



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

**An interview with
William G. Halbritter, 1880-1972**

October 9, 1957

This interview was conducted by: Edgar F. Hastings

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

Mr. Halbritter was interviewed on October 9, 1957, for the San Diego Historical Society. This is a record of spontaneous and informal conversation with the interviewer's questions and comments omitted, therefore it will not read as smoothly as a story. My name is Edgar F. Hastings.

WILLIAM G. HALBRITTER

My father came here from Berlin, Germany in the early 1850s, was married and had six children. After the sixth child was born, his first wife passed on. He then married Louise Wolff, my mother, in the 1870s. He had two children by the second wife, Fred C. Halbritter and myself. Fred was born in 1878 and I was born August 22, 1880, in Cleveland.

My father was a building contractor in Cleveland, Ohio, and came out here to San Diego in the 1880 boom. He was here three years, then had his family come out, and we reached San Diego on the 3rd of March, 1883. I was three years old and Fred was five.

We first lived in San Diego on the corner of 14th and I Street and my father continued in the building business. I can show you houses on Golden Hill that my father built in 1884 and 1885 which are still standing. My father started building bridges for the city. On 15th Street was the Switzer Canyon Creek that ran down to the bay. He built four bridges over it on F Street, on K Street, on Market Street, and one above that on D Street, or probably it was E Street. He built bridges on E, F, G, and H Streets over Switzer's Canyon. He worked on the Coronado Hotel when the Coronado Hotel was being built. My father passed away in 1905; my mother lived seven years longer until 1912 or 1913.

My brother Fred and I went to school on L Street near 27th or 28th, which was on the Cuyamaca Railroad track. It was a little pink schoolhouse on the right-hand side of the track, about where Franklin Avenue is. My dad built a home on 16th and L Streets. From there we moved out to what we called the Ninth Ward, out in the East End on the corner of 30th and Boston Avenue. We finished our grammar school at the East End School. Fred did not go any further in school, but I went two years at the old Russ School.

After Fred quit school he went to work in a laundry and went into the laundry business. He went to work for the old Model Steam Laundry on F Street between 14th and 15th Streets, owned by Jerry Horning. Fred worked there nine or ten years. Then he worked for a laundry on the corner of 16th and I Streets, called the Sanitary Laundry, owned by Nelson Schneider. When he quit this laundry he went to work for the Spreckels Company and was a motorman for 20 years. After Fred retired from the electric company, he opened an oil station on the corner of 25th and Logan Avenue and ran that until he died in March, 1932. The oil station was taken over by his son, Harry.

After I finished high school I took two years of stationary engineering in a private school in San Diego. I don't remember the name of the old German who ran this school, but I put in four hours a day in the afternoon there for two years. After I graduated I went to work for Jerry Horning at the Model Steam Laundry, the same place where Fred was working. I worked for him ten years until 1906.

I left that job and went to work for the county, operating the laundry and doing engineering work at the County Hospital in 1906. I was appointed by the supervisors who were Jim Cassidy, Howard Cherry, William Justice, John Griffin and James A. Jasper. When I went to the County Hospital, they put up this little, new brick building and right alongside of it they had a little shed with a Scotch Marine Boiler. I operated that way for about six or seven years. Then they built a large engine room and we installed two 85 horsepower boilers (tubular boilers) to furnish heat for the hospital and the nurses' home. I operated both of those departments until they got so large that I just had to have help. John Maloney was the superintendent at the County Hospital. Then we put on an engineer by the name of Jim Cronan and I still continued operating the laundry department. The old County Hospital in those days was heated with steam radiators. I continued to work there until 1922.

When I left the hospital I went into the automobile business with the Nash Automobile Company as a salesman for two years. Later on I bought stock in the Nash Automobile Company as a part-owner in the agency itself. I worked in that business until about 1927, then I sold my interest back to W. Edward Shaw. I then went to work for Bob Langston selling Buick automobiles for the Buick agency, the Robert D. Maxwell Company where I worked for about a year and a half. There was a young fellow there by the name of Johnny Burger. Johnny and I left the Maxwell Company and we started a used car business of our own. That is when the Depression hit us. But we sold out just before the Depression hit. Johnny went to work for the Stubbs Company, the Ford agency. I sold the rest of the lease on the building, all the equipment and the cars that we had left, to the Campbell Chevrolet Company.

