



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

### LIBRARY NEWS AUGUST 2009

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

This month we offer for your reading pleasure a story by Neil Gilbert Oehl. Mr. Oehl is the great-grandson of Wardman and Naomi Holmes, who emigrated from England to the United States, eventually settling in San Bernardino in 1860.

The Holmes family is one of 58 featured in a series entitled “Covered Wagon Families,” published by the San Bernardino *Sun-Telegram* during 1938-39. It was Wardman’s son Frank who supplied the information for the November 23, 1938, *Sun-Telegram* article, entitled “Frank Holmes Tells of Trip from Utah with Wagon Train.” Mr. Oehl draws his information from this article and from other family sources, some of which are unpublished.

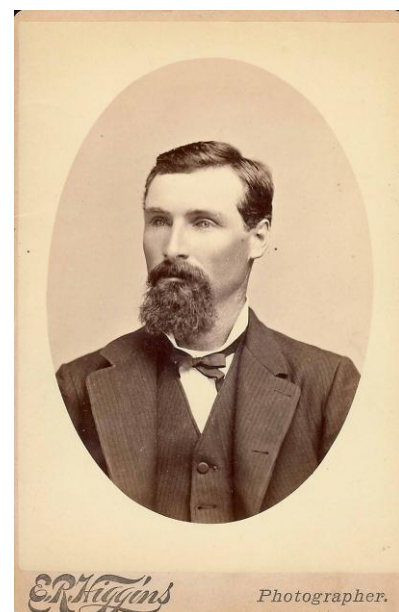
### THE HOLMES FAMILY IN SAN BERNARDINO

By Neil Gilbert Oehl

As a descendant of two pioneer families of the San Bernardino Valley, I maintain considerable pride of heritage. My father’s parents, Julius and Catherine Oehl, settled in San Bernardino in October 1886, and eventually established the Oehl Meat Packing Company and several markets. However, it was while settling my mother’s estate (Bonnie Holmes Oehl) that I discovered considerable information about my maternal grandfather’s pioneer stock.

Mother’s father, Thomas Holmes, was the youngest of eleven children born to Wardman and Naomi (Bland) Holmes. Wardman’s ancestry has been traced back to the early 1700s to his grandparents, Thomas Holmes and Mary Wardman of the Addington Parish, Yorkshire, England.

Handwritten records in a personal ledger, record incidents which eventually led to the Holmes family settling in San Bernardino. My great-grandparents left Bradford, Yorkshire, England, with two daughters, Mary and Miranda. A third girl, Martha, had died in England. They boarded the sailing ship ARGO on 1 February 1850. It took two months to cross the Atlantic, and the ship, unfortunately, sank on its return trip to England. The family journeyed overland to St. Louis,

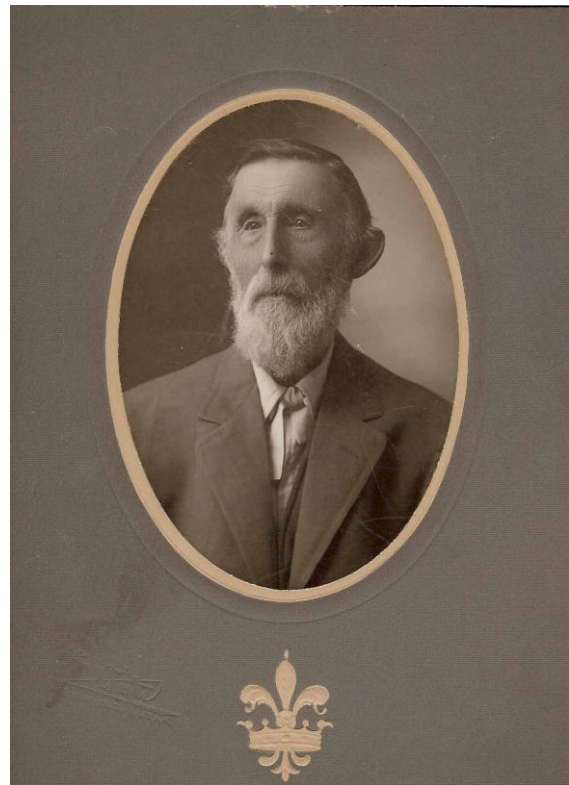


**Wardman Holmes**  
Born 23 July 1817 in  
Baildon, York, England

Missouri, where they arrived on 1 April 1850. After two years in St. Louis, and just after the birth of their first son, William, the family endured a five-month trek across the plains by ox team, and arrived in Salt Lake City in September 1852.



