



City of San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society P.O. Box 875, San Bernardino, CA 92402

LIBRARY NEWS OCTOBER 2008

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

On September 13th I got back to work at the Heritage House Library, and several old friends showed up, among them John Hockaday, and Roger and Alice Hall. We had a long chat, made especially enjoyable by the fact that these are among the very few local historians doing primary research on San Bernardino and environs.

GERMANS STUDY SAN BERNARDINO FAMILY

The Society gets requests for help all the time and one of the more interesting came from Catharina von Bredow. I have reproduced her letter here, which is self-explanatory:

Dear Mr. Shaw,

I am currently working on a cultural study project for the University of Heidelberg, Germany, focussing on the America of the early 20th century. This project is based on the lives of real people. We have acquired a variety of letter conversations, as these allow a direct link to the people of the past. My particular focus is on a collection of letters written by James Russell to his son George Vernon Russell in the years 1928 to 1932.

Building on the information we can obtain from the letters (ca. 150), we are now trying to reconstruct the lives of James and George Russell and their family, and, if possible try to find their living relatives. As I already found out Mr. George Vernon Russell became a famous architect building some landmarks in San Francisco and Hollywood. However, it is very difficult to find information regarding the father James Russell, the author of the letters.

We know that he had a shop in 1073 Third Street in San Bernardino called "Russell's Men's Furnishings and Shoes". On another letter head appears the name "The Maccabbees", James Russell R.K. in 787 E Street, San Bernardino. We don't know how they came through the Great Depression, if their business survived, what became of James and his wife after 1932.

We would be very grateful, if you could help us in the search for more information on James Russell and his family. If you have any details in your archives, any pictures or documents, or any other kind of information or suggestion where I could find such information, it would be wonderful if you could contact me.

If you are interested in our project, we will of course supply you with more information and the final report.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Catharina von Bredow

Steve referred the letter to me for response. My first impression was that based on the address near the Santa Fe Depot, this was probably a low-rent operation. I had never heard of a famous architect from San Bernardino by the name of George Vernon Russell, and thought that maybe there was a mix-up in von Bredow's identification. The prospect of finding much about the life of his father James Russell, a clothing salesman from the early 20th Century, seemed daunting. It never occurred to me that, even if the son was a famous architect, the father would be a leader of the community, but so it proved to be. I quickly found this biography in John Funk's *San Bernardino County Supervisors 1855-1999*:

James Russell

Fifth District Supervisor, 1926

James Russell was born on February 5, 1873, in Adams County, Iowa. He was the son of James S. and Rachel Binkley Russell. While in his infancy, James' parents moved the family to Centralia, Washington, where his father taught school and farmed in that area until his death at age 99, the last Civil War veteran in the State of Washington.

James' mother died while he was quite young and his father subsequently remarried. At about the age of 14, James left home, partly because of incompatibility with his stepmother, and came to San Bernardino. Here he worked for a time as a driver of lumber teams in the San Bernardino mountains, a stint as a fireman for the Santa Fe Railroad and other colorful occupational adventures. Deciding to finish his schooling, he completed the required high school courses in two years.

Shortly thereafter, three of his brothers, William, Lowell and Marion, and his twin sister, Belle, also came to Southern California. James and William entered into a partnership and opened a grocery and general merchandise store at 1023 W. Third Street, near the Santa Fe Depot.

James Russell and Sarah R. Culbertson, daughter of Stephen Robert and Mary Estelle (Downer)



Culbertson, were married at her home on June 30, 1901. Sarah (Culbertson) Russell was born near Edgar, Nebraska, in 1882, and came to California with her parents in about 1891. James and Sarah had one son, George Vernon Russell, born July 4, 1905, a prominent architect in Los Angeles.

In about 1912, William T. Russell moved to Highland, leaving the store to James to manage exclusively. The name was changed from "Russell Brothers" to "Russell's Department Store," and later became just a fashionable men's clothing store at 1073 W. Third Street, almost next door to the original store. James Russell, active for years in the affairs of the First Congregational Church and his Masonic Lodge, was both well known and highly respected in San Bernardino.

