15.60, but they were only going to pay \$600 in case of fire. Coverage included these things: \$100 on a one-story frame building and occupied as a dwelling and situated on his farm on the SW corner of Cienega and Cataract Avenues in San Dimas, California. \$100 on his household furniture, useful and ornamental, and family stores, including one organ and one sewing machine. \$75 on the wearing apparel of self and family. \$25 on his pictures and their frames. In the event of loss, not to exceed actual value in cost. (The pictures were beautiful pictures, painted by my Grandmother and brought from Prince Edward Island. She had a number of them and my sister and brother have them now.) \$150 on his one-story frame building, occupied as a private barn and situated 78 feet West of the above-described house. \$40 on his one-spring wagon and harness. \$50 on his two horses, in event of loss, not to exceed \$25 each. \$50 on his hay, grain and other feed; and \$10 on his carpenter tools, all while contained in the above-described barn. I'm sure that the \$10 on his carpenter tools were because those were so valuable to him in building his house. Apparently he had a one-story house that they lived in while he was building the present house in front of it.

I remember when I was a Sophomore in High School, in 1928, we took a field trip to Palm Springs. The whole Botany class went, and all that was in Palm Springs at that time was a brick Indian trading post about where some of the golf courses are now. We went to Palm Canyon, with palm trees and a little grass and a little spring going through there. That's really all there was to Palm Springs in 1928.

This has been real interesting living back in those days.

Jack: Bill, why don't you take this questionnaire to your sister, Betty Graber, and some time in the near future, we'll get together with her and see if she can add more to this.

We appreciate your time and effort in helping us to record all this. It will be on file in the San Dimas City Hall any time anyone wants to see it.