

FROM PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS
of
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SAN JOSE, AS I KNEW IT
By
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San Jose, and Santa Clara County, have changed considerably since I was a boy there. I was born in 1903. My grandparents lived at 28th and Santa Clara Streets, where they owned several acres and a comfortable house. There is a church there now.

Mt. Hamilton could be plainly seen from their place, and if I climbed their windmill tower I could see it even better.

Santa Clara Street, and other streets hadn't yet been paved. When I received my first bicycle about 1910 I could fall if I hit a rock within the gravel on Santa Clara Street. Sometimes I saw men lighting gas street lamps on the south side of Santa Clara Street, at about 13th Street.

My grandparents were Porter Decatur Williams and Ella Williams. He had been a sergeant in the Civil War in the cavalry. I still have his discharge paper.

Grandfather Williams became a Councilman for East San Jose after it became incorporated. He was very much against liquor, as his own father Syria Williams, had almost killed his mother when he was a small boy. Great grandfather Syria often came home drunk and once he must have a roaring jag on, for he threw the ax at great grandmother and barely missed hitting her. She left the ax sticking in the log cabin beside the door, until the following day. When great grandfather saw it the next morning he was so startled that they say he never drank again.

Sometimes long freight trains passed along east Santa Clara Street, which we then called Alum Rock Avenue. The trains carried dried prunes from packing houses farther out toward Alum Rock.

Once their load was so heavy that the wooden bridge across Coyote Creek west of our house broke and two heavily loaded cars fell into the creek. A new, and stronger, bridge was soon built.

From our place we could see the lights on the big tower at Market and Santa Clara Streets. It had one leg on each street corner and an arc light at the top. It was supposed to light up all of San Jose, but it never did that.

When the earthquake came on April 18, 1906 my grandfather was frightened and took cover under the house. He came out sheepishly, and explained that he went there just to see how the house was "standing it". He had never experienced such a heavy earthquake before this.

The family attended the little 20th Street Methodist church in East San Jose. When Liquor was banned in East San Jose, State

Senator Walker showed grandmother and I the very pen he had signed the prohibition papers with. Grandmother was impressed.

As I grew a little older, I used to ride the street cars to Alum Rock Park and usually walked on the trails, and swam in the enclosed pool. That way I avoided grandmother's insistence that I take a Saturday night bath in the unheated bathroom, where I had to step on something to get into the tub because of its legs. Once when I slipped I reached out and happened to pull the chain from the high water tank up on the wall. The toilet became flushed and grandmother came running wanting to know if I was all right.

The street car fare was .05¢ to go uptown. Right after the 1906 earthquake my grandmother took me to First Street on the street car and, although I was 3½ years old, I remember the collapsed building fronts down on the sidewalk on the south side of Santa Clara Street, between First Street and Fifth Street. There were several. I saw a bedroom in an upstairs bedroom in one store building.

The bank, which later became Bank of Italy, at the South east corner of First and Santa Clara Streets had some damage. It was replaced many years later by a tall building, where the Bank of America is now.

The entire Santa Clara Valley was orchards-- mostly prunes. In the springtime the blossoms were pretty and a blossom festival was held at Saratoga. Grandmother usually took me there. It was a pleasant ride through the orchards. At Saratoga we drank the good water from Saratoga Springs.

For Christmas that year I had received a rag doll. I suppose it became my security blanket. I carried it around with me, and called it "Tommy".

When riding out to Los Gatos about 1907 with my grandmother to hear Governor Pardee speak I lost Tommy. I was holding him out the open street car window to let him see the prune blossoms, when a prune tree got him. I haven't liked prunes since.

Another boy and I rode our bicycles out to see the Alamaden mines about 1912. The road was graveled and our tires had several blow outs. We taped them, and pumped them up and continued on our way. My grandmother was upset that night because I was late getting home. On the trip we passed farm land and orchards, and an occasional farm house.

Another long bike ride my friends and I took about 1913 was down the old Monterey road, past the cemetery, to Coyote. On that trip we too, had some tire blow-outs. Again we repaired the bicycle tires with friction tape, and pumped them up so we could get home.

On another trip we rode our bicycles out the graveled road to Berryessa. We saw the old Berryessa house, and their prune orchards, but the gravel roads made for slow going. We arrived home late.