Following the sudden death of Albert G. Kendall, Chairman of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, on June 1, 1926, several men were suggested to fill the void. Of those, James Russell was appointed on July 3, 1926, by Governor Friend W. Richardson to be the Fifth District Supervisor to fill the remaining few months of the late Mr. Kendall's term. Although Mr. Russell had frequently been active in the politics of San Bernardino, he had never before held a political office. He was a candidate in the August 1924 primary for supervisor, but had been defeated 3,174 votes to 1,435 votes by the highly popular incumbent, A. G. Kendall, who had held the position since December 1918. In his statement regarding his appointment and plans to seek election in the forthcoming 1926 primary, Mr. Russell stated:

"Whether I run or not I am going to do all in my power to have all major roads leading to the mountains in this County taken over by the State Highway Commission.

These roads are no longer a local concern and the people should be relieved of the burden of taxation caused by the expense and upkeep due to outside traffic."

Due largely to disagreements with other Board members on matters of policy, rather than compromise his beliefs and convictions Mr. Russell did not run for election to fill the position to which he had been appointed and left his office of four months on November 22, 1926. He was succeeded as Fifth District Supervisor by John Androsen, Jr. Mr. Russell's business was severely affected by the 1929 financial crisis and subsequent national depression. On August 25, 1932, he sold the clothing store and the following day, sold his interests in the "Royal Arms Apartments," the "Roseland Apartments," and the "Vista Apartments," in which he had previously invested. Their home was sold in October 1932. Mr. Russell salvaged enough from these sales and the failure of the San Bernardino National Bank to buy a small resort business in Pine Valley, San Diego County. This, along with his activities as the village Post-master and realtor, plus frequent trips to the modest family home in Encinitas, kept him busy for some years. After his retirement from Pine Valley at about age 77, he and Mrs. Russell moved to Encinitas where Sarah Russell died in 1956, and where, on September 11, 1958, James Russell was fatally injured in an automobile accident in San Diego County at the age of 85.

James Russell had been a pioneer automobile enthusiast. He had initiated the use of motor vehicles for delivery service throughout the San Bernardino area around the turn of the century and at one time had a "stable" of twelve such vehicles plus several personal cars of various sorts. His favorite sport, however, was trout fishing at which he was a renowned expert. His fishing companions ranged from the pastor of his Congregational Church, the Reverend Henry Mowbray, to James J. Jeffries, ex-heavy weight world boxing champion. In those days, any Big Bear Lake Rainbow Trout under a pound and half was returned to the water for maturity. During World War I, being over the military age limit, Mr. Russell volunteered for overseas service with the Y.M.C.A. and spent some time at Stanford in their training unit. The war came to a close before he was assigned to an overseas post.

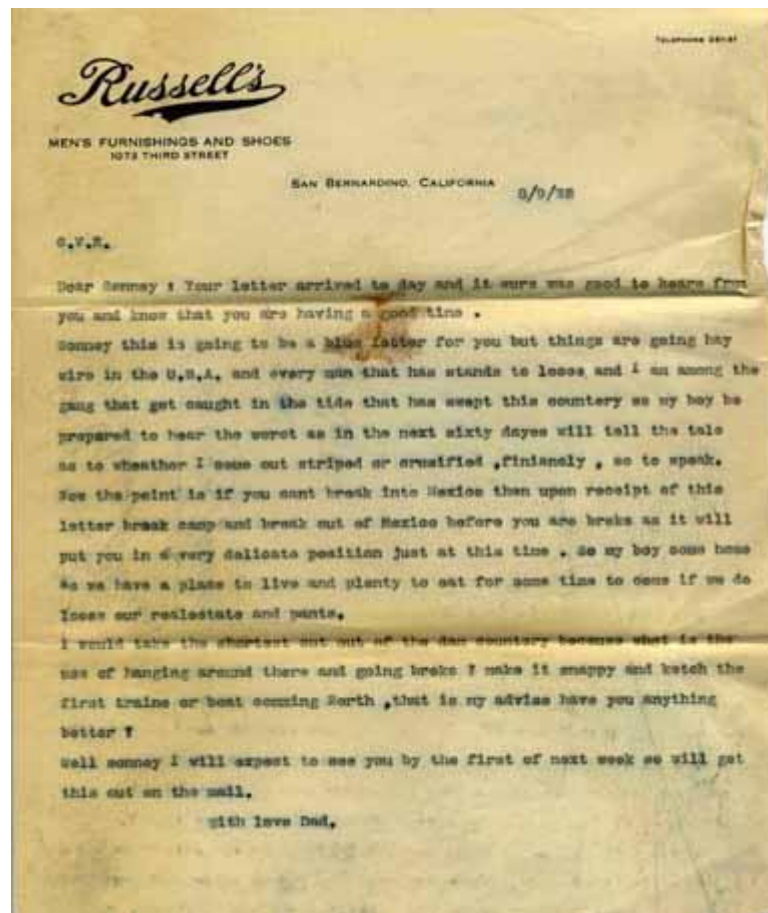
During the early part of the century Mr. and Mrs. Russell maintained their home at 101 South Mount Vernon Avenue. They moved later to 799 E Street and, in about 1927, to Baseline and Sterling Avenue and had an attractive residence built there. This, too was sold before their retirement to Pine Valley.

