



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

**An interview with
Mary E. Addis, 1877-1971**

September 9, 1959

This interview was conducted by: Edgar F. Hastings

PREFACE

Interviewed at her home at 1532 E Avenue National City, California on Admission Day, September 9, 1959 by Edgar F. Hastings for the San Diego Historical Society.

Note: This is a record of a spontaneous and informal conversation with the interviewer's questions and comments omitted, therefore, it will not read as smoothly as a story.

BIOGRAPHY

My name is Mary Eva Addis, and I was born September the first, 1877 at Larned , Pawnee County, Kansas. I came to San Diego in 1891.

My father's father died when my father was a little boy so I don't know his name. Father's mother married a second time and her name became Hill.

I don't remember anything about my mother's mother or father. My mother's name was Mary Ann Montgomery, and she was born in Illinois. She passed away when I was just ten days old.

My father was William Bedford Orrell. He was born in Virginia sometime before the Civil War. He was ninety-five when he passed away and I think that was in 1925.

I suppose mother and father were married in Illinois, because that's where she was and they lived there. I know my oldest sisters were born in Illinois. The oldest sister was Fanny. Then Ida, whose married name was Jennings. They were both born in Illinois, and they are both gone. Then there was a brother, Frank. Then Elizabeth, the one that's living yet. Her name now is Elizabeth Gray. She's ninety-two and living in a rest home. She's pretty old and her mind's about gone. Then there were twins, Kate and Anna. Anna died when she was two years old, before I was born. There were seven years between the twins and I. Kate's married name was McChesney, and she lived in San Jose. She had quite a family of boys, four, and there's just one left. She was paralyzed six or seven years, couldn't speak nor anything. Then I was the last, the tail end. We were all born in Kansas or Illinois.

My father never married again, he raised our whole family of girls and one boy. Father was a blacksmith at Osage City and had a blacksmith shop there. Then Elizabeth got married and Papa had Fanny take Kate and that left me adrift. He boarded me with an elderly couple for awhile until he could get settled to come to California. Then Kate and Papa and I came to San Jose, California, to Grandma Hill's when I was seven years old. My father continued in the blacksmith business in San Jose. I lived there seven years because I was fourteen when I came to live with my sister, Ida Jennings.

JENNINGS, FRED & FRANK

Ida had married Fred Jennings and his brother Frank was living there too when I went there. Frank and Fred came from Kansas. We used to live in Kansas, we went from Illinois to Kansas, and that's where my sister married Fred, at Larned, Kansas, where I was born. The Jennings came out first.

POINT LOMA

Later Papa came to San Diego to live with Fred and Ida. He ran a chicken ranch on the place on Point Loma. There were no streets in Point Loma, just a canyon. We lived up the canyon back of Roseville, Talbot Street now. There's two canyons there, you know, there's Canyon Street that goes up to the Theosophists, that's up through the main part, and then there's this narrow canyon, that's Talbot Street. Well, this was the narrow one. It used to have a great big road down below, just wide enough for a horse and buggy to come up.

At first when I went there to live they had a five room house. Then Meritt Hawkins built a five room house, and moved away, and Fred bought that place and moved his house down and joined it onto Hawkin's. We had ten rooms then. That gave him more land too, and my father put in watermelons, and Fred had orange trees, and figs, and my father raised the chickens. We had a cow, and we had horses. Fred was always buying Indian ponies. One time he came home with a beautiful little horse that he claimed was just as tame as could be. We all wanted to ride it, and Fred got on and fell off and broke his collar bone. I don't know how he got off, but the horse ran away and we girls had to chase all over Point Loma trying to catch it. It was wild, an Indian pony. We always teased him about that horse being such a gentle one.

JENNINGS FAMILY [AND BELLE BENCHLEY, SAN DIEGO ZOO]

When I went there Fred and Ida Jennings had Dot and Belle and Frank and Ted. While I lived with them they had Lula. After I left here was Sue and William and Helen.

SCHOOL

I went to school on Point Loma. The school was down by the bay, down there by the old Nail Mill. It had been a store building, just one room.

CAPTAIN EDEN

Old Captain Eden lived right down there, and we used to love to go over and watch his painting.

HASTINGS, MARY

My first teacher was Mary Hastings, and I loved her better than anybody in the world. After she went away we had a teacher that lived up by the pavilion in Mission Cliff Gardens. She was an artist, she used to teach us girls to paint at noon and at recess. Then we had another teacher, I don't remember her name. Then they built a new school. I just went to the eighth grade.

ADDIS, ALBERT

When I was eighteen I went back to Kansas to live with my sister Fanny. I was there four years and then I got married. I was working in a dry goods store in Ottawa, Kansas, when I met Albert Addis. We were both clerking in the same store. We were married in Quemno -- that's an Indian name -- Kansas, in 1900.

