



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

LIBRARY NEWS FEBRUARY 2009

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

This month Ronnie Featherstone provides another of his stories on San Bernardino businesses and their owners. This one is on Harry's Roller Rink, which was owned by Harry Dickerman. Because of Ronnie's story, local historian John Adams and I became interested in Dickerman's enterprises, so we undertook to learn more about Harry's skating rink, and to see what information we could find on Dickerson's other businesses, one of which was the Baseline Drive-in Theater. John, who is a friend of Ronnie's, is the historian for the Rialto Historical Society and the author of several books. We are both familiar with many of the online sites where historical and genealogical data can be found, and thus began to find quite a bit on Harry Dickerman. However, the more information we collected, the more questions we had. Finally we located Diana Speckels, Harry's daughter, and she put us in contact with her brother Robert (Bobby) Dickerman. Bobby filled in many details, but John and I still had some research to do.

Bobby told us that when his father bought the building in the 1940s it was already called "Harry's Rink." It was run by Harry Fiander, and was located south of the Orange Show Stadium at 905 South E Street. Then, in 1953, it was moved to the west side of the street at 690 South E Street. John and I tried to find out if it was built at the 905 address, and if so, when and by whom. At first, we thought it might have been moved twice, and that its original location was in Urbita Springs/Pickering Park. There is a reference to a skating rink there, and a building of about the same dimensions as Harry's Rink appears on a 1938 aerial photo of the Urbita Springs area. As it turned out, Paul I. Kelly built the structure at the 905 address in 1938. This information comes from Paul's son Ken, who has vivid memories of not only the rink, but also of Harry Fiander and Harry Dickerman.

I have decided to present the story in two parts. The first part is Ronnie's childhood recollections of Dickerman and Harry's Roller Rink. The second part will be based on historical records, and the first-hand knowledge of Bobby Dickerman and Ken Kelly. If our research goes well, part two will appear in the March issue of the newsletter. Bobby gave us 18 family photographs, including one of his father, which appears below in Ronnie's story.

HARRY'S ROLLER RINK

By Ronnie Featherstone

This story is dedicated to the memory of Harry Dickerman, and the businesses he ran in San Bernardino during the 1940s-1960s. Thanks to him, memories were made for literally thousands of Inland Empire residents during those years. Most people only knew of his name "Harry." Not many that went to Harry's Roller Rink ever met him and wouldn't have even recognized him.

During WW11, the roller skating rink was an inexpensive form of recreation for families, teenagers, professional skaters, and seniors. It brought all the age groups together for a fun experience at a very inexpensive price. After Harry bought the place, customers came from all over the Inland Empire by the hundreds. He had times just for seniors to skate, times for families to skate, and then times for everyone to skate, from the beginners to the professionals.

Harry was of short stature with a medium build, and he had dark hair and brown eyes. Every time my family (five kids) went to Harry's Roller Rink, we always made it a point to talk to Harry. He was a great businessman, and cared about his businesses. His social abilities with people made him very popular with all ages. Most teenagers visiting his rink during the '50s and '60s might remember Harry because he was in his 50s and 60s during those years.



Harry Dickerman

Harry was like a parent to all the kids, when their parents weren't there. If someone fell and scratched his knees, Harry was right there with a bottle of Iodine and bandages. I witnessed Harry's kindness many times. If a child was crying all alone, Harry would go over and put his arm around him, and then solve the problem. Roughnecks and pushers didn't last long; Harry would walk out on the skating floor, kick them out, and tell them, "Don't come back"



The big neon sign on the wall at Harry's Roller Rink

He had a neon sign on the wall. A category on the sign would light up to show who skated next, and when the music would change from a waltz to a fox trot. The acoustics in the old wooden building were wonderful and did justice to the live music played on the Hammond Organ.