(From material supplied by George Vernon Russell, the San Bernardino Daily Sun of August 17, 1925 and July 4, 1926, the San Bernardino County Assessor and Vital Statistics Records. — J.C.F.)

February 1978

I sent the above to Ms. von Bredow and it seemed to be what she was looking for. I offered further assistance; for instance, I found some nice aerials (the clothing store building is still there) on <http://www.mapslive.com/> and she thanked me for them. I had the impression that she had what she needed.

I haven't inquired in any detail on Ms. von Bredow's project. I thought if she wanted to fill me in she would. She did send this copy of one of the later correspondences from father to son:



ROBERT BRUCE HARLEY
APRIL 2, 1918 – JULY 24, 2008.

One of our Society's most prolific writers passed away this summer at his Redlands home. Harley was born in Albert Lea, MN, and received his B.A. from William Penn College in 1941. He served in the U.S. Army from 1941 to 1945. After the war he returned to school and earned his Ph.D. in 1948 from the University of Iowa, and became a professor of history at Western University, where he remained for 12 years. He then moved to California and worked as Chief Historian for the 15th Air Force at March Air Force Base.

In 1983 he retired and became the first archivist for the newly formed Catholic Diocese of San Bernardino. He held this position for 15 years.

During the 1980s and '90s he wrote extensively for the San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society publications *Odyssey* and *Heritage Tales*.

Robert Harley is survived by his wife of 57 years, Clara; daughters Sue Harley of Ogden, Utah, Peggy Harley of San Bernardino, and Dorothy Harley of Playa del Rey, CA; son Robert Harley and his wife Theresa of Wisconsin Dells, WI, and four granddaughters.

SHERIFF ELI M. SMITH

I am scheduled to give a talk to the Society on October 2, 2008. The focus will be on San Bernardino County Sheriff Eli M. Smith, 1861-62, but I also will cover societal conditions during the early Civil War period in San Bernardino. In doing research for the period I was aided by the discovery of an Internet website that had digitized early California newspapers. It was Mohave Historical Society President John Marnell who alerted me to the site, <http://cbsr.tabbec.com/>. It is called the California Digital Newspaper Collection and it has newspapers that are difficult to access here in Southern California. Included are San Francisco newspapers such as the *Alta*, *Daily Alta*, *Call*, *Chronicle* and *Examiner*. At least one of these papers goes as far back as the 1850s.

Those familiar with local history will know that under the Mormon regime, 1851-1857, the community was peaceful (mostly) and productive. This changed when the Mormons left at the end of 1857, and a lawless element entered the scene. This is demonstrated from the following story, which I found at the new (to me) site:

From the May 11, 1858, issue of the Daily Alta:

OUR SAN BERNARDINO CORRESPONDENCE. May 5, 1858.

OUTRAGE AT SAN BERNARDINO.

Another horrible outrage was committed in our valley on last Sunday morning, and an innocent unoffending Indian was murdered in cold blood by a party of drunken ruffians. It appears that four men, named Snyder, Eames, Walkinshaw, and Crandall, were out on Saturday night, carousing at an Indian camp about two miles from town; on Sunday morning they started to return, and attempted to bring with them two squaws. The latter were afraid to come, and asked an Indian to accompany them for protection. He started to do so but was ordered back by the whites. He hesitated to obey, whereupon the man Snyder (as he subsequently confessed) drew a knife and stabbed the Indian, inflicting a dreadful wound extending from the clavicle to the lower part of the abdomen on the left side. The Indian died in a few hours, but not until he had fully identified the party who committed the outrage. An examination was held before the Mayor of the city, but there was none except Indian testimony, which, by the iniquitous provisions of our statute, cannot be taken. The man Snyder is said to have confessed to a man named Curry that he committed the deed, but His Honor excluded the confession as improper testimony, but allowed his three companions in guilt—Walkinshaw, Eames, and Crandall, who were *particeps criminis*—to give their version of the affair, which was, of course, made up to suit the occasion. They assert that they were quietly returning to the city when they were attacked by four drunken Indians, and in the melee, one of the Indians was stabbed, but no one saw who did it. They deny that there were any squaws present. Their story is very improbable, and given but little credence, but the murderer was discharged.

