

Chatsworth

CHATSWORTH BRANCH LIBRARY
21052 DEVONSHIRE ST.
CHATSWORTH, CALIFORNIA

Reference
JUL 15 1963

Prepared by: Mrs. Katharine Johnson
10901 Santa Susana Ave.
Chatsworth

REFERENCE

When we think of history in the East it goes back several centuries, but California history is limited in years, so when we talk of one hundred or one hundred and fifty years it is a long time for us.

I want you to think back past the year 1900 - 1890 - 1880 to 1867, 96 years ago, when Ann and Niels Johnson arrived in the San Fernando Valley in a covered wagon with their four children. Because Mrs. Johnson had such a vital part in the establishment of the community here, I am going to give a few highlights from her life, taken from the book "Our Pioneer Mother" written by one of her daughters but told in the first person as though her mother were speaking.

The valley, on their arrival, was a vast stretch of wild oats and hundreds of oak trees, with greasewood, wild lilac sumac, and chopperal shrubs close to the foothills. Niels Johnson, as one of his resources, took the roots of the brush as he cleared off the place, into Los Angeles to sell it. He also cut down some of the oak trees and sold this wood. They had to go to Los Angeles for supplies and mail for many years, until business and a Post Office was established in San Fernando.

The stage coach from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara and points north started in 1864. It came from Los Angeles over the Cahuenga Pass to Chatsworth. The stables and blacksmith shop, where a stop was made for repairs and to change horses for the steep climb over the rocky hills to the other side, was in the vicinity of Oakwood Cemetery chapel. Don DeLaOsa was the proprietor 1867 to 1877. The road went over one rocky stretch so steep that places for the horses to step were carved out of the rocks and the passengers had to get out and walk. Those of you who have hiked over the trail have seen some of the hollows that still remain. The Native Daughters of the Golden West have placed a plaque on the trail to commemorate this historic spot.

In the vicinity of this building was an Indian burial ground where many interesting relics and some skeletons, as well as some relics of the stagecoach blacksmith shop, were unearthed when the cemetery was started in 1922. The stagecoach was discontinued in 1877 after the Southern Pacific was brought to San Fernando about 1874 where it was the terminal for many years.

There were many springs in the area close to the hills, some of them sulphur. The mission fathers used to send their sick Indians and Spaniards over here to use the sulphur water to aid their illnesses.

The town charter was taken out in 1887 - 76 years ago. It received its name through the Duke of Devonshire, who visited his friend, Mr. Barbour, here in the 70's. He noted that the terrain was much like that of his domain in Chatsworth Park, England, and for this reason, the town was named Chatsworth Park, although we have gradually eliminated the "Park". Devonshire Boulevard was named in honor of the Duke, and I hope that some day, the Chamber of Commerce or the Woman's Club will have the name "Boulevard" replaced for the present "Street," now willed by the long-pencilled city fathers.

In 1845, James Love wrote to the present Duke of Devonshire asking permission to use his seal as the seal of our town, and the Duke graciously agreed.

The first store was established in 1890 at the corner of Devonshire and Topanga and was operated by David Nelson, Joseph Nelson, no relation, was the first Postmaster, just where we aren't exactly sure. After the S.P. RR came in 1896, a star route carried mail to Calabasas, Triunphe, Coneje, and the small settlement at Canoga (Water Hole) from our office. Canoga changed its name to Owensmouth when Owens River Water was brought here in 1913; but later, wanting its original historic name, the residents voted to change it back to Canoga and added Park. Other valley towns also changed names - Lankershim to North Hollywood, Marion to Reseda, Zelsah to North Los Angeles and later to Northridge. Chatsworth is the only west valley town that hasn't changed its name.

Other old stores, torn down in recent years, were the Graves and Hill store, which served in the early 1900's, located on Reuben Ahlstrom's place on Topanga, and the Wilkins Building, recently torn down for the Union Oil Service Station. This was a grocery and department store and Post Office. It was from this Post Office that Kelly Johnson, went out as the first regularly appointed rural mail carrier in 1921. He served for 32 years and has since retired. He recalls starting on a 3-day a week schedule at \$90 a month, and progressing to a full 6-day week at \$120 a month. He was, in fact, according to Postmaster Jennings, the only rural carrier. After he retired the carriers became mounted carriers.