In 1901 my son was born. Daddy wanted to name our son John because in England each of the older sons was named John. My father's name was Bedford, so we tacked those two names onto him. When he got older he didn't like it. He said, "Mother, I'm going to change my name." I said, "That's your privilege, if you don't like the name I gave you, I don't like it either." So he never went to law, but just signed his name, from then on, Donald William -- that's my father's middle name -- Addis.

My daughter, Elizabeth, was born here in National City in 1904. She's Mrs. Irwin now, and has a son and a daughter. Donald was married, but he's passed away now. He left one daughter Elaine Kellog. I've seven great-grandchildren. My daughter's daughter has three, her son has two, and my son's daughter has two.

BIOGRAPHY

My husband's father was English and his mother Welsh. They came here in the steerage, and she was with child. They had an awful time coming over, she said, and the child, my husband, was born here.

After we got married they moved our store, and we moved to Waverly. The store belonged to a banker, and when he didn't do too well in a place, he would move. My son was born the twenty-fifth of May and in April he told us he was going to move the store to Garnett, from Waverly, so they loaded everything into the car, and we took our furniture and everything and went in the car with it. He told us he had a house for us, but when we got there it was snowing, we didn't know a soul, and I had to sit in that store while my husband went to find a place. There weren't any houses vacant. He finally found just one but they said it was rented and if the people didn't come by four o'clock, why we could have it. My husband said, "It's mine, I've got a wife here expecting and I have to have a place to put her." So the man let us move in. I had a wonderful husband. Then they moved the store again and we moved to Overbrook.

NATIONAL CITY

We came to California in 1901 when Don was just five months old. My sister, Mrs. Gray, had come to California and was living here in National City. I wanted to see my father awful bad, and we went to Ida's to see him. Then we got a place down here in National City, and we've lived here all that time, except when we were in Portland for awhile.

VAUGHN'S GROCERY

Daddy got a job with Mr. Vaughn at the Grocery store down here on Seventh Avenue, and worked for him until we left to go up to Oregon. When we came back he went back to Mr. Vaughn's again, and worked there until we bought the store in partnership with my husband's brother-in-law's brother, Gill Robinson. Then we bought Gill Robinson out and owned the store.

ADDIS GROCERY

Then Mr. Addis moved from Seventh Avenue to Second. This was in National City, of course. Well before that though we stopped Mr. Vaughn again and went over to San Diego and bought a store on India and Fir, I think it was, down there by Con Wolfs'. We ran that for a long time, and then we came back to Mr. Vaughn again. He was always glad to get Daddy back. That's what my husband did all his life. He ran that store until he lost his sight and couldn't even see me. I didn't know how blind he was, he kept it from me, you know. We were just being stole blind up there at that store. A man came into the store one day and told me, "I wish you'd take Mr. Addis to Dr. Leland Jones." We went to him and he brought Daddy's eyes back so that when he died he could read small print that I couldn't even see with my glasses on.

NIVENS

When I lived on Point Loma the Nivens moved into the Hawkins' house before Fred bought it. Mr. Nivens was sure Scotch and so was she. You know there were no neighbors around so they were the only ones my sister could neighbor with. Mrs. Nivens had a chicken that wasn't too well, so she said to my sister, "Would your father kill this chicken? I want it kill[ed], it's not going to do very well because it's sick or something." So my father cut the chicken's head off. That was in November and Ida went over there for something and had this chicken with it's head off, with the feathers on, hanging behind the stove.

Ida said, "What are you doing with that hen there?" She said, "I'm getting it mellow so I can pluck it." Then she invited Ida and Fred to eat Thanksgiving dinner with them. They went and she offered that chicken for dinner, Ida couldn't eat any of it of course.

The Nivens had three daughters and a boy I think. I know there was Cathy who taught school over in San Diego afterwards.

CISTERNS

Before the Nivens moved, they moved down near Loma Portal later, there was no water on Point Loma you know, and they caught rain water . We all had cisterns. Well their cistern was pretty low, it had a crack in it or something, and they had to clean it out so they didn't have any water. By that time Fred had connected with the city water and filled his cistern with that and we had plenty of piped water. Mr. Nivens made arrangements with Fred to fill his cistern saying he would pay for it. So Fred let him fill his Cistern. They used that up and wanted to refill it. They never asked Fred, but just came and attached the hose on and filled It again. The second time he came and Ida saw him fooling around to turn the water on she went and got the pliers and turned it off. At that time my father was upstairs in bed. He had pneumonia and was very sick. Mr. Nivens came in the kitchen and threatened my sister, shook his fist in her face and demanded that she let him turn on that water. She said, "Well, you didn't make arrangements with Mr. Jennings. When he comes home you come up and make arrangements with him. You have water enough to last until he comes home, if he says all

