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Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society

HATTIE HURD – A GOOD-TIME GIRL

Albert Simonson recently shared the following article with the Historical Society. As usual, Albert paints a vivid picture of times gone by. His contributions are very much appreciated.

“Hattie Hurd was a good-time girl, the kind men naturally like.

You could find her in hotel ballrooms everywhere – Alpine, El Cajon, Ramona, Ballena, Julian, even Escondido. She was a spunky high-stepping girl and often danced from 7 o’clock ‘til dawn. Those were footloose times, she recalled in her autumnal age in 1958, when pink Thunderbirds and Hudson Hornets with “Step-Down Design” and Plymouths with soaring fins had replaced the horse and buggy of her tender sprouting youth.

This southern belle came out here in June 1885 to stay at her “Uncle Henry” Whitney’s stage station, store, and newly designated post office at Alpine. The place got its official name from George Washington Webb’s “Alpine Ranch.” Webb was a Julian man of many talents who had graded the Banner toll road and also the San Diego-Julian toll road., which is buried beneath a still-visible slab of old highway. Before the postal designation it was called Valle de las Viejas or Mesa del Arroz. “Alpine” sounded more marketable.

Hattie’s uncle and her brother Willis had a feed barn and stables for stages and the Stonewall Mine traffic.

“Uncle Joe” Foster (no relation) ran 4-horse stage lines through both Ramona and Alpine. His 1866 Concord Coach #158 can still be seen in San Diego. Whitney and her brother kept fresh horses in Alpine. There were more fresh horses in the grassy meadow of Descanso.

Alpine already had a dozen or so tents for tuberculosis patients from back east who did well in the dry “alpine” air, except when big cattle drives dusted up the town, funneling between the hotel and barn. Women and kids got strict orders to stand clear so as not to stampede the cattle.

Unlike Missouri, Alpine seemed to have a lack of butter and eggs. Hattie could only get a wooden tub of slimy margarine made from beef suet. When Governor Waterman came through on his way to his Stonewall Mine at Cuyamaca City, he sent word that eggs were on breakfast order for him and his retinue, a tall order.

The obliging hosts had to scour the whole area to buy up three dozen eggs at ten times the Missouri price, and they were no doubt happy to see the grandee governor depart with his ten-mule jerk-line team. The mine had two such teams to haul supplies and gold bullion. Stonewall traffic usually took the southern road to San Diego, and the gold often stayed under guard in Alpine overnight.

Hattie could always get olives, though. Every farm had a big barrel of olives with a dipper where one could fish out a cool bunch from the murky depths, and everyone was welcome to partake. It was a symbol of country hospitality.

Hattie and her brother Willis Hurd “lived from one dance to the next.” In Ramona, they danced the night away in the old brick schoolhouse. Intermission dinner was at midnight in the Adams House hotel. Then the dancing resumed till wee hours in a golden glow of sweet youth.

In later years, dances were at Mrs. Kearney's Ricker Hotel, which she re-named the Kenilworth Inn. The Ramona thrift store, newly remodeled, now occupies a former bank building at that site. On the side street, you can still see a stump from one of the old eucalyptus trees. The inn burned in the 1950's. The thrift store is a very good one, and it has a photo of the old hotel.

In 1890, Hattie married and moved to Ramona. Her shopping trips to San Diego took 3 days. When the rail line from San Diego to Foster Station (present San Vicente Dam, Lakeside) was laid, things went much faster.

Hattie could rise at 4 am, drive the team to Foster's to catch the San Diego train, go shopping, and be back home in Ramona already by midnight. "Shop till you drop" had a different shade of meaning then. The route was down the Mussey Grade where the reservoir is now. The riding trail to Uncle Henry in Alpine was too narrow for a team so Hattie rode it on horseback.

I don't know where the dances were held in Ballena. Maybe she meant the 2-story hotel at Witch Creek. We can't ask her anymore. Our well-known neighbor Bob McDaniel worked in the old store at Santa Ysabel as a boy. He remembers dances in the ballroom of the next-door Santa Ysabel Inn. In fine weather dances were held under the grand old oak which still endures. He can tell you all about it and about school days in the Witch Creek School, and fetching an errant baseball out of a sewage-sodden sump where we now drive into the Santa Ysabel post office. Those microbes merely bolstered his immune system.

You can still see the patio under the tree, with steps up into the inn. There used to be a hand dug well by the tree, which maybe explains the tree's longevity and size.

It's a good place to think about the good times that were, and about fancy-free girls like Hattie who knew how to have fun in a way we guys can appreciate."

Carol Walker and her husband Paul lived in Alpine for 19 years. Carol is the webmaster and newsletter editor for the Alpine Historical Society. If you know someone who should be interviewed as part of the Voices of Alpine Series, please contact her at cwalker@alpinehistory.org or 619-467-7766.



Hattie's 1885 Home