Those who attended the opening of our new Post Office four years ago will doubtless remember the many other places where the Post Office was housed. One of the old ones still remaining is the building just north of the school which was used in 1895 when Mr. Lovelock was postmaster. The building has two doors, one of which was an entrance to their home and the other to the Post Office.

Names of early settlers here were Tetsliffs, Grays, Williams, Iversons, Mirandas, Montregons, Hills, and Newbells. Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Iversen were sisters. Most of them came in the late 80's or early 90's.

The town was originally designed to be a Methodist Colony after it was subdivided by Mr. Barbour, and a trainload of people were brought out from the East to settle here. They arrived, of all things, in a snowstorm with driving sleet, and they turned right around and went back again. All land was originally deeded with the stipulation that no liquor ever be sold on it, but how do you go about enforcing a deed such as this?

With her own family of six children (four were born later) and children of the Spanish people here, Mrs. Johnson decided that some kind of school was necessary. She had previously taught her children in the evenings after a busy day's work. So, working through the Santa Susana School District in Los Angeles County, a little school was started in a one-room building that stood on Santa Susana Ave. just below Chatsworth Street on the east side. This building was later purchased by the late C. W. Johnson, Kelly's father, and was used as a bedroom for the boys. It still stands there and has been remodelled for rental purposes.

This was in 1880, and later in this year, the first part of a school building was built at the present location of the Chatsworth Elementary School. In the big 1890 boom, an addition was made to the school to enlarge it for the increased enrollment, which increased to 120; after the boom was over, it returned to 16 in 1912, when Kelly Johnson graduated from there.

The building was purchased by W. A. Gray and was moved across the street, so that a modern stucco building could be built. The old building was later purchased by Mrs. Marjorie Foeter, who operated a store and rooming house. The building was moved to the site of the Legion Hall in 1947 by a Mr. Masters, presumably to start a shopping center. This never developed and the building was incorporated into the Hall building when the legion bought the property and built the hall - then called the Legion Hall. It was sold to Roy Rogers several years later, when it was called Chatsworth Hall. It was repossessed by the Legion in 1961.

The new school building erected in 1915 was condemned after the 1933 earthquake in Long Beach, as were all hollow-tile block school buildings in So. California. It was a lovely two-story building with many rooms, but it had to be torn down, and the present building was built in 1935.

Mary Gower, of the famous Gower family in Hollywood for whom Gower Street was named, was the first official teacher. One of the later teachers was Kate Ijima, Mrs. Perry Mulholland's Mother, now Mrs. Hass. She, as some of the other teachers, lived with the Johnsons during the week. She is one of the few people now living, other than members of the family, who knew Grandma Johnson, and she has many kind words to say of her kindly Christian character.

It was necessary to maintain a certain average attendance to keep the school going, and Mrs. Johnson used to hitch up the horse and buggy and go down from the ranch many times a month to check. If the proper number of children were not there, she would drive to the various homes until she picked up the required number and took them back to school. As the book stated, she was clerk of the School Board for many years, and, no doubt, had to report the school attendance.

Oh yes, the school bell has quite a history. When the first building was built there was a belfry but no bell, and no place in the west to get one. So Mr. Gray sent an order back east to have one made and it was hung there soon after the second half of the building was built in 1890. When the building was moved and the bell was no longer needed, it was placed in the belfry of the Methodist Church where it hangs today - one of only two church bells in the valley, the other being at Sylmar.

Before we leave the school, you may be interested to know that we had a high school here before Owensmouth (Canoga Park) H.S. was built in 1915. For two years, about 1905 or 1906, high school was conducted in the Methodist Church. When H.S. was started in San Fernando, young people from here went there to school, while those further south went into Hollywood. There have been only two years since the school started in 1880 that there hasn't been some descendant of Ann Johnson attending the Chatsworth Park Elementary School.

The First Methodist Church of Chatsworth served our community as the only church for 63 years. It was then known as the Chatsworth Community Church, even though it was a mission project of the Methodist Conference. The first pastor, Rev. J. C. Elliott, was appointed in 1888. The church is the second oldest Protestant church in the valley. Prior to this appointment, Grandma Johnson had gathered interested children and parents in a Union Sunday School about 1880, which met under the oak trees when weather permitted until the school house was built, when they met there.

In some early records of the church, which our committee of Records and History (of which I am a member) discovered a couple of months ago, we found that a Holiness preacher came here in 1884 and held meetings for 2 or 3 years. He was followed by a Baptist Circuit rider, who held services when he happened here on his itinerary - all this was prior to the establishment of the Methodist Church in 1888, actually giving us a church and Sunday School history at least 8 years before. Aunt Emma Graves, who passed away in July 1962, was the last charter member of the church.