right, why that's all right." Well, he just came in the house and shook his fist, you know, and I got scared and ran upstairs and got my father. He came downstairs, he was so weak he could hardly get down, and he went up to Mr. Niven and said, Mr. Niven, I'm a sick man, I don't know what this is all about, but you go home and wait until Mr. Jennings comes home, and he'll fix it with you." Mr. Nivens shook his fist in my father's face, and my father took a flat iron -- Ida had been ironing -- and started toward him and then old Niven ran. Now Mrs. Nivens was a lovely woman, and the children were nice, but that old Scotchman -- never will forget him as long as I live. I never thought I'd like another Scotchman, but I like Mr. Cairns awfully well. He's an awfully good man, a neighbor here.

CRIPPEN, JOHN

Then the Crippens lived there. Frank Jennings' wife and Mrs. Crippen were sisters. His name was John, John Crippen.

CAPTAIN EDEN

Captain Eden lived down right on the bay by the school. He was an old sea captain, and he was a wonderful painter. He took a lot of paintings to that ocean beach on the cliffs. Where the cliffs used to be there was a hotel down right on the ocean. Captain Eden showed his pictures in there and sold them from there. Dot and Belle Jennings were janitors in the school, and [Captain] Eden took a great fancy to Dot. He used to give her pictures and things. About all Captain Eden did was just paint pictures and sell them. He mostly made pictures of boats and sea pictures. He was a wonderful artist, he did very well in oils -- great big lovely pictures.

PORTUGUESE FISHERMEN

I knew all the Portuguese. There were the Monises, the Madrugas, the Silvas, and the Goulartes. They had all these beautiful babies and you could eat off their floors, they were just snow white, that white pine you know. They were awful clean. They were fishermen and had the nets down there. I used to think that was wonderful. They went out on the ocean like they do now, and they would be gone for days, then they would come back and then these fishnets would be hanging over these racks. I just loved the smell of that. They had some fish houses down there. They would clean the fish, and then they would salt them, and they would also smoke them. They were awfully good. They would bring my sister great big fishes. The Chinese junks had gone before I got there.

NAIL FACTORY

The nail factory was there yet when I was there, but it wasn't working. The building was still there. Fred Jennings had gone to work in that nail factory, that's how he happened to go over to Point Loma.

JENNINGS, FRED AND FRANK

Fred Jennings was constable when I lived with them. Then he got to be sheriff. That was through his brother. Frank was sherriff first.

BRENNANS

I remember the Brennans. I went out there with my teacher, Mary Hastings, and stayed a week. Mr. Brennan took us up in the lighthouse and showed us a little how the lights went. That was a wonderful thing for us. They weren't living in the lighthouse, they lived down at the bottom. Those houses are still there. It wasn't the old Lighthouse, there wasn't anything in that, it was just abandoned. The Brennan boys took their sisters and me -- I don't

know whether Mary Hastings was with us or not -- and we climbed up that hill and got in that lighthouse. I don't know to this day whether the boys pulled that window shut or not! I was out on the roof -- I was always a tomboy -- and they shut that window and I couldn't get in and I couldn't get down. They scared me to death.

The Brennans would come to school and there would be about three of them sit on one seat. There would be Richard and Joe and George. They had a horse and buggy. A red horse, and the buggy was open at the back kinda, just a little frame around it, and a little box in the back and some of them sat in there. There was Richard, Joe, George, Nellie -- Nellie and Joseph were twins -- then there was Kate and Leo. I forget all of them. They didn't all come to school in that horse and buggy. Some were too young to come to school. But the Brennans came with bloody noses, and maybe only one would get there. They'd have awful fights. They were Irish you know. They fought each other, there wasn't anyone else. You see they drove from out there at the lighthouse clear in to Point Loma to school. We never knew whether they were coming to school or not because they would get into these awful fights. Kids! They'd bloody each other's noses. They had awful tempers, but I loved every one of them. I just loved those boys, Leo and George -- they were the younger ones -- and Dick and Joseph.

When old man Brennan would go to town he would always come back pretty well loaded. I was always a tease, and I was always finding snakes. Once on his way home Mr. Brennan came driving up the canyon singing. I had a live gopher snake I'd picked up, and when he came I showed it to him. The snake tried to get away from me and I flipped it around Mr. Brennan's neck. It sure scared him, and my father caught me at it. I sure got a waling that time. I had a lot of fun with those Brennans.

1916 FLOOD

The only flood that I ever saw was that time the Otay Dam went out in the 1916 flood. We went down to the bay and we saw arms and legs sticking up where the dead had come down. That was an awful thing. There were animals and everything there.