Harry handed out wooden horses for the really small kids to use while the parents sat watching their older kids skate. He always tried his best to make a fun environment for everyone. Every occasion took place at the roller rink. There were wedding parties, reunions, school class trips, anniversaries—groups of all kinds. Seniors had fun just as much as the kids did. A teenager could have fun for hours at the roller rink, and not even spend \$3.00. Shoes rented for .50 cents, and it was \$1.00 to skate. Plenty left over for the concession stand.

On his neon sign, Harry would occasionally light up the "Clear Floor" sign, and everyone would get behind the rails while he checked the floor for any trash, spillage, or candy and gum that had dropped. His old wooden skate floor shined like high gloss varnish, and all his wooden rails were varnished to a high luster, and very heavy duty.



On the top shelf are the wooden horses used to keep the toddlers occupied

Harry also was the owner of the Baseline Drive-In Theater. In 1948 he bought 20 acres, built the screen and opened his independent theater. When I would go there, I always stopped at the projection room to talk with the projectionists.

Harry Dickerman, who passed away at the age of 90 on March 25, 1988, was a great humanitarian, and he also enjoyed seeing people have fun. He was definitely an asset to San Bernardino and the surrounding cities. Recognizing his contributions was a pleasure for me, and a large population of San Bernardino will remember his name forever.

Ronnie Featherstone



Courtesy of Dave Rutherford

A person could have hours of fun at Harry's for a nominal admission fee



Courtesy of Steve Shaw

A postcard picture of Harry's Roller Rink, probably 1953, the year they put the new maple floor in



Harry also owned the Baseline Drive-in Theater in Highland, CA

—————End of Featherstone Story—————

MANY THANKS TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

In the last couple of months there have been various donations to the library and Society, and a word of appreciation is due the contributors. Several persons have donated money, or time, and sometimes both. People have given us books, photographs, maps and the like. Some of the items obtained in recent weeks are listed on the pages below.

Most people donate without any thought of personal recognition. When it is I who receives the donation, I thank the person and tell them how much it is appreciated. When I received a thousand-dollar donation from Roger and Alice Hall recently, I had the foresight to ask if it was all right to mention it in the Library News. When they contributed the same amount last year, all I did was personally thank them. The Halls aren't seeking acclaim, but I convinced them to let me put it in the newsletter. There are others who donate large amounts, but I have not obtained permission to reveal their identities, and of course there are many who donate lesser amounts.

Arrowhead Parlor No. 110, Native Sons of the Golden West, contributed a couple of thousand dollars three years ago, and the parlor has agreed to donate some more this year to pay for specific security needs. This is very generous of them and the money has helped us maintain and improve our facilities.

Some people have the mistaken impression, because we are called the "City of San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society," that we receive funds from the city. We do not, at least not regularly. The City did help us paint and reroof our structures a while back, which was a much-appreciated windfall for us, but that was unusual. As I recall, the "city" part of our name came from wanting to make the distinction that our Society was interested in the history of the *city* of San Bernardino, not the county.

LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

Swing Collection

January was an active month at the library due to the many new acquisitions. Chief among them are items from the estate of Juliet Swing, the widow of Everett Hale Swing, who had a distinguished career as an attorney with a specialty in medical malpractice.

The Swings were a prominent family that did so much for the community. Ralph Emerson Swing was Everett's father, and their aggregate years in San Bernardino spanned almost 12 decades, from Ralph's birth in 1875 to Everett's death in 1992. Both were prominent in the annals of the city. Ralph was a highly regarded lawyer and is well remembered as a towering figure with the National Orange Show, beginning with the first in 1911.

