

Thursday, May 29, 1980 - Lela Hathaway and Jack Carruthers
interview of

Stanley and Shirley Plummer

on behalf of the City of San Dimas and
the San Dimas Historical Society

Stanley: Both Shirley and I are native Southern Californians. We lived in Pasadena for three years following our marriage and came to San Dimas in 1923. It was my privilege at that time to take over the management of the San Dimas Lumber Company. My father was a new Englander, born in New Hampshire where he spent his boyhood years. He later moved to St. Paul, Minnesota where he opened a cabinet and carpenter shop. It was in St. Paul that he married my mother. Her maiden name was Retta Welch. She was born in Canada. In 1891 my father and mother and sister Marian moved to Redlands, California, where they planted an orange grove and built the family home where I was born. My father was a citrus and walnut grower during most of his life in California. In the summer of 1923 my parents acquired the citrus acreage and home on the northeast corner of San Dimas Avenue and Gladstone in San Dimas. They took up residence there with my sister Marian and this became their family home during our parents lifetime.

Shirley and I built a home at 416 N. San Dimas Avenue. Shirley, why don't you bring your family into the picture at this point?

Shirley: The whole situation with me is that I don't know too much about my family. I was born in Orange where my father had a carpenter shop which it was termed in that day, rather than a fancy name. He did many of the outstanding buildings of Orange County in that area. My mother was a semi-invalid fighting tuberculosis. On the doctor's recommendation we moved to Pasadena about 1901 because the doctor thought to get her on higher ground would save her life, which of course it didn't do. I had all of my public schooling in Pasadena, and eventually went to Pomona College where I met Stanley and we went together for the full four years of our college days and that ended in our marriage. My father was known as Albert Meecham, a highly respected person in the Christian Church in Pasadena. He had served as a Deacon for almost thirty years. So when we came to San Dimas that's where our affiliation was, in the Christian Church. My mother was a Scotch lassie and I'm sorry to say I can't come up with her Scottish name. She was adopted by the E. D. Strongs and he was a retired Captain from the Civil War days. That's about all I can tell you about my background.

Stanley: Shirley, your father was a veteran of the Civil War. After coming to Pasadena he had his own business on Union Street, as a locksmith and gunsmith. He gave us our first residence on Seventh Ave. in Pasadena. After his retirement we persuaded him to make his home with us.

Well, you have heard a little about our families, and perhaps now we should try to describe something of what we found in San Dimas when we arrived in 1923. My parents and sister were getting settled in their ranch home on Gladstone Avenue and in the early fall Shirley and I moved from Pasadena to our new home on San Dimas Avenue. Shirley's father, Albert Meecham, made his home with us here.

My responsibilities had already begun in the operation of the San Dimas Lumber Company. Mr. Bilheimer, the former proprietor of the Lumber Yard, had decided to go to Pasadena to be associated with his brother in the operation of a model grocery there. We were made to feel very welcome on our arrival in San Dimas, by the business community, neighbors, church, and the business community at large. We have found San Dimas to be a friendly town, warm and generous in spirit. San Dimas was one of the finest citrus-producing areas in all of California when we came here in 1923. There were four packing houses, an Exchange Orange By-products plant, and a San Dimas Fruit Exchange office, all functioning in full capacity. The growers lived in their fine homes on the ranches surrounding the town. The residential nucleus forming the town consisted of the people allied with the processing and distribution of fruit as well as the merchants and service people required to support the industry. The business district was concentrated within a two-block area on Bonita Avenue, between San Dimas Avenue and the Santa Fe crossing. From San Dimas Avenue East, both sides of Bonita were planted to oranges. I invite you to turn back the clock now to the summer of 1923 and stroll with me through the business district from San Dimas Avenue West, to meet some of the merchants on duty then.

