

Mrs. R. I. (Rowena) Carruthers

Transcript of Taped Interview, 1964, George Dunning, Interviewer

My grandfather came out here from Kentucky in 1890, saw this place, and bought it. It was built for a hotel, but never had any guests. The Santa Fe Ranch Company who laid out the town of San Dimas, built it as a place for them to stay. They had a manager. They were the only guests. It had been built in 1887 and grandfather bought it three years later, you see.

We've lived here all these years - six generations have lived in this house. It's been home for everyone. So many strangers we have taken in, who'd come out here and get off at the wrong place and there'd be no train to take them anywhere. Ellen Beach Shaw, was one of them - the famous singer. And she was on her way to Claremont to give a concert and got off at the wrong place. So we had to arrange for horse and buggy to take her over there. While she was here, she sang for us. And as she sat down at the old square piano, and sang "The Last Rose of Summer". We had an aunt from Kentucky visiting here. My grandma said, "You'd better come down and hear the singer." "Oh," she said, "I don't care to come downstairs." But as soon as she started to sing, she just flew downstairs to hear her! Of course, they didn't hear much of her through the East, it was more abroad and in California.

It would

Well, so each Christmas we've had the family assemble - 25 or 30 of us - and we've had our Christmas tree. It stood in the one spot all these years, since I was a little girl, at the East end of the room. That's been a long time ago! And they all come and we have the Christmas tree in the morning, Christmas morning, and then we have our eggnog and then at night they all come back for dinner. And we've been doing that for many, many, many years. There have been very few Christmases that we haven't had it.

Of course, I have no idea who the architects were. And - ah - there isn't so much more to say. I don't know what else to say. But the house has 32 rooms -

Interviewer: Is there a big ballroom or a large dining room?

No, this really would be the dining room. And the little room that we use as a breakfast room, we use now as a dining room. For years, we used one end of this room as a dining room. The other end, is sort of a living room. Then, we have a small sitting room that we use a lot. And it has a big old drawing room - a sort of formal room - at the right as you come in. And so we have these three rooms that we've enjoyed all of them.

And one interesting thing, we have 14 fireplaces in the house. Which is kind of interesting. I almost shocked one man the other day; it was one of the painters come to paint the house. "My goodness," he said, "Oh, you have a fireplace." I said, "We have 14 of them!"

What else do I know that's interesting about the house? Well, for years, you know, we used lamps. And the fireplaces. Most bedrooms have a fireplace in them. But then, there was somebody to bring in coal and wood and to empty these ash things that pull out the little pans. There's no one to do that any more. And we had a coal furnace put in, which was just huge. Now they're cleaning the new one, a gas, I guess it is.

Well, there isn't so much to tell. It's just a great, big, old house that we've lived in all of these years, and all loved dearly. I've almost sold it two or three times. Jack said, "Now, Mother, you can't back out this time!" I've had two or three offers. They were good ones, but you know, you just can't do it, somehow. It's home!

Interviewer: Many of the furnishing that you have here in the house are original, are they not?

Oh, yes, Hmm-mm. And some of them look it! (chuckle) But Sue has brought a few pieces in and if she ever gets all her things unpacked, we'll find a spot for them, but I don't know just where. And as I said, she's been very slow moving in, just taking her time.