

FROM LORDSBURG TO LA VERNE, THE EARLY YEARS - Dr. H. D. Fasnacht  
Speech to San Dimas Historical Society, March 18, 1982

Thank you, George Dunning, Ted and Martha(Glauthier), and friends of the San Dimas Historical Society. It is good to be with you. I thought I had it made, and have looked forward to this, until I saw Rose Palomares come in and the Wheelers, too, all of whom may know much more about this.

I want to talk this evening on "From Lordsburg to La Verne" and I have particular reference to the college - Lordsburg College, La Verne College, the University, rather than the City. The time was almost exactly one hundred years after the inauguration of George Washington as first President of the new Republic, when several German Baptist Brethren, now Church of the Brethren, or Dunkers, met in the town of Lordsburg and formed the Lordsburg College Association, "to purchase, own, and construct all such buildings as may be necessary for a first-class college or seminary of learning for the complete education of the young in all useful learning and knowledge."

But let's go back a few decades and pick up a little history preceding this historic occasion. And in much of what I say this evening I am indebted to the La Verne Leader, to Gladdys E. Muir who wrote the History of La Verne College, the First Seventy-Five Years, the Lordsburg Eagle, and other notes collected by Dr. Heckman, our Librarian at the University.

First from the Progress-Bulletin of August 6, 1977, " Juan Bautista de Anza had crossed the valley with his parties in 1774, and again in 1776, in an attempt to provide an overland route from Arizona to the Pacific. However, these explorations went unnoticed here, and the Mohaves, the Cuahellas, the Serranos, and other Indian tribes of the valley who had settled here more than three centuries earlier, went about their lives undisturbed. But America's young men were going West to seek their fortunes, long before Horace Greeley so advised them in the 1870's. Jedediah Smith and his group of fur traders came through in 1826, looking for opportunities. However, since the territory at that time, was under Mexican control, the Anglo-Saxon party was told it was not welcome. Two Mexican noblemen of Spanish origin fared better, however. In 1837 Ignacio Palomares and Ricardo Vejar came through the Valley and saw its potential. They petitioned the Governor for permission to raise cattle on a large parcel of land and called it Rancho San Jose. When the U.S. wrested the land from Mexico 13 years later, the Government reaffirmed the claims of Palomares and Vejar.

News of the fertility of the Valley reached other parts of the State, triggering a series of land deals." And - continuing from the Progress-Bulletin, "Settlers were beginning to arrive in steady streams. But it wasn't until the Southern Pacific extended its railroad to Pomona that the stage was set for the first land rush. A census of the 1850's showed three families of 40 persons living in the Palomares section of Rancho San Jose. The upper route from San Bernardino to Los Angeles, <sup>passed</sup> through the present La Verne and San Dimas, as you people know from the Mud Springs situation.

And here's where Lordsburg starts; where it enters our story. Colonel I. W. Lord, a local spokesman for the Los Angeles Board of Trade, and a prominent businessman and promoter, became incensed at the railroad's lack of concern. After a quarrel with its management, he contacted officials of Santa Fe. While land was being developed in Pomona and Ontario, a power struggle was giving birth to what was to become Lordsburg. After the Southern Pacific ran its railroad tracks past Pomona, making trade possible with the rest of the nation, the railroad began to reap the benefits of its monopoly, pushing freight rates higher and higher until they became exorbitant. Lord urged the Santa Fe to run competing lines from Needles to Los Angeles, and offered to donate rights-of-way within his sphere of influence. As an added inducement, Mr. Lord offered free rides to anyone who came to the area using the Santa Fe. The railroad agreed, and Col. Lord bought up all the land he could along the proposed path of the new railroad, about 2 miles North of the Southern Pacific.

When the Santa Fe reached Pomona in 1886, Lord sold \$200,000 worth of lots to settlers and investors and called his settlement Lordsburg, naming it after himself. In 1886, the community of Pomona formed a Christian college of the New England type in a small cottage at White Ave. and Fifth St., Pomona, and it was to become Pomona College. The largest auction in southern California was reported to have been held on May 25, 1887, with some 2500 persons present. Los Angeles was canvassed with a brass band and 30 railroad cars carried prospective buyers to this area. Palomares Street, now Arrow Highway, was the town's Main Street, with stores, the Post Office and residences. Lumber was brought from San Bernardino. (That was before Stanley Plummer was in business here.) By August water mains were in use. Lord and others constructed a \$75,000 hotel, located where now the University Library is situated. It had about 130 rooms, but no residents, as we shall see. The Lordsburg Eagle was born. Lord had done a successful work.

The Boom which brought so many prospective buyers and over-investment to this Valley in 1887, however, was an empty one. The land companies which had built hotels in many of the 25 new towns, including San Dimas and La Verne, along the line of the new railroad, were offering other inducements. Here is where the Brethren enter into the drama of the Pomona-Lordsburg Valley.