Let us take the South side of Bonita Avenue. On the corner we find a Ford Agency and Garage, owned and operated by Matt Loring. Adjacent to it, another garage is run by Jack McIntyre, who incidentally, is the local fire chief. The community's fire engine is housed here, with Jack at the wheel, ready to take off after he has blown the fire whistle to alert the crew of volunteer fire fighters. Next a store building has been converted to a branch of the County Library. Miss Helen Rees is the Librarian. Then we find a cottage-type real estate office, manned by M. B. Helwick and O. L. Tillman. A little further West is a tiny building occupied by a restaurant of sorts, and still further on is a filling station with two gas pumps, run by Bill Randall. A sizeable Feed and Fuel business occupies the large barn-like building at the corner of the alley. It is owned and operated by S. P. Alcott, assisted by Sanford Rouse. Across the alley is yet another garage and motorcycle shop belonging to Joe Walterscheid. Joe is also the local electrical contractor and has his shop at this location. One gas pump stands at the curb. The large two-story Johnstone Building fills the rest of the block to Depot Street. This structure houses an excellent home bakery on the East, next to which is Mike Alexander's Barber Shop, where shaves, haircuts, cigars and local news are regularly dispensed by Mike and Ren Kenyon. Charlie Goetz operates the next little dry-goods store and beyond him at the West end is the typical home-town grocery store run by Guy Goodwin. The upstairs of the Johnstone Building is devoted to hotel and apartment rooms and also to offices serving Dr. Rolphing, a medical doctor, and Dr. Yerke, a dentist. As we walk across Depot Street we enter a park-like area in which is located the Santa Fe Depot, with the proverbial wood-burning stove in the waiting room, the ticket office, and the clicking telegraph key. "Dad" A. F. Rhoades is the agent. Outside in the park is a shell-shaped bandstand, a number of shade trees, and a horseshoe-pitching ground. The Park continues on to Cataract Street where the Santa Fe crosses Bonita.

Let us return now to San Dimas Avenue and look at the North side of Bonita. In the first short block, there is no sidewalk, but a beautiful row of magnolia trees line the curb, behind which are citrus trees surrounding the Carruthers Mansion. We have reached Exchange Place now, and on the West corner is the First National Bank. W. A. Johnstone is President, and Cyril Platt is Cashier, assisted by Fay Marchant, Agnes Ferry, and Hattie Offield. Behind the Bank on Exchange Place, the busy office of the San Dimas Fruit Exchange is managed by Herbert Foster and Curly Groninger. The office of the San Dimas Water Company is under the capable management of Herb Gilman, and with the assistance of Frank Taylor. Still farther North and across the alley a brick building houses a telephone exchange Under the supervision of Charles Laing. Back to Bonita Avenue again, and next to the bank is another grocery store operated by Mr. Neher, where Cy Wright made history and many friends. Next door is the San Dimas Drug Store with Charlie Fairbanks, druggist. Charlie is an expert prescription druggist, a health counselor, and even a veterinarian assistant. Outside the door stands an old patriarch umbrella, where a thermometer hangs to proclaim the heat of the summer. In the drug store is the popular soda fountain, and, like a sidewalk cafe in Paris, a brief stay here and you get to see almost everyone in town. West of the Drug Store is Henry Henger's store of men's furnishings. His stock of merchandise includes everything from celluloid collars to button shoes. A Hardware Store under the name of Hoke and Harwood is next in line. O. W. Hoke is the proprietor and associated with him is H. L. Foresman, a plumber and tinsmith. Upstairs over these two stores is a spacious hall used by the Masonic Lodge and other civic groups. The San Dimas Service Club will be organized here. In a small building adjacent to the hardware, A. B. Bays operates a jewelry store and watchmaker's shop. Next, a family-type hotel occupies the space between the jeweler and the Neher Building. Good home cooking is traditional.

The Neher Building is a two-story structure at the corner of Depot Street. On the first floor Mr. and Mrs. Holmquist operate a fine-quality grocery. The upstairs is a rooming house with an outside stairway in the rear. Again we cross Depot Street and enter the Post Office on the first floor of a brick building known as the Sipple Block. Postmaster Ollis Way is assisted by his sister Grace Collins and carriers Mumford and Batchelor. Upstairs are more rooms to rent. At the rear of the Post Office facing Depot Street is the office of the San Dimas Press. C. L. Compton is the owner and editor of this classic weekly and Howard Hoover the manager and printer. Further North on Depot Street an independent garage is operated jointly by Ed Culver and Charles Pettis. Pettis, also is the town constable. Albert Morris assists him as night watchman on a foot patrol in the business district. Next to the Post Office on Bonita Avenue is the Pool Hall, with a fountain concession on the side. Barney Pisingher operates the concession, with Mr. White as manager of the Pool Hall. The two-story structure still further West has been recently purchased by Mr. Fisher. It contains two store buildings downstairs and a large lodge hall above where parties and dances are held. Mr. Fisher plans to remodel the upstairs to apartments. The small wooden building next on line is a harness and leather shop run by Ernest Black. The Blacksmith Shop nextdoor is an important adjunct to this agricultural community. B. T. Spry is a small man in physical stature but a mighty blacksmith, well versed in molding plowshares and shoeing horses.

The next building is the well-kept San Dimas Rest Home, frequently known as the San Dimas Hospital. This is operated by Mr. and Mrs. Daley and most efficiently handled. At the West end of the business district is a cement block building which houses a neighborhood grocery and a general store.

Thank you for joining me on this rambling tour.

Lela Hathaway: Stanley, at the time that you and Shirley arrived, what was the means of transportation to and from San Dimas?

