



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Isidora Shippam, 1897-1983

December 30, 1980

Interviewed by: Dr. Marguerite Reeves

Transcribed by: Shirley A. Brandes

Edited by: Eleanor Wright

Final draft typed by: Ellen Newton

INTERVIEW

MARGUERITE REEVES: This tape is being made December 30, 1980, at 3049 Island Avenue, San Diego, California, in the house that Cordelia and Isidora Shippam's father built in the early 1900s. The first informant will be Isidora Shippam.

ISIDORA SHIPPAM: In the City of Liverpool, England, at 14 Rockhouse Street I was born. My mother's name was Jane Hudson before she was married. Then she became Jane Hudson Shippam. I had a brother, Cecil.

He was the first grandson in the Shippam family, so he was named after grandmother Cecilia Shippam, so he became Cecil Shippam. Mother wanted him called John Joseph after her father and her brother. But daddy said, "No, because he was the fourth child in line in the Shippam family, so let's change the routine." So he became Cecil Hudson Shippam. He was three years and eight months older than I was. He was born on March 31st, 1894. I was the second child of John and Jane Shippam and I was born December 6, 1897. We were still at 14 Rockhouse Street. Then on March 17, 1899, my younger sister was born and her name was Alcestis Cordelia Hudson Shippam. We all carried mother's name. Daddy had his choice of the first

names: Isidora is after the Greek Goddess, Isis. And sister was named Alcestis for the Greek play and Cordelia after King Lear's daughter. The two [older] sisters were selfish and Cordelia was the one that helped her father out when he needed help. Grandmother, Cecilia Shippam, was ill in a nursing home and when she passed away daddy said, "The ties are broken now, let us leave for the new country of America." We had friends at Point Loma who were members of Madame Tingley's Theosophical Society.

They wrote back and forth to dad and said it was a wonderful country to raise the children in; there is no snow, no wind, and the children can even run around barefooted. No snow coats, nor hip boots, nor galoshes were needed. So daddy put the house up for sale and within a few weeks it was sold. We got our tickets and on the 16th of June, 1904, we left Liverpool, England, on the White Star Liner Cretic. We had a number of friends there to see us off at the Mersey River dock. One friend, a Mr. Craddock, gave us a bag of oranges and said, "Where you little girls are going you will see the oranges grow on the trees and you can pick them there." Which we found out was true after we got to California. We were nine days crossing the Atlantic. About mid-Atlantic the waves were high and the Captain called all the people on deck and he said, "I'm afraid, folks, we are in for a stormy time of it, but don't get excited for I'm a good Captain; we have good engineers on board and we will cross the Atlantic safely."

"So", he said, "we may be two or three days late but I think too much of my passengers and my ship to allow anything to happen in any storm. I've crossed the Atlantic many times and I've always arrived safely and gone back to Liverpool safely." In the mid-Atlantic the icebergs were seen coming down from the north. "So", he said, "now don't think I am making up any stories, but there are the icebergs coming down so we are changing the course of the ship." This delayed us two days on the way. Then we finally arrived in Boston in nine days instead of a week. When we got to Boston there were 24 Mormons who had boarded the Cretic in Liverpool and they were going to the Mormon colony in Salt Lake City. The leader and several of their group went ashore with our dad and said we will try and find rooms to stay in until the storm abates and they can unload the luggage from the ship. We went ashore and went to different hotels but they said, "No, no rooms available. There is a convention on and all rooms are taken." There were 5 of us and 24 of the Mormons so that meant 29 people who had to be given room space. So daddy came back to the ship with the Mormon leader of the group and the Captain said, "Don't worry, folks, if we are here three days to a week you will stay here at the White Star Liners expense -- no extra cost." Which we did for three days.

Then we got the train in Boston and went up north to see Niagara Falls and into Canada and back again; then headed west and a little bit south, went through Kansas and saw the wheat fields and the wheat growing for the first time. And the wide expanse of the country. The train kept rolling on. Later on, we got to Salt Lake City, by going through Colorado and saw all the Rockies. The train had to go through the tunnels and daddy thought, "Well, we are in the far west now, maybe the Indians are here." So he let out an Indian war whoop several times and they said, "Sure enough. We thought the Indians were all on reservations, but they must be here someplace."