In 1914 my grandfather died with cancer. My grandmother sold their house at 28th and Santa Clara, and moved to 544 North 17th Street where she owned another house. The street cars passed by, and it was

easy to go up town.

There were hundreds of vacant lots at the time and the city incinerator was only a few blocks away. Other boys and I liked to go to the incinerator to see if we might find something we thought of value.

We sometimes swam in Coyote creek, although it was polluted.

To go to my school down at South 7th Street and San Carlos Avenue, I roller skated at first. Then rode my bike for several years. It was a long distance but rain or shine, I never missed going to school. The school was the Normal Training School, which was in connection with the Teacher's College. (Now San Jose State University)

One winter there was a very hard rainstorm, with winds blowing about 100 miles per hour. Just before the noon recess word came to the school that the tower had blown down. All the boys put on their raincoats and pedaled quickly over to Market and Santa Clara Streets. The tower had fallen south on Market Street, and missed a 1916 Dodge car parked by Hart's store, by about three feet. Since the car was new, we boys thought the owner was lucky.

The old tower was never replaced, as it's success as a San Jose lighting unit hadn't ever been proven. . . .

When everyone had heard that a war was coming all boys in school had to drill. My basic training was done on South Seventh Street. We drilled for an hour each day for a year. I was a private in the rear rank.

The young man who drilled us, was attending the San Jose Normal School. He was soon to become a Lieutenant, and he was killed in France during the War. His name was Galen Robertson.

People named Aibassa had a fine vegetable garden at 24th Street and Julian Street. (Now McKee Road) I often went there for fresh vegetables.

As activity increased before WW-1, the 6th Infantry from the San Francisco Presidio marched along north 17th Street, out to Luna Park. The park was located at the north end of 17th at that time. I watched as cannons rattled by, drawn by horses, with one man riding one horse, guiding the others. At Luna Park the military men put on a mock war demonstration. They ran, fell flat, fired their guns, cannon boomed, horses reared and there was great excitement. When the demonstration was over, the army men unloaded their rifles of the blank shells, and then strewed them around. We boys gathered them up and my pockets were soon bulging. Later when my parents house burned in northern California, the exploding shells brought neighbors running. I happened to be there on school vacation and was glad no one was hurt.

In San Jose the trains were all on South Fourth Street then and freights often came rattling through San Jose. The train station was on North First Street.

When attending the Normal Training school I was taken, with my class, twice to see Dr. Charles P. Herald's Wireless station. It was on top of the First National Bank Building, on South First St. The old radio is in the Foothill College Museum now and may be seen there when they are open.

Boys all over San Jose soon built crystal sets so they could hear Dr. Herald's broadcasts. They came in good on North 17th Street

Once my grandmother took me on a long street car ride, up to Palo Alto. The interurban cars were fast and when stopped you could hear the motor driven belt slapping and revolving. The sound was nearly as memorable as that from a steam locomotive. Going to Palo Alto you traveled through prune orchards, with their limbs always reaching, but not quite touching, the side of the cars.

Early during the depression the Akron and Macon flew over San Jose. The government bought land at Sunnyvale for an airbase. A mooring mast was provided in the middle of a large garden crop. This was where the Akron was tied up at first. Surrounding the mast was a circular track so the dirigible could revolve as the wind changed.

After the Akron was wrecked, the Macon arrived. It was later wrecked off the California coast. The large hangar was constructed and the two little hangars later added at the base during WW-2. The small hangars were used mainly for the blimps that came with WW-2. The large hangar was 211 feet in height.

By this time I had grown up and was working as a carpenter. I helped to build all the buildings that have tile roofs on the base. We called the base Sunnyvale Airbase, but later it was named Moffitt Field for a Navy admiral.

When the work was going on Sunnyvale was a little town of about 6,000, and there were no houses near the base for several years. The great construction of houses there came during, and shortly after WW-2.

Every young person in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley seemed to work at one time or another with prunes. The crops

were a source of cash when young people wanted to work. When prunes became ripe they fell to the ground. Thousands of young people could be seen during the ripening season, down on their knees under the trees gathering up the crop. They were paid .10¢ per box, and by working very hard and fast they often earned as much as \$3.00 per ten hour day.