The Epworth League, which is now the Methodist Youth Fellowship, took out its charter on Nov. 28, 1898 and has had an unbroken history since that time. The charter hangs on the wall of the chapel.

N. A. Gray donated the land for the church which was built in 1903, 58 years ago, a lovely little chapel, the only one of this style in So. California. To maintain its present wood siding, special permission had to be granted by the city when it was remodelled in 1948, so that we did not have to stucco the outside.

The Ladies Aid was established in 1902 to raise money to help build the church. I have the original minutes of the organization of the Society which will go into the historical archives.

The church was the life of the community in those days and everyone, whether they attended church or not, joined in the socials, the picnics, the box suppers, the dinners, and other affairs given to raise money and provide fellowship.

The only place in town big enough to accommodate indoor groups was the court in the Gray home, at Lassen and Farralone, now occupied by the Robert Worrens, which was built in the early 90's. The Grays were very generous with the court and allowed the church to use it for many affairs, even though it meant considerable adjustment for them and their large family. The family was one of the outstanding residents of the community and Mr. Gray became an extensive property owner, owning at one time much of the land north of Lassen and west of Santa Susana, which he purchased for about \$12.50 an acre.

In 1951 the Four Square Church came to the community, and was followed in rather quick succession by the Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran and others, so that the community now has many churches. But it is unique history, that one church alone should serve a community for 63 years as the Methodist church did.

The Santa Susana Pass originally was constructed on the south side of the canyon about the boom year, and sections of the road are still visible for those who like to hike and might make a trek up that way. About 1912 the county built the highway on the north side. However, it was not paved for another 10 years or more. When I came into the family in 1920, Daddy Johnson had a contract with the county to keep the road graded, and they did a fine job of it, so much so, that it was almost as smooth as a graded surface. I could stand at the north of our house and watch until they arrived on the highway and wave a final goodbye as they went on their way. Now, trees have grown up until we can barely see the cars pass by. The Johnsons also kept the other roads in town graded by the same contract.

The big boom of 1890 to which I have referred several times, began when the So. Pacific RR was brought to Chatsworth, where it was a terminal until 1904, when the tunnels were built through the Santa Susana mountains. The first tunnel was built under Story Point, and two others beyond, through the hills; the second one being $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles long. The other boom project was the quarrying of rock which was taken by train to build the San Pedro breakwater. A spur track was laid over to the hills about 300 ft. south of Lassen Street and property owners in that area have found remnants of this track on their property. This project did not continue for very long, as it was discovered that the sandstone washed away and did not make a solid foundation.

The workers on these projects increased the population greatly at the time but after the jobs were over they left for other similar jobs and Chatsworth dropped back to its usual rural population. The tunnels were not cemented until after I came into the family in 1920 or 21.

The Chatsworth Inn, which was torn down two years ago, was built during the boom by Mr. Gray's brother-in-law and was a busy place then and in the early days of the moving pictures. The Inn, located across from the Reuben Ahlstrom place, and a little south on the rear of the Boydston Lumber Yard, cared for much of the increased population with its many rooms and large dining room. Many moving pictures were made here in Chatsworth and vicinity, with the Inn itself being used in many. The actors and producers stayed at the Inn, as transportation to Hollywood wasn't as good in those days as now. Many notables of silent film days, Mary Pickford, Wm. S. Hart, Wm. Farnum and others, were housed in these walls. What a pity that the building couldn't have been preserved!

Not only people, but horses, were brought out here and Reuben Ahlstrom said that he had cared for as many as one hundred horses at one time, in his pasture across the street.

Uncle Fred Graves, Aunt Emma's husband, was the constable here for many years; yes, we had our own police force and a jail. Unfortunately, the building is no longer here because a prankish youth set fire to it and burned it down. Fires in the hills, for they happened way back then, although they were seldom man-made, were fought by volunteers, and they really knew how to put them out. They never raged for 1000 of acres as they do now, with modern equipment. The men used shovels and gunny sacks and dirt and hard work. Even after the city took over fighting fires here, local men often helped when certain home areas were in danger and the department came to know them and really appreciated their help.