Daddy didn't say anything; he kept quiet. Later on, on the train, he said, "We saw no Indians; I wonder where they were. He finally told them and the people were calmed down. So from then on we came down into Washington and Oregon, and then into California. We stayed in San Francisco to wait for the train that came down to San Diego. On July 3rd -- it was a Sunday, the day before the 4th of July -- mother said, "My goodness, what sort of a place have we come to, all that noise and racket!" We took rooms up at Fifth and A Streets, at the Arlington Hotel and stayed there for two weeks. The landlady said, "So you know what tomorrow is?" And dad said, "Why, it's Monday, of course." "No," she said, "that's Independence Day, the Fourth of July. That's what all the noise is about." Mother said, "Well, of course, in England they wouldn't have any noise like that on a Sunday!" We stayed two weeks in the hotel and daddy said, "Well, we'll have to find rooms somewhere." So we started out and walked from Fifth and A to 26th and M Street, which is now Imperial Avenue. We saw one lady walking across a vacant lot and she said, "You folks going somewhere or are you lost?" Daddy said, "No, we are looking for a house to rent." She said, "Well, you're looking at the right person; I've got the key; let's go up and look at it." It was a three-room house on L Street -- 3435 L -- and daddy said, "Well, what is the rent?" She said, "It's \$5.00 a month. It's only three rooms, but it will put you up temporarily." So we lived there for nine months and that's all the rent we've paid since we've been in San Diego. We have resided

here for 75 years. Daddy and another carpenter built the house in which we are living now at 3049 Island Avenue. It was I Street then, but there was confusion with the Post Office and they would send the mail for I Street up to First Street so they changed it to Island Avenue, so the mail could be straightened out. Since then we have lived in the same California bungalow. At first there were wide open spaces. La Mesa Road crossed to the northwest corner of our property line. We used to see the stage go by our place on its way into San Diego.

There was a man who stopped by one day and he said, "Oh, are you folks new in the neighborhood? I have some fresh strawberries, would you like some?" And mother said, "Well, let me see them first to see whether they are ripe or not." "Oh, yes," he said, "they are ten cents a box, or three boxes for a quarter." Mother said, "I'll have three boxes, and he said, "Oh, good. I'm taking them in to town to sell them, but if I sell my load of fruit and vegetables before I get there, why I can turn around and go home." So each week when he came in, he would stop by and mother would get fruit and vegetables.

Daddy was a bookkeeper in England so he went to the West Coast Lumber Company. [Later] the Santa Fe Depot took over that property. So daddy was out of work at the West Coast Lumber Company.

Later he worked at Weldon's Lumber Company; then later in the San Diego Lumber Company; the Western Lumber Company; and the San Diego Planing Mill. Finally he retired from work and did bookbinding at home.

MR: What about those people in Point Loma. Who was that in Point Loma that your father knew?

IS: Oh, the Shurllocks -- Captain Shurlock. He was a sea captain. He was one of the members [of the Theosophical Society] and he was also a friend of the Savages [Charles and Louise Savage with whom the Historical Society already has a taped interview]. One of the Savage boys was the private secretary to Rupert Hughes, the movie man. He worked up there with him. But as to the Shurllocks, he retired after he had been long years on the sea. The Savages were over on Point Loma. They were members of Katherine Tingley's Theosophical Society. The Shurllocks had three children and they all attended the Academy over there. That is now where the university campus is.

We used to go every Sunday down to the Isis Theatre down on Fourth Avenue. Madame Tingley gave her lectures there. They were religious meetings. Finally time went on and the theatre was sold and Madame Tingley retired from the religious life and then I think Jack Dodge took over. They still have a small group in San Diego. One friend thought we were members, because we were there, but we were not. We attended the Greek plays over there at the theatre at Point Loma -- we used to go over there and see the plays.

When I was growing up I raised chickens and would sell the eggs at the store. Sometimes they would take them in in trade for groceries and other times the grocery man would give us cash. I went to Sherman School on 24th -- between 22nd and 24th -- and between I and J Streets. That was the old Sherman School that was built in 1887. We went there from 1904 to 1913. I had to go into kindergarten with my sister because she didn't like to be alone and she wanted mamma to stay with her, so I had to stay in kindergarten to keep her company. Then I went into the first grade and went for eight years and then graduated from the Sherman School. My graduating teacher was Henrietta Rose. She was the daughter of Louis Rose for whom the Rose Canyon was named.

