

Josephine Asher Vacher's Story as told to Hazel Sperry

THE ASHER - VACHER STORY

At the time of this writing (March 12, 1964), El Cajon Valley boasts with pride its claim that Mrs. Josephine Asher Vacher, age 94, and member of one of El Cajon Valley's pioneer families, is the oldest living ^{whitehead} ~~person~~ born in Old Town San Diego.

She is the 2nd child of seven born to Josephus Marion Asher and Sarah Clark Asher, and was born in Old Town San Diego, January 17, 1870. The seven Asher children were Robert, Josephine, Alpheus, Mary, Anna, Jay and Dorcus. Their father, Josephus Marion Asher was born in Illinois. Formal educational opportunities for him were few, but being a person with a fine mind, a student by nature, and with a great spirit of determination, he became a most successful self educated man and one whose life and efforts here in the San Diego area left a worthwhile contribution to the early days of San Diego and to nearby localities, especially Paradise Valley and El Cajon Valley. He first visited San Diego in 1859, but returned to St. Louis and then went to San Francisco in 1861 where he held a government position in connection with the U. S. Government Customs Division. A later position which he held while living in San Francisco was that of a commercial writer for the San Francisco Times whose editor was Dr. Gunn.

It was while he was living in San Francisco that he met and married Sarah Clark, a very fine teacher who was from a Canadian family. During these years in San Francisco, they were friends of Alonzo Horton (better known to San Diegans as Father Horton, the founder of New Town, San Diego) and of the Marston family who have played such a big part in the business development of San Diego.

In 1869, Mr. and Mrs. Asher decided to come with their son, Robert, to San Diego. They were met upon their arrival here by Father Horton. Mr. Asher bought lots on Fifth Street between "B" and "C" Streets from Mr. Horton and started San Diego's first nursery and florist shop. He was also very interested in fruit culture and he acquired additional property in

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what is now called Paradise Valley and which was part of the old National Ranch. There he established a tree nursery. It was called the Fruitvale Nursery. At that time it had been thought that San Diego area would not be worth much for agriculture, but Mr. Asher was determined that it could be a fine agricultural area. He continued to experiment with orchard culture. In this he was very successful and he organized the San Diego Horticultural Society and was instrumental in producing the first San Diego Fair held in San Diego in 1880. During these same years he continued to hold various government positions such as Collector of Customs and as County Assessor.

Because of failing health he decided to give up his nursery in San Diego, and having purchased acreage in El Cajon Valley in ¹⁸⁷⁷1878 from Mr. R. G. Clark (one of the earliest pioneer settlers in El Cajon), the Asher family moved to El Cajon Valley in 1882 or 1883 when Josephine was about thirteen years old. At that time she was in the 8th grade. She had started her formal education in Mrs. Marston's kindergarten in San Diego, then had attended the old 6th and B Street School (the little pink schools) and was one of those chosen for the first classes held in the Russ School when it opened in 1882.

After graduation from grammar school at the El Cajon School (situated about where DeFalco Market and Long's Drug Store stands on North Magnolia) Josephine continued her studies under the tutorage of her mother and also by taking correspondence courses. In those early days, examinations were given each year to those who desired teaching certificates. Her first teaching assignment was at the Cuyamaca School up in the Cuyamaca mountain area. Then she returned and taught in the El Cajon School. Along with her teaching she continued to take courses improving her education and then took time out to attend and graduate from the San Diego State Normal School in its first graduating class. Returning to teaching, she taught in the

Moosa School and had a room in the old castle. Next she taught in Redlands. Then after her marriage to Mr. Eugene Vacher and after the birth of their son, Eugene, she taught school in Tecate and then back to the El Cajon School where she continued to teach until her retirement in June 1941 when she was 71 years old.

She continues to live on the property which Mr. Vacher and she developed on Fuerte Drive and Monte Vista Road on the south rim of the El Cajon Valley.