HISTORIC HOUSE RESEARCH

I found a project that Arda Haenszel was working on regarding the history of the Heritage House. She began her research in 1978, when the building was donated to the San Bernardino Historical Society (forerunner to the San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society). She undertook to learn about the house—when it was built, who built it, who lived in it, etc. She had the main document for doing house research, the title report, which listed all of the property owners from the time it was supposedly built,

1891, clear up until 1978. She then went to the City Directories (oh, aren't we lucky to have those), which listed all of the occupants. The residence was sometimes occupied by the owners and sometimes by renters. Of course the most interesting part of the research is the biographies of the people who lived in the house, and she used the traditional methods for obtaining these, such as local and regional history books, letters, interviews, and newspaper stories. Because the building was given to the San Bernardino Historical Society, some stories about the house appeared in the Society's publication, *Odyssey*. Chief among these was one written by Lillian Miles, owner of the dwelling from 1942 to 1976.

Arda was given the information that the person who had the structure built was George Otis, and that the house was known as the "Otis place." She tried to verify that information, but she never was able to do so. It occurred to me that this was a chance to pick up from where she left off and try to get some proof of the assertion that the house was built by Otis in 1891. In addition, this could serve as the model of how to conduct research on an historical structure. Many people have expressed interest, and frustration, in studying the history of a house. The main problem usually is how to nail down who built it, and when.

HISTORIC HOUSE RESEARCH MEETING: OCTOBER 18TH

On Saturday, September 20, 2008, we held a group discussion on how to do historical research on a home. The group was not large, but quality made up for lack of numbers. There are not many people who are interested enough to go digging through deeds, tax roll records, building permits, water connections, and the multitude of other resources available, but those who were present on that Saturday are eager to delve into the past. After discussing methodology, we resolved to put our efforts to use on several houses and to meet again next month to go over the results. A few interested parties were not able to attend the first meeting and this will afford them an opportunity to learn the procedure and catch up with the rest of us. The date is Saturday, October 18, 2008, starting at 10 a.m. We will meet at the Heritage House, 796 D Street.

BACK ISSUES OF THE LIBRARY NEWS...

...can be found here: http://www.ci.san-bernardino.ca.us/about/history/library_news/2008_library_news.asp

BOOK SIGNING AND BOOKFAIR

Aimmee Rodriguez has a new book coming out on The Harris Company. See announcement on the following page.

Book Signing & Bookfair



Wednesday, October 1st

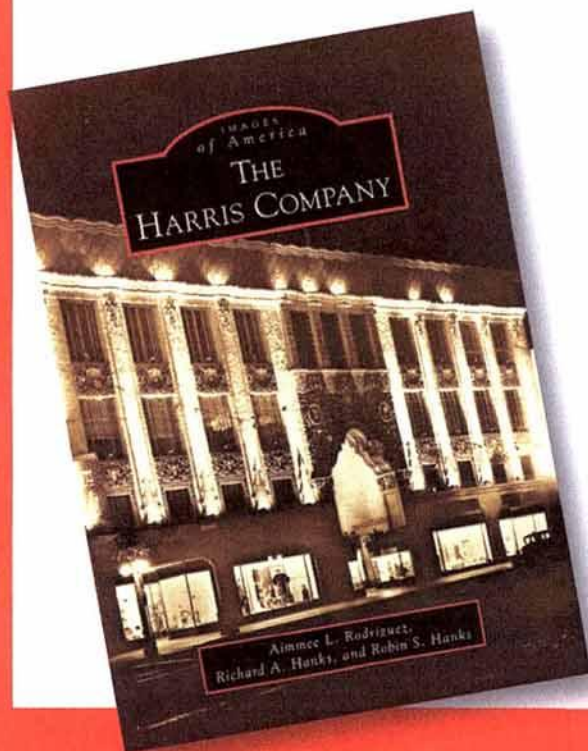
5:00 - 7:00 pm

BARNES & NOBLE

BOOKSELLERS

Citrus Plaza Shopping Center

27460 Lugonia Ave, Redlands, CA • (909) 793-4322



Authors Aimmee Rodriguez, Richard Hanks and Robin Hanks will be at the store to sign their new book on "The Harris Company."

When you mention the San Bernardino Historical & Pioneer Society at checkout, a percentage of the sale will go to support this organization and its endeavors.

