

CHATSWORTH MEMORIES

This newsletter features memories from those who grew up in Chatsworth. Thanks to these two founding members of our Historical Society, Lila Schepler and Katharine Johnson, we have a window into our past. Besides some of the memories published here in this newsletter, we also have books published by Virginia Watson, Ioline Cleveland, Bob Turner, Bob Sherman and Bill Schepler. In addition, we have both written, audio and video interviews of some of our earlier residents.

We continue to look for more stories....those that keep our Chatsworth history alive.

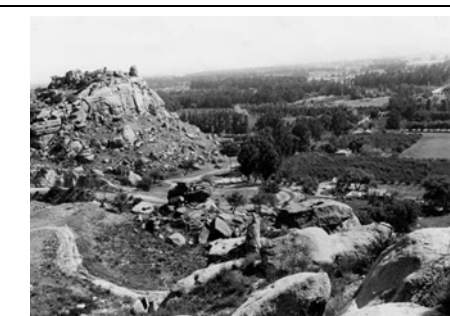


“Dearie, do you remember when?”

Written by Lila Schepler in 1975

I remember the cold winters in Chatsworth during the 1930's when the north wind swept off Oat Mountain impeded only slightly by acres of citrus, figs and the tall eucalyptus wind breaks you still see around town. We had 10 party telephone lines then (ours had 3 rings I think). We were on the same line with Jim Butler, citrus rancher, who had 5 rings. Fairly often at 3:00 A.M. the Fruit Frost Services' would call him when the temperature sank to the danger point, to alert him to get his men out for smudging to prevent freezing. When my dad heard the ring he got up, for he was one of the men who smudged for 25 cents per hour. So did most of the High School boys in the West Valley. They all came late to school the next day, eyes ringed with black soot—and their hands black, too, for it just had to wear off. Since smudging with oil was so expensive, some of the ranchers bought truckloads of old tires for 5 cents each, and burned them instead. Pfui!

Having roasin' ears and hotdogs was a fun thing for young people down on the old Shadwick ranch (the Home was located about where the Rockpointe Recreation Lounge is today). Roastin' sticks were out from the willows along the wash (now a concrete flood channel), a few ears of corn picked from their garden, wieners and buns you brought with you and a lovely dinner was made around an open fire. Shadwicks had an old wood range in their kitchen that was a marvel to me; the Shadwick girls could tell the temperature by reaching their hand in the oven and could decide if it needed another stick of wood or if it was ready to bake. Ah, the light and fluffy biscuits I ate there!



Stoney Point in the 1940-50's before Topanga was extended to the 118 Freeway.

A fun thing to do on Sunday afternoon was to go for a hike. You could eventually meet every friend in town climbing Stoney Point.

How many generations of youth have learned to climb on this old landmark? Or maybe we walked past Minnie Palmer's home to the small pond on the back of the ranch and went wading. Or, if you were feeling daring and had an older boy along, you hiked toward Santa Susana Pass, skirting the Hobo Jungle along the railroad. They had a small cave to partially protect them in damp weather, a cook area (built of rocks with a screen over them) so they could cook with their tin coffee cans or small pots, an old cupboard which had been rescued from someone's discards and couches made of front car seats. Riding the rails had become a way of life for so many in the early 30's. The hobo's came to your back door and asked for a handout and usually did a little work for it. There was a camp in the hills where fellows in their late teens or early twenties were sent if they were picked up as vagrants. This money the police hoarded until it grew large enough to buy a boy a ticket back home. They fought fires, built roads, built check dams etc.

When I attended U.S.C., each Monday morning found me at 5:30 A.M. in Canoga Park where the Big Red Cars parked overnight at the corner of Topanga and Sherman Way. It was always cold, it seemed. The street cars had funny little heaters under the front seat and it took all the way to Hollywood to slightly warm the old cars! It cost 55 cents to ride one way. On Saturdays, I rode out to Chatsworth on Southern Pacific's Train which made one stop at Chatsworth at 2:00 P.M. That ride cost 60 cents.