Then I went back into county service and took over the county garage where I succeeded Arthur Butler. I was superintendent of the county garage from 1932 until I retired from county service in 1947. I was married on the 28th of May, 1903. My wife's name was Ethel Latta and she was born in the San Pasqual Valley in San Diego County. I was a neighbor to her family on F Street when I worked for Jerry Horning at the Model Laundry. Ethel

lived just two doors up the street from me, which is how I got acquainted with her. We had no children. She passed away on the 3rd day of November, 1955.

I remember the old mule cars. The first one that I remember ran out National Avenue to 26th Street, the end of the line. Then they turned the old mule around and they went back to 5th and H Streets. There was a line going up 5th Street -- no, it was 4th Street then -- where the cable cars came in. The old mule car went up to about A or B Streets, along in there, which was about the end of the line and was about out of town.

I remember one of the drivers of the old mule car who used to give me a ride out home all the time, was old Irish John. That is what we all called him and that was the only name I knew him by. He would let all the kids hook on and give all the kids out in the Ninth Ward a ride. The cars had only four wheels and they had little, short seats with a little alley running up in it. They were closed cars and the seats ran the long way of the cars. I didn't know too much about the cable cars. I knew there was a cable line that ran from the foot of 6th Street up to 6th and C, along C to 4th, and up 4th to University. The cable cars went up 4th to University, then turned east on University and followed to Park Boulevard; then from Park Boulevard they turned left and went up to the Ostrich Farm and to the old Mission Cliffs, the end of the line.

The old powerhouse was on 4th and Kalmia, right at the head of that canyon. The electric line went up 5th Street, the same as the old horse car. The old cable car didn't go out Market or H Streets, but the electric cars did, out to 31st and National Avenue. They turned off on Logan on 26th and down National, then to 31st. Then it came back on the same old route, turned at 5th Street instead of 4th and went up 5th Street to University, then turned east on University and followed the old cable line out to the Park.

I remember the old double-decker cars. Sam Gay was a conductor on one of them, the double-deckers. Old Sam was a great friend of mine in those days and he used to give me a ride just like old Irish John used to. Whenever he would see me walking home he would slow the car down and I would jump on and get a free ride home. These old double-deckers looked like the ordinary streetcar except they had a deck on top and two seats ran the length of the car in the center. There were stairs going up the back and the front. They had a little roof on top of that. They were for tourists and any passengers so they could see all around.

I used to do quite a bit of hunting in the old days, mostly quail and ducks, just anything that my shotgun would kill and that we could eat. We did not go out to shoot for fun; we would shoot for meat. For quail hunting we would go out to Poway and Penasquitos Ranch. We would go over to the Linda Vista Mesa and take the old Poway grade down into Poway. We would often go out by the E. W. Scripps' place at Miramar. We used to go to Jamacha, Jamul and all those places which were good quail hunting. We had 25 bird limits when I was hunting. It didn't take long to get your limit. We used to shoot ducks on San Diego Bay where we would get sprig widgeon, redhead, and teal ducks. We did a lot of hunting on all the San Diego lakes such as Lower and Upper Otay, Morena, and Sweetwater. I used to do most of my shooting on Upper Otay in those days. We used to shoot up there on those drives that E. S. Babcock put on. E. S. Babcock used to put on a drive and we would kill the birds for the Hotel Coronado just for the sport of it; and they would use the birds for the hotel.

We also went deer hunting. Olivenhain is a good location for deer. Then we would go to Poway where deer hunting was very good. Nettleton had the Penasquitos Ranch where we did a lot of quail shooting and at the far end of it, there was good deer hunting. This is just before you get to the Poway country. In the early days the Oneonta Slough, which is down near the mouth of the Tijuana River, was the best fishing grounds along the coast. We would catch corvina and croaker which were just about all that we would get down there; and it was all surf fishing.

For entertainment in the early days, besides hunting and fishing, we did. mostly dancing at Saturday night dances. In those early days dancing was done mostly in the old Company A Armory out on National Avenue between 29th and 30th Streets. Every once in awhile we would come down to the

Company B dances at the Company B Armory on 2nd Street between Broadway and E Street, if I remember correctly. They were public dances.

I don't remember who ran the dances, but I do know that Company A and Company B had a dance every Saturday night. For music we had a violin and a piano. Miss Nagel played the piano for the Company B Armory. I don't remember who played the fiddle. But, out at the Company A Armory they had a guitar and a violin. Bruno Hestor played the violin and Danny Day played the guitar.

END OF INTERVIEW