On

Shirley: the big Red Cars of the Pacific Railway we could ride to San Bernardino or to Los Angeles within an hour and we could make connections to almost any area within fifty miles of Los Angeles. A Pacific Electric Depot stood at the corner of San Dimas Avenue and Fourth Street. In those days the Santa Fe also made passenger stops to handle both local and long-distance customers. Model-T Fords were in their hey-day, but country roads were not freeways and it took a little longer to get there. Locally, walking was the familiar way of transportation. We went to town and it was a pleasure to see all of your friends.

Jack: About how many people were in San Dimas at that time?

Stanley: I would judge between 2,000 and 2,500.

Jack: About how many churches were active in the community then?

Shirley: I remember five. The Baptist, the Methodist, the Union Church, the Christian, and the Holiness Church. In 1954 the large structure housing the Christian Church was totally destroyed by fire, including a magnificent pipe organ in the building.

Jack: What about your club activities?

Shirley: Outside of the lodges and church groups, there were two social clubs for women that I remember. The Wednesday Afternoon Club and the Inter Nos Club. A mixed group that had been meeting in private homes to play "500" expanded to a Dinner Bridge Club about the time we came to San Dimas. This group, consisting of some 60 members, met in formal attire for dinner, bridge, and dancing, at the Mountain Meadows Country Club. The San Dimas Service Club was also formed early in 1924.

Stanley: The San Dimas Masonic Lodge was quite active in those early years. I have a history of our San Dimas Lodge that I can give you at a later date if you like.

Perhaps in speaking of clubs we should include the Chamber of Commerce, for it provided a community-wide organization which was active in community building and public affairs. The Chamber held periodic public dinners which were well attended, usually to hear a speaker of prominence. It provided a liaison with the County Board of Supervisors. Bill Keating handled this phase of the program for many years, in a very efficient and productive manner. In the years of 1925 and '26 the Chamber entered a San Dimas Float in the Pasadena Rose Parade. The floats were entirely the work of citizen volunteers. Special community programs were sometimes sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, including minstrel shows, evenings of vaudeville, concerts, etc.

For many years, San Dimas provided an attractive display at the Los Angeles County Fair and this custom has been perpetuated to the present day. Before the incorporation of our city, the Chamber of Commerce provided the only official contact with government to represent the community's interests, and as look back, we see that strong leadership has accomplished many things.

Jack: What about vacations? What did you do and where did you go?

Shirley: In the early years, we seldom had more than one or two weeks vacation. We most frequently took it by traveling up and down the Pacific Coast, visiting the logging and sawmill operations and the National Parks. On other occasions, we explored a good deal of the state of Arizona. In 1933 we had our first trip to the East Coast, the New England states. In later years, we have fortunate to have two extensive trips to Europe, a boat trip to the South Seas, including Australia and New Zealand. We have been to Alaska and on several occasions, to Hawaii. Lela, you were with us in the South Seas, and on our last trip to Europe. Just you and I have had some beautiful trips together also, including one through the Panama Canal and into the Carribean.

Lela: The names of your friends of your early days, neighbors and relatives - Shirley, who lived just South of you when you moved into this house?

Shirley: A delightful elderly couple, retired, Mr. and Mrs. George Banks. Mr. Banks had been in the employ of the Southern California Edison and had operated their very first hydro-power station located in Mill Creek Canyon. Across the street at the corner of Fifth, was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Taylor. Mr. Taylor was the comptroller of the San Dimas Water Co. On the West side of San Dimas Avenue at the corner Mr. and Mrs. Ned Wheeler made their home. Mr. Wheeler was the manager for the San Dimas Orange Growers Association. On the southwest corner lived a family by the name of Elschier, and in the rear of that property Mr. Eli Schuler, the owner of the property. He lived in an upstairs apartment over a garage where he had stored a Stanley Steamer automobile. He did not drive, but the car was there and in perfect condition. Mr. and Mrs. Guy Goodman, owners of one of the principal grocery stores downtown, lived almost directly across San Dimas Avenue from our house. In the next block north of us lived the Pacific Electric San Dimas agent, A. G. Owen, the cashier of the First National Bank, Cyril Platt, the assistant cashier, Fay C. Marchant, and the editor of the San Dimas Press C. L. Compton. Around the corner on Fifth Street we found the family of Ollis Way, postmaster. Also the Frank McLain family. Mrs. McLain was the first white child born in San Dimas and was the daughter of Dave Teague, a name famous in the pioneering days of the valley. We found that we had located in a very fine neighborhood and have stayed in the same place for 57 years.

Stanley: Well, Lela and Jack, we have rambled and stumbled through a lot of memories. Thank you for this opportunity to recall many of our old friends and acquaintances.