He also was the one at Roseville. My sister also attended Sherman School; and our brother attended the Sherman School, but he was about in the fourth grade when he came from Liverpool, so he only went four years.

MR: Tell about the ... [?]

IS: Oh, yes, when they were grading the street they wanted to fill the land in and daddy said that would spoil our alfalfa [crop] where the cows lunch. They said he would have to have a wall built, and daddy said that he had one friend that makes cement blocks, "But I don't care for the looks of them." In England they have the fields and places with bricks or cobblestones, plenty of cobblestones. They were grading Market Street at the time. Daddy went up and spoke to the manager and asked, "What are you going to do with those cobblestones?" "Oh, I don't know; just let them lay there." So sister and I went up the hill to see which one could throw the most cobblestones down the hill.

Then daddy came with the wheelbarrow and carried them to the front of our place. He built the wall -- 100 feet long and 3 feet high -- a little at a time. One friend had said that he had a carpenter and said, "Oh, the first big storm that would come, the cobblestones wall would fall down." Daddy said, "Oh, Mr. Blackburn, you don't know what you are talking about. Why, that wall will still be standing when you and I are six feet under." And it has, since 1914. When we first came to San Diego we had the experience of riding up from the old depot on the horse car. You've heard the story of Black Beauty, well, these two beautiful black horses towed the horse car. We rode from the bottom of Broadway -- it was D Street then -- up to Fifth and A Streets on the horse car. That was our first experience on the streets of San Diego. From that we saw the electric car come; later on, to Encanto, they had the gasoline motor-driven car which everyone called, because it was painted fire-engine-red, the "red devil"! We rode on that.

Later on, along came the buses; that is what we have today. If you are a good walker, nothing is to stop you from walking the two or three miles to town. Since we were born in England we didn't have lazy legs so sometimes we'd walk. When I grew up and got out of school the first World War came - 1917 -- so brother went up to Canada and joined the Canadians up at Victoria, British Columbia. Our cousin had gone up previously; he joined the Seaport Highlanders [?] and he went over to France ahead of brother. Fortunately, brother was on the line of march and was picked out for the Officers Training Corps in Victoria, British Columbia. He stayed six weeks there and became a lance corporal, I think it was, then later on rose higher and was sent to the Signal Corps. When he got to England there were 600 sent over to France. When he was gone I thought, "Well, brother isn't here and they don't need two of us at home so I would like to go to work. Daddy didn't want me to go to work.

One friend I knew worked in the Izer F. Davis Candy Factory and they wanted workers there. I had never had any experience so I went to work for \$4.00 a week for 48 hours. They talk about low wages, well, that was the wage then and if you worked for six months you got a fifty-cent raise. I worked there for 15 years and eleven months.

MR: Where was that?

IS: At Seventh and Island, across from where Klauber-Wagenheim Company is now, but it used to be H. Uelzen a produce place, one of the first ones in San Diego. Later on, after mother passed away in 1933, sister and I thought it was too lonesome for sister to be home alone so we went looking for work. We went down to the California Packing Company. That was down there where Lindbergh Field is now. Solar [Aircraft] was on one side -- where Lindbergh Field is now. We worked there for about six months and a fishermen's strike came on and we were not working because the boats stopped coming in. Then we went to Van Camps.

MR: When was this? What year?

IS: That was in 1934. I got on as a packer because I had said that I had been with California Packing Company. My sister got on as a cleaner because they didn't need any more packers. Later on they needed packers so she left the cleaning department. I worked there for 22 years and sister went into the aircraft from 1941 to 1944, or until the war was over. She worked on the swing shift, so she took a rest from the work and then came back the next year when they needed help at the cannery. She worked there for thirteen years.

After daddy had completed the cobblestone wall he wanted to build some steps out of the stepping stones from the old Chollas Creek down in the valley at about 34th and F Street. He used to take a walk each morning and bring back a couple of pieces under each arm for the stepping stones. Finally after the steps were built, he built the gate -- a latch gate like they have at Fi[el?]dstone Hill Observatory near Liverpool, England. That was the spot where daddy had placed the engagement ring on mother's hand. And he said, "That will make you recall the days that we were first joined together as permanent friends and later turned into marriage." And that gate still stands. That was about 1914-1915 because he built the wall first and that was in 1914. Then he built the gate afterwards.

MR: And then Delia fixed it at one time.

CORDELIA SHIPPAM: I just re-shingled the top of the gate.