Ralph Swing was active in many local organizations, and worked tirelessly on projects that benefited the community. For instance, following the devastating floods of 1938, Mr. Swing, a member of the California State Senate, drafted and submitted an act to create a San Bernardino County Flood Control District, and his act included a mechanism for funding it. He pushed the bill through the state legislature, and longtime chief Flood Control engineer Art Sidler thought of Ralph Swing as one of the main figures in the creation of the Flood Control District. In his book, *Some History and Biographical Sketches of People who have been Influential in Flood Control and Water Conservation in San Bernardino County 1939-1977*, John Funk, another Flood Control engineer, wrote the following:

Ralph Swing was the City Attorney of San Bernardino from April 13, 1903, to May 8, 1911. He was City Attorney for Upland from May 17, 1909, to January 21, 1914, and from June 12, 1914,

to May 1, 1930. He was the President of San Bernardino's Centennial Celebration in 1910, the President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1917, a member of the City's Water Board, and held membership on numerous committees which worked for the betterment of San Bernardino through the years. He was a charter member of both the San Bernardino Elks Club and the Eagles Lodge, and a member of the "Native Sons of the Golden West."

Mr. Funk briefly covers Swing's career at the State Senate, 1922-1950, and credits him with being the founder of the National Orange Show. The exposition's main building, the Swing Auditorium, was named in his honor. This building was damaged when a light plane crashed into it on September 11, 1981. The board of directors decided to have the structure demolished, although some felt the damages were easily repairable,

A Google search under the heading "Ralph E. Swing" registers 281 hits, a surprising number given that he has been dead for nearly 50 years. Here is a link to a talk he gave before a medical group in 1934:

<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1659084>

Everett's wife Juliet was the last relative of Ralph Swing's children to live in San Bernardino. Her ancestors were also early residents of San Bernardino. Her father was Herb Weir, the son of Richard Weir. Richard was a noted local citizen and a member of the San Bernardino Society of California Pioneers. He was one of those who helped construct the 1917 monument in Cajon Pass.

Juliet's daughters, Sandra (Sandy) Pendleton Dysli and Cheryl Priscilla Swing, saved out some of the family things they wanted, and put the rest up for sale with auction houses. Steve Shaw and Allen Bone went to one auction and put in some bids for the paper goods and ephemeral items. Although unsuccessful at winning the bid, the Society later bought the Swing and Weir family items after the high bidder culled what he wanted and consented to sell us the rest. Later on, Sandy spent quite a bit of time at the Heritage House library identifying the family photos, and talking about her family history.

There are some items that are probably of limited interest, but strike a chord with me. Take, for example, the following payment release form signed by architect Howard E. Jones. This informs us that Jones must have designed the Ramona Hospital maternity wing addition, another historic structure by the ubiquitous architect, and the fact that it's in this collection reminds us that Ralph Swing and Dr. Mills were cofounders of the hospital in 1908. Ramona was the forerunner of today's Community Hospital.

No.	\$2000⁰⁰	OFFICE OF HOWARD E. JONES, ARCHITECT
		San Bernardino, Calif., <i>March 1st</i> , 1926.
Received of	Cont. Price <i>\$15,128</i>	To <i>Ramona Hospital Association</i>
The within amount of Certificate	Extra Work \$	THIS IS TO CERTIFY
192	1st payment \$ <i>2000</i>	That <i>Chas. L. Schmitt</i>
	2d "	Contractor for the <i>General contract</i>
	3d "	of <i>a one story hospital bldg.</i>
	4th "	is
	5th "	entitled to a payment of
	6th "	<i>Two thousand and 00</i> DOLLARS
	7th "	by terms of Contract.
	8th "	<i>Howard E. Jones</i>
	9th "	Received Payment Mar. 2, 1926. Architect.
	10th "	Remarks <i>Chas. L. Schmitt</i>
	11th "	
	12th "	
	Tot. Amt. Iss. \$ <i>2000</i>	
	Balance Due <i>\$13,128⁰⁰</i>	

Payment release for Ramona Hospital signed by architect Howard E Jones



The Swing collection includes a number of stock certificates

Sandy subsequently donated several items to the Society before returning to Switzerland, including many 8 x 10 photographs, quite a few snapshots, unpublished stories and other family memorabilia. There are two published genealogies: 1) Albert H. Swing and Harry P. Swing, *The Swing Family—the first five generations in America*, Bryn Mawr, PA, 1961; and 2) Rose, George and Margaret, *The Kay-Pendleton-Neel Families*, published by J. Grant Stevenson, Provo, UT, 1969.