Mrs. Vacher has been the recipient of much commendation for her splendid teaching. She was a teacher who always gave her students "those extras" - enriching their curriculum and providing them with additional learning experiences. A number of our prominent business men of El Cajon were among those who were recipients of her guidance, understanding, challenges and encouragement as they attended our local school. Early Indian students and their grandchildren are among those who still make visits to her home. Also students whom she helped with problems and handicaps are among those who still remember her with cards and greetings.

During her years in El Cajon she has been a devoted and active member of the El Cajon Presbyterian Church. Bible study and prayer have been a very important part of her daily life. Along with Mrs. Vacher's varied interests which include outstanding collections of buttons, Kate Greenaway pictures, interesting Valentines, wild flowers, etc., she has saved interesting old newspapers and clippings and old books pertaining to the early history of the San Diego area.

Among her personal friends and acquaintances of the early days in San Diego and El Cajon are such persons and families as the Hortons, The Marstons, The Kimball Brothers, Father Uback, Cave Coutts, Kate Sessions, Major Chase, The Uri Hills, Amazial Knox, The Rhea's, The Halls, Flynns, Ames, Gordons, Durbins, Clarks, Graves, Hawleys, Millers, Stalls, Burgess, Dr. Matheson, The Dodsons, Roethers, Fletchers - to name but a few.

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Mr. Asher named his El Cajon Valley ranch Castle Rock Ranch. It consisted of 40 acres which he bought from R. G. Clark and which bordered property still retained by Mr. Clark at that time.

Castle Rock Ranch was situated in the west central part of the Valley and was bounded on the west by the present Johnson Avenue and on the north by Broadway which is now better known as Fletcher Parkway. It was not too far from where the Cuyamaca Railway line a few years later in about 1889 (Surveyed September 1887 - Time Tables show use in 1889 (June), passed through the Valley as it left El Cajon station enroute to Cowles, Lakeside and Foster.

This property has a number of huge granite boulders (large enough to resemble castle dwellings). Children found these rocks a wonderful place around which to play and to slide down. Mrs. Asher made sack suits which every child must wear while sliding in order to protect his or her clothing. These suits were made of burlap sacking and the cut out holes for neck, arms, and legs were trimmed with "turkey red piping".

Fondest memories also drift back to the swimming pool which was one of the reservoirs on the ranch and which Mr. Asher filled twice a week with fresh water from one of his wells to provide swimming pleasure for his family and friends.

Castle Rock Ranch was both vineyard and orchard. It produced very fine grapes which were dried and packed as raisins right in their own packing plant on the ranch. The orchard produced the very finest of every kind of fruit that El Cajon Valley climate can grow - peaches, pears, plums, apples, pomegranites, persimmons, quinces, apricots, figs, olives, etc. The garden section produced vegetables and the finest of berries. Chickens and a cow supplied the family with the necessary poultry and dairy products. Two or three horses supplied cultivating power and transportation.

In addition to hired hands which helped on the ranch, each Asher child

was given a portion of the vineyard as his own to care for and to enjoy the profits received.

At harvest season in the fall, the bunches of grapes were cut from the vines, placed on large wooden trays to dry in the sun. In case of a rain, the trays must be hurriedly stacked on top of each other and carried to the sheds where they could be kept dry. After the grapes were dried for several days in the sun, they were put in the sweat house and the trays were stacked tightly together and the room was kept without ventilation which caused the raisins to sweat. This softened them. Then the bunches of raisins (still on the stems) were packed in flat wooden boxes. A fancy paper liner was put in the box first and then the bunches of raisins were carefully placed in the box in as decorative a manner as possible.

Mrs. Vacher tells the interesting story of how she and the daughter of the manager of the Boston Ranch, Grace Donald, were asked to pack boxes of raisins for the Worlds Fair in Chicago. They worked together on this project and packed them at the Boston Ranch packing house. Each girl packed a box of raisins. Each received first prize at the Worlds Fair for their entries.

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