-6-

When Chatsworth went into Los Angeles in 1915 to get the Owens River water, the city gave us a small truck and Kelly Johnson's oldest brother, Ernest, was captain of the volunteer fire department. Glen Pogue, his brother-in-law, and Tracy Hughes were later in charge of the fire department. It was really not too effective for in case of a house fire, by the time the crew was assembled from the surrounding farms, and the truck started, the house was pretty well gone. But as far as a real fire department, we didn't have one even though we paid city taxes until July of '62.

Kelly's father, known as the "Honey King" had, at one time, more than 2000 hives of bees at strategic places in the valley. They marketed the honey in Los Angeles and Kelly often slept in a hay field on Cahuenga Blvd. when he went in with a load of honey with the horse and wagon. He couldn't make the trip there and back in one day.

Aunt Emma's eldest boy, Jesse, and Kelly drove to San Fernando High School in a horse and buggy but when Owensmouth H.S. (now Canoga Park) was started in 1915, Kelly went there for two years, and was a charter pupil of the school. In his Senior year he decided to go back to S.F. to graduate, and stayed there during the week, working his way.

I was a resident of the valley seven years before I became a resident of Chatsworth, coming from Colorado to San Fernando in 1913 where my father, J. A. Walton, was pastor of the Presbyterian Church for four years. It was here that I met Kelly, but that is another story!

The Johnson "Pacific" Telephone Company was established in 1910, with a line from the ranch in the hills to Daddy Johnson's place down here. It was so effective that little by little, business houses and individuals wanted to be added to the line, until nearly everyone in town had a phone - the old fashioned wall type, of course. Of course, it was not very private, because anyone could listen in on anyone else's conversation, by lifting down the receiver and sometimes there was a click-click-click down the line, as different ones took their receiver off the hook. But it was pretty handy at that, and, moreover, when the Pacific Telephone Co. wanted to come in here they had to get permission to take over the franchise and discontinue the local service.

Coming down to more recent times in recording some of the organizational activities, the Boy Scouts were organized under Kelly's uncle, Norman Johnson, in 1912 and this organization has quite a history in itself, as compiled by Edward Ahlstrom.

The Chamber of Commerce first started in 1914, but had several ups and downs. During one of its "downs" the Chatsworth Civic Association was organized and served the community for several years until it united with the re-organized Chamber and formed the present up and going Chamber of Commerce. This, too, is another interesting history when all of its accomplishments have been catalogued.

Our Woman's Club was founded in February 1921 by our beloved Grace Hageman Armstrong, and will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year. Few local organizations have a more interesting and colorful history than our club. The Hagemans, who came here about 1915, have also played a very important part in the life of the community.

The Chatsworth Park P.T.A. was organized about 1915, and has served the community through the school and its pupils, valiantly during all these years. Now, of course, there are several schools here and several PTAs but there is only one Chatsworth Park P.T.A.

There was no girl's organization in the community until the Standard Bearers were organized in 1927. I served as their counsellor for 14 years. All girls of eligible age in the community belonged, although it was a Junior Missionary Society of the church. A lot of fun was had in slumber parties, overnight camps, retreats, week camps with other groups, etc. and we did a wonderful amount of good for others. Camp Fire Girls followed this. Girl Scouts came into being when Eileen Janess came to town 16 years ago, and she has done a wonderful piece of work in this rapidly growing group.

The Legion and Auxiliary were organized in 1945, with most of the members being transfers from the Canoga Park Post and Auxiliary, and they, too, have done an outstanding piece of work in their special field of endeavor, with the veterans. One of our members, Virginia Somerville, received a personal citation for 6000 hours of hospital work last year.

The increase of commerce and the advent of new business houses in the community and the part their genial proprietors have had in the making of Chatsworth is still another vital story that we haven't time to go into today.

Many other wonderful people have played a part in our history - farmers, citrus growers, artists, musicians, movie stars and just ordinary folks like you and me, and were there time we would mention them all by name. But to them all we owe a debt of gratitude for the part they played in making our town the wonderful place it is today.

May I say in closing, that most of the material I have given about Ann Johnson came from other sources than the book "Our Pioneer Mother" which has only three pages about their life in Chatsworth. One book "The History of the San Fernando Valley" written by the D.A.R. and published in 1924, gives much more of the life of the pioneer Johnson family than our own book does. Perhaps a little of the friendly spirit of Chatsworth, its hospitality and warmth and kindness, has been a benediction left by the courageous pioneer who played such a part in its early history - Ann Johnson.