I never did work in a prune orchard, but worked at Herbert's Packing Co. on north 7th Street for awhile, on a prune grader. I worked on the second floor, where there were sixteen wheel barrows, and sixteen holed in the floor, and sixteen chutes where prunes came down from the third floor. I was told the work would be easy-- all I was required to do was to keep the prunes off the floor. A slide door could be opened to allow the dried prunes to slide out into the wheel barrows. The foreman assured me that my job would be easy and that I would be paid .25¢ per hour for a ten hour day.

I soon found myself running with wheel barrows, emptying them into a chute sixteen feet away, running back again to replace the wheelbarrow, opening that slide-up door, reaching for another full wheelbarrow, closing its door, racing across the floor to empty it down a chute, then racing back again, to grab an overflowing wheelbarrow under another chute. I quickly decided the foreman's statement that the work was easy was exaggerated. I complained.

Next I was taken downstairs to a lid nailer machine. There I was told that prune boxes with loose lids on top would come flying to me on rollers. All I had to do was move the boxes under the nailer, stomp my foot, then place the boxes on a cart next to me.

The boxes soon were flying along the rollers, and I was moving

very fast to keep the boxes from backing up. The lids were branded with fascinating names such as Cherbourg, Liverpool, Brest, Havre, Hamburg, London. For my work I had been advanced to .35¢ per hour for a ten hour day.

At last the season ended and all workmen were laid off until the following year. I was glad to have worked with the prune crop, and more glad that the season ended.

As I was growing up and still a young boy I carried telegrams for the Postal Telegraph Co. Their office was on the south side of Santa clara Street, between First and Second Streets. Miss Harris and Miss Powell operated the telegraph key. They were good operators and assisted me in learning the code. Soon I could recognize their station call. When a telegram came in my job was to ride my bicycle and deliver it. The two operators of the station seemed to like money to the extent they had arranged for me to also deliver packages for several stores: usually one large package at a time.

When Santa Clara Street finally was paved, and during a hard rainstorm, I found myself carrying a suit box under my arm. My wheels slipped on the north side of Santa Clara Street, a short distance from First Street, and I fell to the new pavement. I might have been badly hurt, except that I had landed on the suit box and smashed it. When I delivered it to the lady out on The Alameda, I told her I was glad that she had the nice new suit. I'm sure that she didn't know my reason, for I scrambled away as quickly as my legs would allow me to pedal.

South of there, on First Street, I was sitting on the curb
On a school holiday when a Barnum-Bailey circus parade came by.

A boy on an elephant, and dressed as an Arab, was a boy from my school. He called out my name and I felt real important being recognized by an Arab, and I quickly glanced to either side of me to see whether anyone had noticed my greeting.

Farther south on the east side of First Street, at an other time I watched as a human fly climbed up the outside of a store. I don't know his secret, but a great crowd had gathered, and the man easily went on the outside of the building from the street to the roof. He didn't use harness, or ropes, and only his hands to cling to the surface of the building. He had been hired by a nearby store so as to bring people to their part of town.

On Santa Clara Street, about a half block west of First Street, crowds gathered each year in front of the Mercury office to watch a large display board fastened to the front of the building showing baseball scores during the World Series. We could hear the telegraph clicking away, and soon a man would change the scores high up in front of us. The crowds would be so large that they often overflowed into the street from the sidewalk. Then they had to be moved back so street cars could pass.

There used to be two newspapers in San Jose-- The Herald and the Mercury. They combined to name their larger paper The Mercury-Herald. Later the name Herald was dropped.

At the corner of Market Street and Santa Clara Streets was the large Hart's store. It was Hart's son, Brooke Hart, who was kidnapped during the early depression, by Thurmand and Holmes. A news item in the Mercury told that the Hart boy's body had been thrown off the newly built Dumbarton or San Mateo bridge. The

Hart family were well liked in San Jose, and soon a crowd had gathered. The kidnappers had already been caught and were in the San Jose jail on north First Street. The crowd broke into the jail and dragged the two men out across north First Street into St. James Park, where there was a lynching. Afterward the tree was removed. As the men were being dragged, a woman in the large crowd stepped forward and pushed her high heel into the eye of Thurmond., partially blinding him, such was the crowd's feeling.

Farther west another block and one block to the north was Notre Dame Academy operated by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. There was a high fence around the college and I couldn't see in, unless I happened to glance through as someone was entering or leaving. The college was moved to Belmont in 1922., and the San Jose property was sold.