Now I take the next section from the book by Gladdys Muir. The Santa Fe Railroad had in its employ an agent by the name of George McDonaugh, who had helped establish other Brethren communities, some in the Midwest. In 1889 he was transferred to the Pacific Coast to do something about colonization. Mr. McDonaugh planned excursions, which he organized at the Brethren annual conferences in the East. In late 1889, after the Virginia General Conference, such an excursion was planned by a Mr. Eshelman, who had been active in establishment of McPherson College in Kansas. Eshelman, with some other Brethren, decided to pick up an option to buy the new, but vacant Hotel. By the terms of the option, the building and lots, 100 of them, which comprised the Alpha Beta block, now the University Library block, were to be sold for \$15,000, plus a bonus for the buyers of \$1250 if a school was opened within two years, under a competent faculty, and showed for the first term an average of sixty-five students, and if it were maintained for a period of not less than ten years.

Four Brethren, Daniel Hauser, S. A. Overholtzer, David Kuns, and Henry Kuns, names which you recognize, agreed to take over the project and pay for the building and lots. Let me read from Muir's book a quotation from the Pomona Times Courier of June 11, 1981:

The deeds have passed to the Lordsburg property, which has been purchased by the German Baptists. The hotel will be converted into a college. They got a splendid bargain. The hotel cost originally \$75,000 and was finished up about the time the boom folded its wings. It is a fine house, one of the best of all the "boom hotels" and is situated in one of the prettiest locations in the State, and in the heart of a splendid agricultural section, but there was no chance to make it pay as a hotel... Many new residences have been put up...in the past year, and dozens of orchards have been added to the older ones that were there before. The settlement promises to be one of the most prosperous in this end of the State at no distant future.

Who were these Brethren? The men who founded Lordsburg College were members of a little-known sect, the German Baptist Brethren, which originated in Germany in 1708, growing out of what some church historians have called the Second Reformation. Because of strife and persecution in Germany, they came to America in 1719, and settled at Germantown, Pennsylvania. The Brethren were thrifty, energetic, peaceful people, and pushed with the Westward movement in the following decades into better lands in Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas, where I joined the parade. They were known in Oregon as early as 1846, and in Southern California as early as the 1860's. The first church in this area was in Covina, then the one in La Verne in 1890. They were colonizing people, moving together as several families into a new area.

The development of Pomona College, which we've already mentioned, in 1887, and Lordsburg in 1891, were natural consequences of the development of a new area. The history of any institution, whether transportation, church, education, commerce, reflects the desire, year after year, the determination, of a community to meet its needs. The small academy out of which Lordsburg, La Verne College, the University, came is a recognition of that fact. The German Baptist Brethren was later, after the turn of the Century, to rename itself the Church of the Brethren as it is known today.

The school did open in September, 1891. On March 6th, the men whom I have just named, met, and in their first meeting, the minutes (of which we are in possession in the University Library) read in the second sentence "decided to open a college". There were at the beginning 76 students. They had met their required goal. The Hotel has been put in order. A call had been issued for library books and for support. On that first roster we find such names Blickenstaff, Overholtzer, Palomares, and Vejar, names which you recognize today. S. S. Garst was President for the first year. Between 1891 and 1901, the end of the first 10-year option period, there were 4 Presidents: S. S. Garst, E. A. Miller, a former president of Bridgewater College, I. N. H. Beahm, a former educator, and W. I. T. Hoover, who had just earned his Master's Degree at De Pauw University.

For the fall term the tuition was \$11, Board \$35, Room \$2.50, if you bring your own fuel. You remember there were fireplaces in some of the rooms. Since many of the rooms had fireplaces, students were reportedly required to purchase or furnish their own fuel. Generally, life on campus was uneventful during the next ten years. Students and faculty lived, ate, worshiped, and had classes in the large building. On the block South of that building, where the baseball field now is, there were vegetable gardens and probably several milk cows which the students tended. There were no inter- varsity sports. The students hiked, played croquet, tennis, went bicycling, particularly on moonlit evenings, according to the record. There were literary, musical, and elocution societies, and religious groups. The Trustees soon learned, as they are still learning, from experience, that from a financial angle an educational venture was a losing proposition. The Lordsburg College Association was organized as a stock company. Year after year, deficits had to be made up by the owners. But they had to keep the College open for 10 years in order to validate the original option. At the end of the tenth year, the Institution closed, for the years 1901 and 1902. That explains why we have just this year, 91 years later, celebrated our 90th academic year. Most of the students did not qualify for college level work and as far as is known, no degrees were awarded during that first decade.

'A notice of the closing of the college came to the attention of a Mr. W. C. Hanawalt, a school principal in Pennsylvania. He recognized the tragedy of closing the school, came to investigate, met with the college's trustees, and signed a protocol agreement to lease the property for five years. He quickly renovated the building and a half-dozen students came, twenty-five by year-end. President Hanawalt acquired more land, the three blocks to the West which comprise the main part of the campus today. The family-type institution went on. Mr. Hanawalt organized and published the California Student, a periodical from the campus. I read from the issue of December, 1903:

- There follows 15 minutes of history of the College from  
that date to the present time. -