Schepler Slide Collection – Bee Keeping on the Johnson Ranch

In 1934 or 35 I worked as extra help for C.W. Johnson who owned the Bee Villa Ranch, in fact had the largest Bee and Honey business in Los Angeles beginning in the

1880's. He let me drive his Model "T" truck, and I had to learn to drive all over again because it had no gear shift. Well, my job was to "smoke" the bees with a blower while he checked the frames for the amount of honey on them. I was prepared, I wore a bee hat with a wide brim from which wire screening hung—and from which, in turn, thin canvas hung. This canvas was tucked into the neck of my sweater and securely pinned. I wore a sweater over a long sleeved shirt because it made it harder to sting through. The sweater was tucked into slacks and secured with a belt, the cuffs were secured with heavy rubber bands. The slacks were tucked into hiking boots. Well, all that was left to sting were my hands. And they did! I seldom came home with fewer than 13-15 stings. Even so, my hands were not badly swollen. How did "Grandpa" Johnson dress? Very casually, usually a bee hat and if he was stung (which was seldom) he took his finger and carefully pushed the bees' stinger out so it wouldn't lose the stinger and die. That impressed me alright.

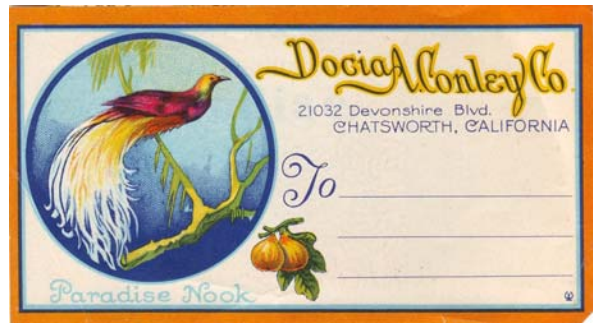
I remember when Kelly Johnson borrowed Cecil Graves big truck, filled it with all the teenagers in Epworth League and drove us over the wildly, winding Topanga Canyon to the beach at Castle Rock. Here we went swimming, or had wiener bakes or grunion hunting. He, and his wife Katherine who was our Counselor, took us 4 or 5 times each summer. Kelly and Katherine were called by their first names by even the very youngest children and it was a mark of great affection and respect. Any couple who used to host parties for teenagers almost every week (ice-cream making, popcorn popping, even taffy pulling) have to be FRIENDS of the youth. I remember doing dishes at their home: the girls washed, handed to the boys who dried, who then tossed them to a

CHATSWORTH PIONEER CHURCH

Memories of the Pioneer Church and the need to record it's history sparked the beginning of the Chatsworth Historical Society. In this article written by KJ (Katharine Johnson) she records the last day's activities and memories before the congregation moved to it's new building at 10824 Topanga Canyon Blvd. At this point in time, the old building they were leaving behind at 10051 Topanga Canyon Blvd. was scheduled to be torn down.



Pioneer Church in 1920's while still located on the west side of Topanga half way between Lassen and Devonshire



Docia A. Conley shipped figs, olives, preserves, and jams all over the world. It was a great place to get a summer/seasonal job when fruit needed to be prepared, packaged, or shipped.

boy standing by the china cabinet who placed them on the shelves! Imagine it in your home? Kelly was a leading baseball player on our town team for many years. Every young person in town spent Sunday afternoon during baseball season cheering him on.

I remember when Docia Conley (and her husband) was the great benefactor of youth hereabouts. Every summer when they made watermelon pickles at the Paradise Cannery on Devonshire she gave the beautiful watermelon heart to the kids to eat: entire dishpans full of the luscious red fruit. Many a watermelon festival was held, supplied by the Conley's.

The era of the 1930's was difficult to live through, so I can't say I was sorry to see it go. Why does it make me feel so nostalgic when I write about those times?

Lila S. Schepler Nov. 10, 1975
Lila was born in 1916 and is still a Chatsworth resident, currently 97 years old.