Naomi (Bland) Holmes – 4 March 1902



Joseph Bland, brother of Naomi

The Holmes family continued their odyssey when they left Salt Lake City about 1 March 1853, and traversed the desert wastes to the southwest, arriving at Cedar City, Utah, about two months later. It was during this leg of their journey that they were caught in a spring snowstorm, with a broken axle on their wagon. Their youngest child apparently didn't fair too well on the trip, and died in Cedar City at age 17 months. They established their home there, and enlarged their family with three more children: Wardman, Anne and Frances (Frank). It was Uncle Frank's written account that revealed the final portion of the Holmes' journey into San Bernardino:

When I was a year old my family left Utah. My father being a gunpowder expert, he was allowed to come to California to make gunpowder for the Mormon settlers here. Their wagon train was captained by a Mr. Bennett, grandfather of Mrs. Charles Lindner, Sr., and left Cedar City the second of April 1860.

It was somewhere between Cedar City and Las Vegas that an Indian brave followed the train all through one day to have my father fix his muzzle loader for him. Once the wagon got under way it was impossible to stop for anything less than a major catastrophe, hence the Indian trudged doggedly along until camp was made for the night. When my father had settled his family he called the Indian to him, saying, "Let me see what is the trouble with your gun."

Immediately my father saw that the Indian, in assembling the gun, had put the hammer on the wrong square. With one deft movement he replaced the hammer, setting it on the right square. The Indian thanked him and turned about to retrace his weary way back to his people.

Between Las Vegas and San Bernardino, while the train was camped for the night, an ox was stolen from a man by the name of Smith. It was while rounding up the oxen for the morning that the loss was discovered. This time my father's knowledge of Indians and their ways probably saved them from harm. It was he who found the tracks that led to their hideout behind a little hill. The party came upon the Indians just as they were butchering and cutting up the animal.

When my father asked them if they had stolen the ox from their herd, the Indians laughingly admitted the theft. Mr. Smith was for making a demand for his loss, but my father told him not to make any fuss as the Indians could do us far more harm if aroused than the ox amounted to and that our cow had been broken to the yoke and that he would give him one of our animals to make up his team. So it was with this odd team that our wagon rolled on across the desert waste down Cajon into the little cove known as Glen Helen. From there the train moved on into this valley, seeking friends and relatives and settling down.

Family history states that Wardman and Naomi Holmes arrived in the valley on 15 June 1860, and stayed with the Rolfe family on Mill Street, whom they had known in Utah. Wardman purchased a 30-acre site near Mill and "K" Streets, next to the Parks' place. This property was bought for a dollar an acre from a Mr. Carter. Lytle Creek flooded the family out several times, and they eventually suffered the loss of their home at that site. Wardman evidently was also "a mechanic and machinist who opened up a shop in San Bernardino, turning out guns and all kinds of fine woodwork on a foot lathe."

Four additional children, James, Ellen, Naomi and Thomas, became natives of the valley between 1861 and 1867. (My maternal grandfather, Thomas Holmes, was the youngest of the family.) Since the family had twice suffered the ravages of the swollen Lytle Creek, they moved to the northeast of the valley and bought 50 acres, at \$5 per acre, on what is Highland Avenue where Perris Hill Park is located. Wardman suffered a sunstroke while putting a roof on this new house there. It left him paralyzed until his death two years later, on 28 October 1869. He was interred in Pioneer Cemetery at Seventh and Sierra Way. Three children, Ann, Miranda and Naomi, preceded their father's death, between 1863 and 1867.

The matriarch, Naomi Holmes, took over the management of the farm and purchased an additional 50 acres for \$125. The older children helped to pay off the deed to the property. In her later years, Naomi wanted to move from this site, so through drawing lots, she gave her surviving children a portion of the hundred acres. It was Uncle Frank who later sold his piece of land to the city of San Bernardino for what is now Perris Hill Park.

Grandfather Thomas Holmes was evidently a man of many talents. He wrote newspaper articles for the San Bernardino *Sun-Telegram*. (See "Roots of Cat-Claw Bush Follow Ore Shoot of Gold Mine in Dale District, of Very Great Interest," 15 May 1919; and "Safety Valve [Pioneers of the Valley]," 12 November 1933.) Another essay manuscript which was recently uncovered, was entitled "California Pioneers." This four-page typewritten document describes incidents pertaining to William Louis Manly, John Rodgers, William F. Holcomb and Jack Martin. This article may or may not have been printed; however, the typed form



Lambson STUDIO  
313 S. Spring St.  
LOS ANGELES, CAL.

**Pearl and Thomas Holmes  
Los Angeles, 22 August 1896**



leads me to believe it was intended for publication. I also remember seeing pencil and charcoal sketches and drawings done by my grandfather. Several poems of his were also among his papers.



**Thomas Holmes was a councilman in the 1910 era, but this appears to have been taken in a court during some proceedings. That is Thomas with his chair pushed back in the center of the photo.**

Another handwritten document by Thomas Holmes, entitled "Some of my Experiences in Life," lists many of the activities in which he was involved:

I was secretary and Zanjero of a water company, for several years before I was 25. I was secretary of the local farmers alliance for 3 years, and was then elected secretary of the county farmers alliances for 2 years before I was 22.

