

SAN DIMAS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

July 9, 1986 - Interview with Mrs. J. S. (Mabel) Johnson.
Interviewer: Martha Glauthier 134 W. Second St.

Jack's folks were here when we came here - they lived right across the street from us. (They came to San Dimas in December, 1919.) At that time, there were two of his sisters living in San Dimas, and his brother lived in Azusa, and there was another sister lived down at Yorba Linda, and one at Capistrano, so the whole family was here. No, one sister never came out - one sister stayed in Iowa. Jack had 7 sisters, 2 brothers.

We came in October, 1923, from Montana. We had been married 6 years, and in that time they had 4 drought years in Montana, so Jack decided it was time to do something else besides farm.

(Did you grow up in Montana?)

I finished High School in Valier, Montana, well, grammar school, too. Valier is about 90 miles from Great Falls, between Great Falls and Glacier National Park.

We had five boys when we came to San Dimas. Our daughter was born here, in this house.

(I've always wondered about this house - was it like this when you moved in?)

Yes, when we came here, the west side was an apartment. We didn't know what to do with the two front doors, so we just left them. This is a house that Tom Gore's father built and Tom's youngest sister was born here. Walter's wife, Hazel Willets, remembers playing under this

(What do you remember about San Dimas when you arrived?) mulberry tree when she was small.

It was a little town. There were not sidewalks. Although a few people had sidewalks in front of their houses, there was not a general system of sidewalks. The streets were paved just a little bit down the center, and the rest of it was dirt street.

(Do you remember about the businesses downtown? Who had the grocery store when you came?)

Well, we debated about that. Guy Goodwin had one, young Guy's father. We can't remember where we bought groceries to start out with, because we never bought them from him. I guess maybe, from the Lussier's store, which was where the carpet store is now. Mr. Brownsberger had it then - he bought from Lussier. Cy Wright worked at the store and when Mr. Brownsberger wanted to quit, Cy bought it.

(Did they deliver groceries to the house then?)

Oh, yes. Our oldest son worked in the grocery store when he was in high school. That was his job, to deliver the groceries. At that time, Jack worked six days a week, they worked Saturdays, and until 5 o'clock in the evening. So the only time we had the groceries delivered was if Jack wasn't here, then they were delivered.

(The children all went to school at the Cataract St. School?)

Yes.

(Do you have any special memories of the school?)

When Belknaps came here, Kenny couldn't walk down there.. Bob used to take him in a little red wagon. And he was in Glenn's class, and Glenn and another boy had the job of seeing that he got around. At recess time, they'd help him out and see that he got back in again.

(What about church? What church did you join?)

We didn't join any. The children were all little. I was brought up in the Lutheran church, and there wasn't any Lutheran church in San Dimas. We sent the youngsters to the Methodist Sunday School, and we'd attend spasmodically. And when we finally got ready to join a church, Mr. Ellis was up there, and we joined the Community Church and we've been there ever since.

(What year was that?)

It was in 1951, I believe. We've had 5 generations of Johnsons attend that church - Jack's folks went there when they lived here.

(What was his father's name?)

John. David Harder announced in church one day that Sarah Elizabeth made four generations to attend church here, and I told him afterwards "You lost one generation."

(Do you have any other memories about the church?)

Well, I could tell you something about the Methodist Church. When we came here, Mr. and Mrs. Soder belonged up there, and Mr. and Mrs. Way. Mr. Way sang in the choir. There were quite a few others - Mrs. Mills and the Batchelors, the Humphreys. We were not the only ones who took preference to the Union Church - the Batchelors were already there before we went in.

(Do you want to tell us about the Masonic Lodge and your family?)

Jack was already a Mason before the boys joined, but he belonged in Azusa because that's where his brother belonged. And when the boys came out of the service, one of them expressed a desire to join the Lodge. His Dad said, "They only put out petitions in fives." So they all petitioned at once, and all got their degrees together, all the way through.

(The Masons still talk about it - it took all day?)

Yes, they started before noon, and it was, I guess, midnight before they got through. I think most of the Masons in San Dimas were there, and a good many from the other small towns around, notably Azusa, because Walter and Jack belonged there.

(Did you belong to any of the women's clubs here?)