The Chatsworth Citizen

Thursday, May 2, 1963, Chatsworth, California
 Newspaper Article written by Katharine Johnson

Sad Sentimental Journey Taken By Long Time Church Members

"Memory Sunday" at the Chatsworth First Methodist Church brought together 350 members and friends of the church to commemorate the years of service in the old church building, built in 1903, which will be left behind as the congregation moves into the new facility within the next two weeks.

Continued.....

The work of the church through the years was observed in the three morning services in the sermon by the pastor, Rev. Robert Fehlman, on the subject, "The Ingredients of Achievement." The choir, at the 11 a.m. service sang the anthem, "Seek Ye the Lord," a favorite of the congregation for more than 35 years.

Following this service a fellowship luncheon was held in White Oak hall, after which the group gathered again in the church for a Program of Memories. The co-chairman, Mrs. Edward Ahlstrom and Mrs. Kelly Johnson, shared the duties, with Mrs. Ahlstrom in charge of the luncheon and Mrs. Johnson in charge of the program.

A sing of old fashioned favorite hymns was led by Harold Johnson and an opening prayer offered by Walter Erickson. Brief histories of the various church organizations were given, beginning with the Women's Society. The president, Mrs. Steve Leach, recalled the day in 1902, when the group organized to assist in raising money to build the church, which was finished the following year, and told of some of its many and varied activities through the years. The Methodist Men's Club history of 10 years was given by Charles Janess, a charter member and former president.

The choir, which has an official record since 1920, was according to old timers, always a part of the service even before then, as musical members of the church shared their talent in this way. Mrs. James Roasch, the present secretary and a member of the choir for 13 years, sketched the service of this group in its ministry of music.

FAVORITE HYMN

Will Dursteler, a member of the choir for more than 25 years, sang another favorite hymn, "The Church in the Wildwood," with the audience joining in on the chorus.

Mrs. Jack Wardlaw, a former counselor of the MYF, gave the history of the youth work in the church, which dates back to November, 1898, when the church organized an Epworth League Society, and has carried on an unbroken service to youth since that time.

Mrs. Johnson gave a resume of the history of the church. The congregation was established 75 years ago with the appointment of J.C. Elliott, the first pastor, by the Methodist Conference, with meetings being held in the school house. After the erection of the church in 1903, there was no water on the grounds until N.A. Gray, who gave the property for the church, piped water from Hialeah Springs in the hills north of Chatsworth, about 1906. The nearest water was the artesian well, on Devonshire just west of Santa Susana, and the well at the Chatsworth Park School. There was no indoor plumbing until the erection of White Oak Hall in 1921.

KEROSENE LAMPS

The church used kerosene lamps until 1917 when the church was wired for electricity, and was heated by a wood stove until 1948, when the present gas furnace was installed.

Guests were given an opportunity to tell of the past and of their years of membership. Kelly Johnson has the longest unbroken membership, 52 years. Twenty-five members of the Johnson family, descendants of the pioneer Ann Johnson, who was responsible for the establishment of the church, were present during the day, including out of town people. Mrs. Glen Pogue (Dorothy Johnson) of Palmdale and her granddaughters, Dorothy and Madeline Ecroid of Simi; Wilda Johnson of Burbank; Mrs. Dora Johnson, 93, of Tujunga; and the Bill Pogues of Van Nuys; Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Christensen of Manhattan Beach, former members, were also present.

The meeting closed with the reading of a poem, "The Church with a Tower and a Bell," by Art Honey, and a few words by the pastor who likened the church to one he served in New York. The church has been named a historical monument and can be preserved with the help of the community. It is now a community church building as it was for 65 years when it was the only one in the area, west of San Fernando.

On display were pictures and scrap books of early years.

Tribute was paid to the many pastors who have served the church and to the hundreds of people that through the years, have given of the gifts, service and prayers to bring it to this day. No one will ever know the outreach of lives, brought to a saving knowledge of God in this little church, who in serving Him in other communities and other fields.

K.J.



The Pioneer Church relocated at Oakwood Memorial Park in 1965.