It was my duty to write the minutes of the county alliance, which met each month, also receive the reports from all the local organizations, receive all the state dues, and report to the state organization. Every 6 months I received the password from the state, and communicated it personally to each president, of all the locals. I was secretary of the San Bernardino Co. Driving Club, for several years, and was President of the harness-horse association of two counties, Riverside and San B'dino for three years.

I was one of the directors of the Riverside County Fair association, of Southern California, for several years.

During the time that I was President of the harness-horse association (which means race horses), of both counties, I was the elected superintendent and general manager, of one of the greatest race-horse meetings ever held in either of the counties, nearly \$10,000 was given in purses. (Two-

day meeting.) Horses were entered from several western states. We were under control of the National Race horse association. (A by-line article was printed in the 17 April 1909 edition of the San Bernardino *Sun*.)

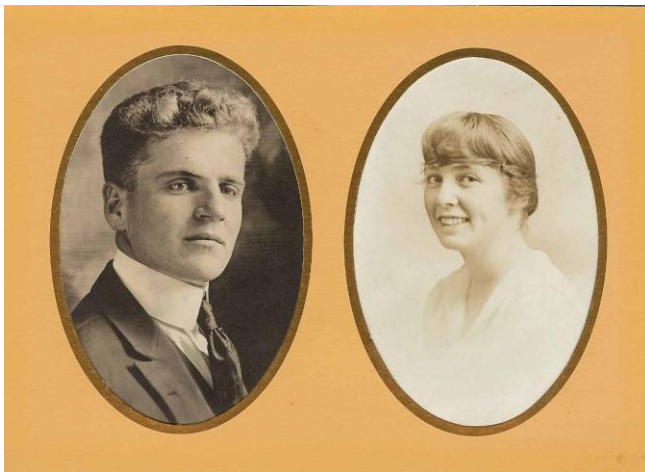
I was a member of the city council of San Bernardino for four years. During those four years, I was chairman of the “council” committee on Fire dept. and a member of the committee on the street department. [He was also an unsuccessful candidate for Mayor.]

I have had forty years experience in mining, and the study of mining geology. Have had all sorts of experience in prospecting and developing mines. Have examined and reported upon many prospects, and mines, both for individuals, and companies in California and Arizona.

I am at this time, superintendent of a large mining property, in which I own controlling interest. I also have large interests in other properties.

.....To those interested in that certain mining claim, known as The Rose of Peru Number one, in the Dale Mining District, county of Riverside, I herewith submit a statement of e[x]penses, and report.....

Grandpa Holmes left a 23-page handwritten description of the Gold Rose Mining property, dated 3 February 1936, in which he gave detailed descriptions of the veins, drifts, and geological descriptions of his 14 surveyed claims. As a youngster, my brothers and I played in some of those mine shafts. My handicapped mother even insisted on being placed in a large ore bucket, and lowered down into a shaft and tunnel. She had spent many years, previous to contracting polio in 1920, with her father and mother walking those hills and valleys of the desert. My mother and father, Bonnie and Herbert C. Oehl, an aunt and uncle, Jean and Dale Holmes, worked some of those gold claims throughout the 1940s and ‘50s, until the costs of gold mining became prohibitive due to the Korean War.



**Herbert C. Oehl and Bonnie F. Holmes**  
**Individual pictures taken before their wedding**



**Herbert and Bonnie (Holmes) Oehl**  
**The day of their wedding – 18 January 1920**

A valuable mineral collection of Thomas Holmes, which was added to by my mother, was donated as a gift to San Bernardino Valley College from the Bonnie Holmes Oehl Estate.

Another discovered ledger, entitled “Receipts,” is of historical value listing entries from 1901 to 1926. These pages include names such as Chas. M. Hanf; H. W. Nisbet; H. C. Rolfe; N. B. Glasgow; Mrs. O. M. Caldwell; A. D. Bedford, optician; L. N. Bedford, dentist; and the Harris Company, among others. Grandpa Holmes owned property along 3rd Street between “D” and “E” Streets.



A second ledger, entitled "Day Book," begins with entries dated 1897, for the Stout Ditch Company, and also lists such items as 'Certificates of Assays for the Tiger Lily Mine in Big Bear Valley, 27 June 1908,' as well as notes from 1901 to 1909 on his race horses, "Sherlock Holmes" and "Zolock." During the 1910 San Bernardino Valley Centennial, Grandpa Holmes paraded his horse "Hale," the fastest "Zolock" colt living.

Thomas Holmes passed away quietly in our home at 462 Mountain View Ave., on 17 August 1937.



**Bonnie Holmes, in the middle with the dimpled smile – San Bernardino 1914**  
**These girls/ladies greeted travelers at the Santa Fe Train Station with oranges during the Orange Show**

**Saving the past for the future since 1888**