Yes, the Inter Nos Club. We celebrated the golden anniversary not long after I joined. It disbanded just three years ago - we had so few drivers. Margaret Parker got so she couldn't drive, and it wasn't long after that that Mary Duvall didn't drive - each one of those cars would take three or four people, so there were not many drivers left. We still miss it, and we talk about having a reunion breakfast one of these days. We were dark in the summer, but that was one of the things we used to do in the summer, was have one breakfast.

(What sort of things did you do at your meetings?)

It was just visiting. They made no effort to raise money at all. It started a few years after the Wednesday Club, and they always had quite a few projects, making money. So the women that organized the Inter Nos were not going to do that, they said we'll just visit. They had programs, and I think they used to work for the Red Cross during the War. There was a limit to the members they could have so they could meet at the members' homes - they couldn't have more than 35 members.

Of course, I belong to the Women's Guild up at the Church and have ever since I joined the Church.

(Do you have any memories of the Citrus Industry?)

I can remember that between 6 and 7 in the morning, the packers would be walking down the street here to get to the Packing House on time. There were quite a few walking down there. It seemed that a good many of the women here in town worked at the Packing House - Mrs. Funkhauser, Mrs. Woodbury, a good many of them.

(Transportation - how did you get around?)

A Model T. Jack, and my Dad and our oldest son came to California in the Model T, a fairly new one. Mother, and I, and the rest of the children came on the train. It was a little faster, too.

(Did you do much traveling on the Red Cars?)

If we had occasion to go to Los Angeles, and we did. We went to the Children's Hospital a time or two- the boys' had their tonsils out, and one of them was circumcised in there. Of course, it was up to me because Jack worked all the time, you see. I often went to Pomona on the Red Cars. Jack was a plumber and worked for his brother - 35 years, he worked for his brother Walter in Azusa.

Almost everybody had a car, but they didn't have two or three like they do now. After we'd been here some ten or twelve years, I don't know just how long, we built a garage. Before that, there was just a building that I suppose was built for a barn. Jack opened up the end and put a big door on so he could get his car in. When we built the garage, we had a friend from Glendora that came over here to visit, and of course we had to show off our new garage. And we went out there and looked it over. The shed was still out there, and she said, "What will you do with that, now?" We said the third car was in that. And she said, "I can remember the Johnson's when all they had was a Model T!" After a while we had at least 4 cars out there. Of course, they went into the service, and they didn't all of them have cars before that. One of them was married before he came home - he was married on the East Coast. Another was home just 30 days when he was married, and some of the boys were not home yet. They're all married now, except the daughter. We have 15 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

(Vacations - where did you go?)

One year we went up to Big Pines. Walter had to help us get enough things up there - the tent and the bedding, and all. We stayed up there a week. Thelma was just two years old then. Then a year or so later we went to Lytle Creek. We always went to the mountains, we didn't care for the beach. Coming from Montana, that would be understandable.

(Did you ever go back to Montana?)

We had been here 12 years before we made the trip back, and then we kept the road kind of hot after that. The first time we went back, Jack and I went by bus. The next time we went, we drove, because young Jack was old enough so that he could drive then. We drove straight through. We had a two-week vacation and in order to do all the visiting we wanted to do, we didn't want to spend time sleeping. One year, the year the gasoline rationing went off, we went up there. Jack and I went that time - none of the kids were home and that was a good time for us to go. Glenn was through with Active Duty and he came up there for about 3 weeks. We were there 5 weeks altogether. Jack went hunting - that was one of the things he missed in California - not being able to hunt like he used to in Montana.

(Who were your neighbors when you moved here?)

Jack's parents lived across the street, and there was a sister next door to them. There were cousins of the Gary's that lived next door at that time. But I think it was in April after we came here that they moved out and these folks moved in and we've been neighbors ever since.

(Was there a house to the West of you then?)

When we came here there was more or less of a shack there. There was a Mexican family that lived there. But the house was condemned a year or so later, and the shack stood there and disappeared piece-meal, - people would come and get a piece of wood for this or that. Then this house was built in 1960. All the neighbors, I think, tried to buy that lot - we wanted it and the Benners wanted it, and others, but they never would sell. The mother of the people living there now owned it.

(When did Addie and Bannie Benner build their house?)

They didn't build that house. It belonged to Bannie's grandparents, and then I think his grandfather died, and the grandmother probably went to live with her daughter. The Benners moved into the house then, and that was sometime in the 30's. So we were neighbors a good many years.

The businesses^{es} that were downtown seemed to be well settled..They were prosperous businesses when we came out here, so that the business section of town didn't change - not until after the War.