Farther west on Santa Clara Street was the San Jose Ice. Co. The owner usually drove an old automobile around San Jose. It had large wheels, such as a buggy might use. I believe its date was about 1908. The old fellow was a kind man and showed a group of boys, including me, through his plant one time. I found it interesting.

If I kept going west on Santa Clara Street I would come to Santa Clara where I could visit the old mission. Much later it burned, and then was rebuilt.

Where Santa Clara Street turned, there used to be a large brewery on that corner. It is long gone now.

San Jose had no flood control for many years. One of my uncles owned a pear and apple orchard on North First Street about

where Highway 101 crosses now. Guadalupe Creek used to flood when hard rains came. My uncle's orchard was under three feet of muddy flood waters several times when I was a boy. During one flood I rode my bicycle along First Street way out in the country toward his place, but I had to stop before arriving there. The water covered First Street; then called the Aiviso Road at that area. My uncle was marooned for two weeks until the water went down. He had an old bay sway-back horse and rode it out for his mail.

When selling apples each fall he drove "old Sam" in a specially built one-horse wagon into town. The wagon had a low ~~bed~~, and high driver's seat, and small front wheels so it would turn sharply among orchard trees. Most orchardists owned similar wagons.

On North First Street was the Vendome Hotel, a large old hotel in a park-like setting, with a circular driveway where early automobiles brought in guests. It has been replaced with newer buildings.

These old hotels were very popular in the early 1900s. There was one at Los Gatos also, on the south end of the main street, and on the west side. It too, was in a park-like setting, and there was a covered band stand where bands played on Sundays.

Out on North 17th, near where my grandmother lived, was a tall eucalyptus tree, there in a yard at the corner of Jackson St. A sign on it proclaimed it to be California's tallest eucalyptus.

Also on North 17th Street lived the Lundy family. Mr. Lundy farmed his land north of Alum Rock Park where the hills are rolling, and good hay crops were common. He lived at the east corner on 17th Street at number 500. He raised several children;

Elmer, Ramona, and Maude. Possibly one other whose name I cannot recall.

Once when mowing hay at his ranch, his little girl Maude ran out to tell him lunch was ready. She unknowingly stepped in front of the cycle and the horses became startled and lunged ahead, cutting off both her feet just above the ankle. The accident almost drove poor Mr. Lundy into a nervous breakdown. He never seemed the same again, although the little girl recovered to spend the rest of her life in a wheel chair.

The main highway from Oakland came into San Jose on North 13th Street. The highway was two lane, and unpaved at first.

The San Jose High School occupied space by the Normal School, in downtown San Jose. The high school was moved way out on McKee Road, near 24th Street in later years.

San Jose had a China Town on North 13th Street, near Jackson Street. It was a common sight to see Chinese men carrying two chairs suspended from a pole across their shoulders, as they walked along with their black hair braids dangling down their backs. I never learned why they only seemed to carry chairs, but probably they later worked replacing chair bottoms.

To go by train to San Francisco took two hours in the early 1900s. As I recall the fare was \$2.25 each way.

Trains made many stops, and towns were seperated by prune orchards. One stop was Mayfield-- a town no longer there.

During WW-1 many soldiers were stationed at Camp Fremont at Menlo Park, and in San Jose soldiers seemed to be everywhere.

During WW-1 the people in our country were stirred up more than in WW-2. School children had to drill, and also to raise Liberty Gardens. Both boys and girls were required to learn how to knit, and it was a common sight to see people knitting as they sat on park benches, or rode on street cars in San Jose.

Students at the San Jose Teacher's College were privileged to hear Sergeant Empey who had written a best seller, "Over The Top. He had lost an arm in Belgium, and came to America to help get everyone more interested in winning the war. His talk was interesting and our country won.

Following WW-1, German Count Felix Von Luckner came to speak. He told about his ships, and how he never took a life, but removed the entire crews before he sank the ships of the allies. He was killed in the Pacific during WW-2, many years later.

There have been many changes in San Jose since 1903. The street cars are gone and busses have replaced them. Trains no longer travel on Fourth Street and the train depot is no longer on North First Street. The incinerator that was on North 20th Street is gone, and kids have more sense than to swim in polluted Coyote Creek.

The town as it was in 1903 is no longer, but has grown up into a very modern, and desirable city to live in. People are fortunate to live in our modern San Jose. It has everything.