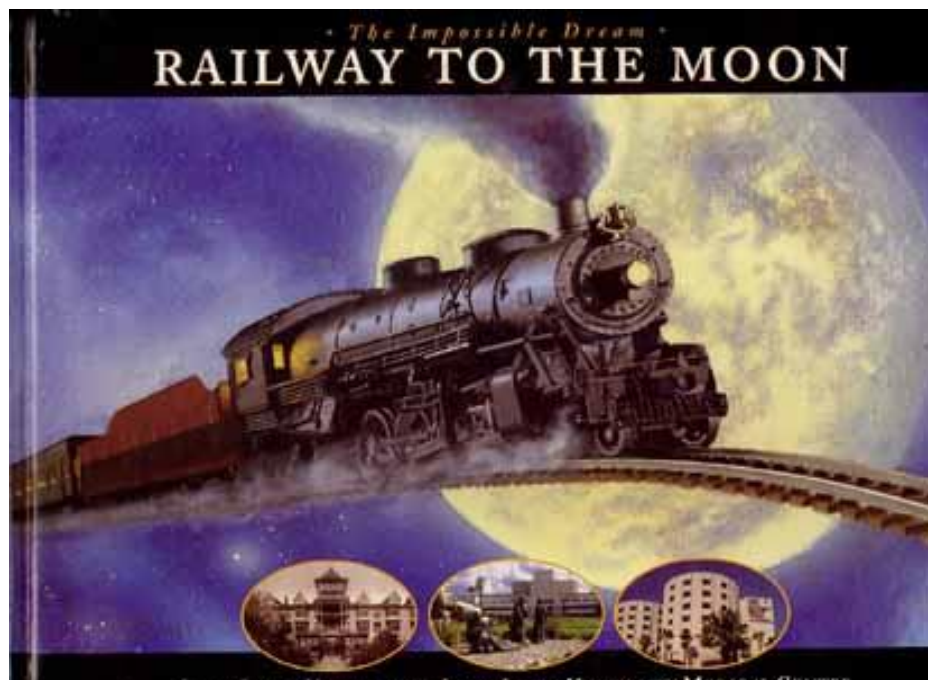
**Seated George Miller Jr., right John Brown Jr., left unidentified.
One of a boxful of items donated to the Society by Sandy Swing Dysli.**

Hockaday Donation

John Hockaday has generously donated photographs and other historical items over the past couple of years. He recently gave us a published history/genealogy by Karin Smith entitled, *The Life Story of Jennie Cook Davis, 1851-1946*, published in Springfield, OR, 1996. John informs me that this is the story of Devore's postmaster, a woman well known to residents of the region. I haven't had a chance to read it yet, but look forward to doing so. Thank you, John, for your continued contributions to our library.

Weaver Donation

Thanks to Don Weaver for a copy of *The Impossible Dream: Railway To The Moon*. This is the story of the history of Loma Linda University and Loma Linda University Medical Society. A very handsome book.



Feldheym Library Donation

Sue Payne, on behalf of the Arda Haenszel California Room, Feldheym Library, donated 18 photographs, all 8 x 10s, taken by well-known San Bernardino photographer Walter Steele. The photos are of Urbita Springs, at one time a famous amusement park located west of E Street and south of Colton Avenue (now Inland Center Drive). She made the donation in mid-January, at which time I thought the Harry's Roller Rink building might have been built originally at Urbita springs (see paragraph two on first page). It has been discovered since that this was not the case. In the meantime I've done a bit of research on Urbita Springs, so now we have that information plus the photographs. Thanks to Sue and the folks at the public library for their contribution to the history of this nearly forgotten spot. It is somewhat surprising that a park that once drew a crowd of ten thousand people in a single day has never had anything approaching a history written about it. There have been some brief newspaper accounts, but these are of a superficial nature.