IS: It has a shingled roof on it. That is like it was -- only in England they used the slate, they don't have the wood shingles. But daddy said, "We're in America now so we will use the wood."

MR: So what presidents did you see.

IS: San Diego seems to be a stopping off place for our presidents from Washington, D. C. The first one I remember seeing was Teddy Roosevelt. Daddy had seen it in the paper that Teddy Roosevelt was on a farewell visit to San Diego. He had been traveling all over the States and at a certain time he would be leaving [on the train] and any friends who wanted to say "Farewell" could do so. So daddy and I went down. There was one other man at the depot at the time. There was Teddy waving his arms and saying, "Farewell, San Diego." And daddy responded, "Farewell, Teddy Roosevelt. Good luck wherever you may be." We waited until the train whistled and the train whistled and the train was out of sight and there was Teddy's arm waving as far as we could see. Then as it made the turn further along the track the train was lost to sight and Teddy was on his way home.

Then the second one was when President Wilson -- he just came on a short visit to San Diego and he was taken ill so he had to go to the hospital. Then Herbert Hoover after the Exposition was on in 1935-1936; he visited the Exposition in Balboa Park. He spoke on a platform on top of the organ pavilion. Then Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt made their visit to San Diego. He spoke at the stadium of the "Old Gray Castle" where San Diego High School used to be. Sister and I were only about 10 feet from the official presidential car and we were the ones closest to him and as he came in we said, "Welcome to San Diego, President and Mrs. Roosevelt -- FDR and Eleanor." And they waved and smiled and bowed to us and I said, "Well, that's the first president we've been real close to." I believe he was the last one to come. Of course we've seen the governors. Ronald Reagan and we also saw Governor Brown at one of the local parades -- I think it was at a Maytime Band Review or a Chula Vista Fiesta. They were in the official car as official guests.

One of my happy childhood memories was when my brother, Cecil, and I used to go down to the foot of F Street to the old quarries wharf where they used to have the sailing ships come in to unload the coal. That was when coal was used in San Diego and we didn't have the electricity and power that we have today. Every Saturday we would take our lunch and I had a drop line and brother had his fishing pole and we would go down to the foot of F Street and catch little smelt and other little fish. We would come home from a Saturday afternoon and bring maybe a dozen little fish and mother would clean them and cook them up for us, and we'd have a supper of fish. The same people would come there. Later on they were building the Broadway pier and brother and I would watch the divers when they went to work. We knew when 3 o'clock came because the divers would come up; their day was over. So we would leave to walk home from the foot of F Street out to 30th and Island Avenue with our catch of fish.

MR: What about the Standard Oil fire?

IS: Oh, yes. I can't quite recall. [Turning to her sister, "Do you know quite when it was? It was when the war was on." Her sister answering, "Wasn't it in 1914? It was when Allen was born. (Editor's note: The fire was in 1913)].

IS: It was a spectacular fire. That must have been about 1914 or 1915 when the Standard Oil Company [was] at 13th and N Street. On the bay side they had these storage tanks, where the tankers would come and unload the oil and put them in the big tanks. That was before the days of the trucking of oil. All the oil came in by ship -- tankers. If there was any disaster of any kind, they would blow the fire whistle. That was down at the gas works at the foot -- down near the depot. People heard the continued blowing of the whistle and wondered what had happened. So then they broadcast it on one of the local radio stations and said there was a dangerous fire and the Standard Oil Company tanks are on fire down on 13th and N Streets. "Don't go anywhere in that area!" They had the two big gasometers then where the San Diego Gas and Electric made their own gas. They didn't have the natural gas then brought in. For three days and nights that fire burned. The oil even went out into the bay and you could see the glare if you were up on a hill. Finally, it burned itself out.

The gasometers were safe and the people in that area were saved. They were afraid that it might get to the railroad station, but it didn't. The efficiency of the fire department and harbor patrol stood by everything from the fire.

MR: Now, what about the story about Coronado?