ENTERTAINMENT

I took care of my children for entertainment in the early days. We didn't go to dances. I never danced in my life. Father was a Methodist and wouldn't allow me to learn. Nor to play cards. I was a great person to be alone. I'd go on the hills and pick wild flowers. That's what I loved to do better than anything else.

CHARACTERS

We had a character down here in National City -- a Chinaman. Everything that went wrong was blamed on that poor Chinaman. I don't think he ever did anything wrong. Nothing was ever proved. There was the case of the woman who was kinda cuckoo. She destroyed her baby by putting it in the toilet, and that poor old Chinaman was blamed for that because he'd delivered the laundry there. But you never hear of the Chinese doing anything that's wrong, never hear of them raping anyone or anything like that. They sure do mind their own business and take care of themselves too.

TRANSPORTATION

When we first came out here we came on the train. From San Jose we came on the boat, and we went to San Francisco and got the boat. I think it was the Santa Rosa. There was no transportation of any kind when we came to my sister's -- unless you had a horse and buggy or a boat of some kind -- to San Diego. My sister took us over to Coronado and she hired a Portuguese in a sailboat. That was the thrill of my life to be on that water in that boat. I'd never seen the water, only rivers. We went over there and went all through that hotel and to the store down below. I've never been there since, but

that was a wonderful trip. Coming back we landed on a sand bar, and that fellow had an awful time getting us off. Another time Ida said we could go rowing. Uncle Frank had a lifeboat, a regular one that wouldn't turn over, so we took that. Dot and Belle and I started down to Point Loma Lighthouse down below at Ballast Point. We didn't know a thing about the currents, and we didn't know how to row too well. Dot sat in the stern and steered us, and Belle and I rowed. Pretty soon, where that buoy comes up, we went on the wrong side of it. When we came to that buoy, I looked at Dot and her face was white as when she died, and I knew there was something wrong. She said, "Row! Row!" We just rowed our heads off, that current was so strong, but we got out of that. We could see the water just going in circles around that buoy just swirling around. After we got out to Ballast Point, we told the fellow what we'd done and he wouldn't believe us. They said there was a sailboat or something went down in that whirlpool. I suppose the tide was different or something. He said we couldn't have done that and come out of there. But we did. Then they said, "Well, we're going to tow you back." So they attached us to a sailboat and when we got opposite Roseville they let us go. Then we got on a sandbar. The tide was out -- that's Shelter Island now -- and we picked starfish and things. We waited awhile and then we got our boat afloat again. It was a wonderful experience, and we never got to go anymore.

NATIONAL CITY HOME

We bought our lots here in 1909 and we built this house for eight hundred dollars. We built a septic tank, and the sand was so good that our house is plastered with that sand. Brown -- from Chula Vista -- was building houses around here, and he came to see my husband and said, "Why don't you start your house now?" You know wages weren't very good at that time, and we had the two children. I said to Daddy, "Well, let's get us a home." So we made arrangements with Mr. Brown. He made it as easy for us as he could. We paid him so much a month. He said he wanted to start something right away to hold his men because he had another job by the time he'd finish this. So this house cost us eight hundred dollars. Five room, plastered house. It's still good. It's cracked with the earthquakes and settling, but it still is in pretty good shape. It's fifty years we've lived right here.

CHURCH

There was no church on Point Loma until they started the Presbyterian Church. That Presbyterian preacher came from Kansas, and was the preacher that married my husband and I in Quemno. He preached at Pacific Beach and also at Roseville. I always held this against him. When we were married they were giving marriage certificates in the form of a book and he didn't have any, but he said he'd get one. He never did. I never had a thing to prove I ever married. Its recorded in Quemno or Linden or Topeka. He never did fulfill his promise, and when he came out here of course he came to the house. I asked him about it, and he promised again, but he never did. I just never felt very good toward him. I joined the Presbyterian Church, but I'm a Methodist. We all were. My husband just went to church with me, he never did join.

LODGES

Mr. Addis was a Mason. He joined back in 1936 and belonged to the Southwest Lodge. He didn't go any higher than the Blue Lodge. I was an Eastern Star, Southwest Lodge, but I demitted. We just couldn't keep it up. Daddy never demitted his. I can go back anytime, but I never did care much for lodges. I went to church quite a bit out here but I don't anymore. When you have to depend on somebody to take you, and it takes something out of them, you don't ask. My daughter is fifty-five this month, and it's too much to ask of her.

We did belong to several lodges, I don't remember them now. I remember the initiation. Mr. Stang had just gotten married, and he brought his wife into the lodge. In the initiations we had to walk up and they would clap two boards together and everybody thought you had been hit. Then the next one that came up thought they were being hit, but they weren't. When Otto's wife came up he really used the boards on her and spanked her with them. That lodge was in a roar. He was a kinda sober man too. He sure gave her the works.

END OF INTERVIEW