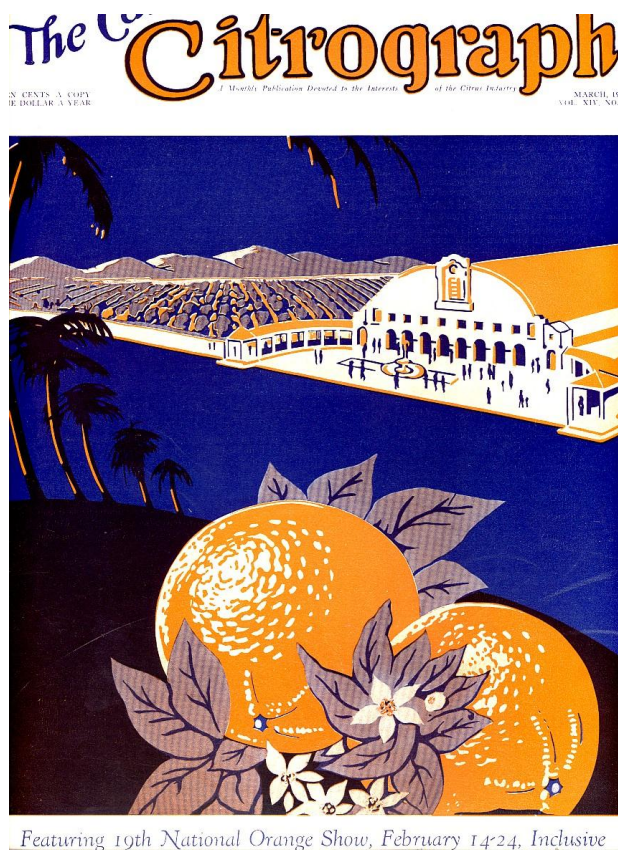
Rutherford Donations

Dave Rutherford donated some scans of Urbita-related photographs and a scan of a 35-cent admission ticket to Harry's Roller Rink (see Featherstone story above). Dave has a large collection of San Bernardino photographs, which he shares freely with our Society. We thank Dave and Donna for the time they spend helping out at the library, and for their contributions to our local history files.

Shaw Donations

Included in a donation from Steve Shaw are two publications by the Historical Society of Southern California. One dates back to the 1920s, and contains a story by well-known San Bernardino historian George W. Beattie. The other contains a translation of Jose del Carmen Lugo's "Life of a Rancher."

There are also several nice copies of The Citrograph from the 1920s and '30s. This was a periodical devoted to the citrus industry. Some of the issues have special feature articles on the National Orange Show. The publications were a bit big for my scanner, but the scan below gives an idea of the colorful covers on some of the magazines. Steve makes innumerable contributions to our Society—time, equipment, books, historical memorabilia, and an endless list of etceteras—and his efforts are greatly appreciated by our members.



HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACQUISITION

Although not library related, I thought our members would be interested in the recent donation to the Society of a carriage that is believed to have been used in the 1910 "Centennial Celebration" parade. Steve Shaw sent the board of directors the following email regarding the donation:

We got pretty lucky again! I was getting photos enlarged for a permanent display for Sturges a few months ago. An Agent/Promoter working with Bud Coffey at Sturges asked him if he knew of a museum that would want a historic horse-drawn buggy. The Historical & Pioneer Society was fresh on his mind.

Long time residents of Bloomington bought this at an auction about 50 years ago. They were told it belonged to the Mayor of San Bernardino in 1910 (McNabb) and that it was used for some kind of festival or celebration and parade. (1910 Centennial Celebration?)

It's now at the Depot. It's in surprisingly good condition for its age. We're lucky it had been stored in a barn. As you can see it needs new upholstery, sanding and painting.

Come by and see it sometime,

Steve



Saving the past for the future since 1888