IS: One of the enjoyable places to visit was Coronado. The Hotel del [Coronado] was there. It is still the same hotel only it's been remodeled, modernized. We had one friend who had been working as a carpenter when the hotel was built in the 1800s. He said that hotel would last while there were people because it was well built. We used to get on the ferry there at the foot of F Street, now where the Seaport Village is now. That was the ferry slip. You could get your ticket for 15 cents. Five cents was for the San Diego Electric Railway -- as it was then -- and you'd get a ride down to the ferry slip; then you got off and went through the turnstile; went through the ferry building; they punched your ticket, which you got there; and then you went up onto the ferry. You could go upstairs or downstairs. We children used to run up the stairs because we thought we could see more. For 15¢ you could ride the ferry there and back. Many a San Diego family would spend the day at Coronado and then come home. That was the first place where they had the seals. Now you go to SeaWorld to see the seals. But there they had a monkey cage with monkeys in it. It used to amuse the children watching the monkeys and the seals. John D. Spreckels -- he was a man of money -- he was a millionaire many times over and he kept up the seal pool and took care of the monkeys.

He had a beautiful home there at Coronado, as well as Madame Schumann-Heink who had a home in Coronado before she went to Grossmont and had her home built there. Carrie Jacobs Bond also lived in Grossmont. We had heard her play "O Promise Me" and "When You Come to the End of the Perfect Day" at the organ pavilion. She sang the words and played the piano, so that is one of our happy memories of the organ pavilion in Balboa Park. And they used to have organ concerts there at Balboa Park.

MR: What about the concerts at Coronado?

IS: During the summertime for about two or three months they would have Vicella's [sp?] Italian Band -- and they were all Italians who had come over from Italy and they would tour the country. They would make a stop for two months at Coronado. Then to alternate another year there was Donatelli's Italian Band. They would play selections a whole afternoon, and then sometimes they would ask, "Now, some of you folks who are here, what's your favorite selection?" And then the band would play it. Many happy hours were spent at Coronado listening to the band concerts.

MR: Now what happened to the seals and the monkeys?

IS: As they improved things there, there was Wonderland at Ocean Beach. It was like an amusement park and they had all sorts of children's equipment -- swings and things for children to ride in. They had a roller coaster there, but not the one they have at the present time now [at Belmont Park in Mission Beach]. That was the start really of our San Diego Zoo. Dr. Wegeforth lived in Coronado and people went to him and asked, "Around in the area, what could we do with the seals?" At Wonderland they had sold the property and they had some lions and some tigers and some monkeys, a bear or two, and that was really the start of our San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park.

That was before the race track in Del Mar was built and they had the zoo in that area there. When they had the San Diego County Fair, they had it up there in Balboa Park and then later on Bing Crosby had the race track built. Then the Agricultural Department felt that they had expanded enough and could have the Fair out there at the Del Mar grounds. That is why they call it the Del Mar Fairgrounds -- they had the County Fair there. People had all the little creatures there, the goats and all. We had one friend who had goats. There was another family who had a mamma pig, a big sow and she had 13 little piglets. Twelve of them could get their lunch but the little teenie one had to stand by without lunch. So the friend who had the goats on display there at the Fair -- the other person [said?], "I have this little piglet I'm afraid is going to die." Our friend said, "Oh, no, it won't, we have good goat's milk here.

If it can't have mamma's milk from the pig, he can have goat's milk." It used to amuse the children so when he would say,

"Now there's the goat and I have this little creature over here; it's half-goat and half-pig." "Well," they said, "it looks like it is all pig to me." "That's where you are mistaken," he said. "It's mamma and daddy were pigs, but it's drinking goat's milk, so it must be half-goat and half-pig." He got many a laugh that way.

MR: Tell us about the chicken you had.

IS: When I was younger, before I went to work, when I got out of school I thought I would have chickens, so I raised chickens to sell the eggs. I'd take them to the store and sometimes get the money for them and then when mother wanted some groceries I'd trade them in for groceries. Then when the chickens got too old to lay eggs, you'd take them down to the chicken place and the man would buy them from you. The money I'd get from the chickens, I'd get to buy some chicken feed to feed the chickens I had at home. I did that for years until I went to work.

I had one special one that I called "Molly". We heard a rooster crowing and I said, "That's strange, someone must have a rooster around here." I went out early one morning when I heard this crowing. I looked around and there was Molly. She was flapping her wings and crowing. I said, "Molly, what's the matter with you." I waited until later in the day when I went to gather the eggs and Molly had laid an egg. I said, "Why, you can't be Molly, I'll have to change your name to "HeShe", because in the morning you are a he and in the afternoon you are a she and lay a nice egg for me." So that's how Molly had her name changed to HeShe.

MR: This is the end of this tape. Now we will interview Cordelia Shippam on another tape.

END OF INTERVIEW
