

A look back/W.D. Hall brought much to El Cajon

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Ever wonder what El Cajon was like in its infancy? How streets or areas came to be named? What kinds of people were important to the early growth of the community?

Anybody who has lived in the area for even a short time has probably been curious about these subjects.

This column aims to help answer those questions and instruct us a little bit about our history. It is being presented by the El Cajon Historical Society and The Californian. The photos and artwork shown with each column are from the society's collection on display at the Knox Hotel on Magnolia and Park avenues in El Cajon. The column appears monthly.

By Chloris Scott

of the El Cajon Historical Society

The owner of a lumber yard, a supplier of water to the residents of El Cajon and the person who provided storage room for the fire cart used by volunteer firemen could easily be three different people but that isn't so.

Wilson D. Hall hadn't planned any of the above when he returned to El Cajon to live in 1897 with his wife Florence and their two sons, Rex and Julian (Skip), from New York state.

For Wilson this was a return, and for his wife, it was an introduction to the West. He had come here in 1886 with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse P.R. Hall, and his brothers and sisters and settled on what is now Madison Avenue and Third Street. As the oldest, the 18-year-old Wilson helped his dad with the planting of wheat, and later grapes, and worked as a carpenter on the new Hotel del Coronado. He bought 29 acres of land near his parents with his savings, then decided to do some traveling before settling down permanently.

The travels took him back to New York where he found his bride, Florence Eliza Grant, a niece of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and the daughter of his grandmother's sister.

Deciding to build a home for his family on his previously purchased property, he bought lumber from the Russ Lumber Co., a San Diego company that had an outlet in El Cajon Heights near the railroad tracks. He soon found that the lumber company wanted to sell what they had in El Cajon.

So, a year after his return to El Cajon, Wilson found himself in the lumber business, having bought all the stock of the Russ yard and its office building. His next project was to move it to another location.

The story goes that he stopped his team and wagon, loaded with lumber, on Main Street for the team to get a drink of water. That's when he decided he didn't want to haul the lumber out to his property and looked around for a new location in town. He found it, seven acres for \$60, and bought it.

Since he'd used his money to buy the lumber, Wilson invited a friend, Charles Kessler, to become a partner, each borrowing money from their parents to go into business. This partnership lasted until 1905 when Hall bought out his partner. During their time together, the two dealt in lumber, gasoline engines and did mill work. Kessler, who had a small printing

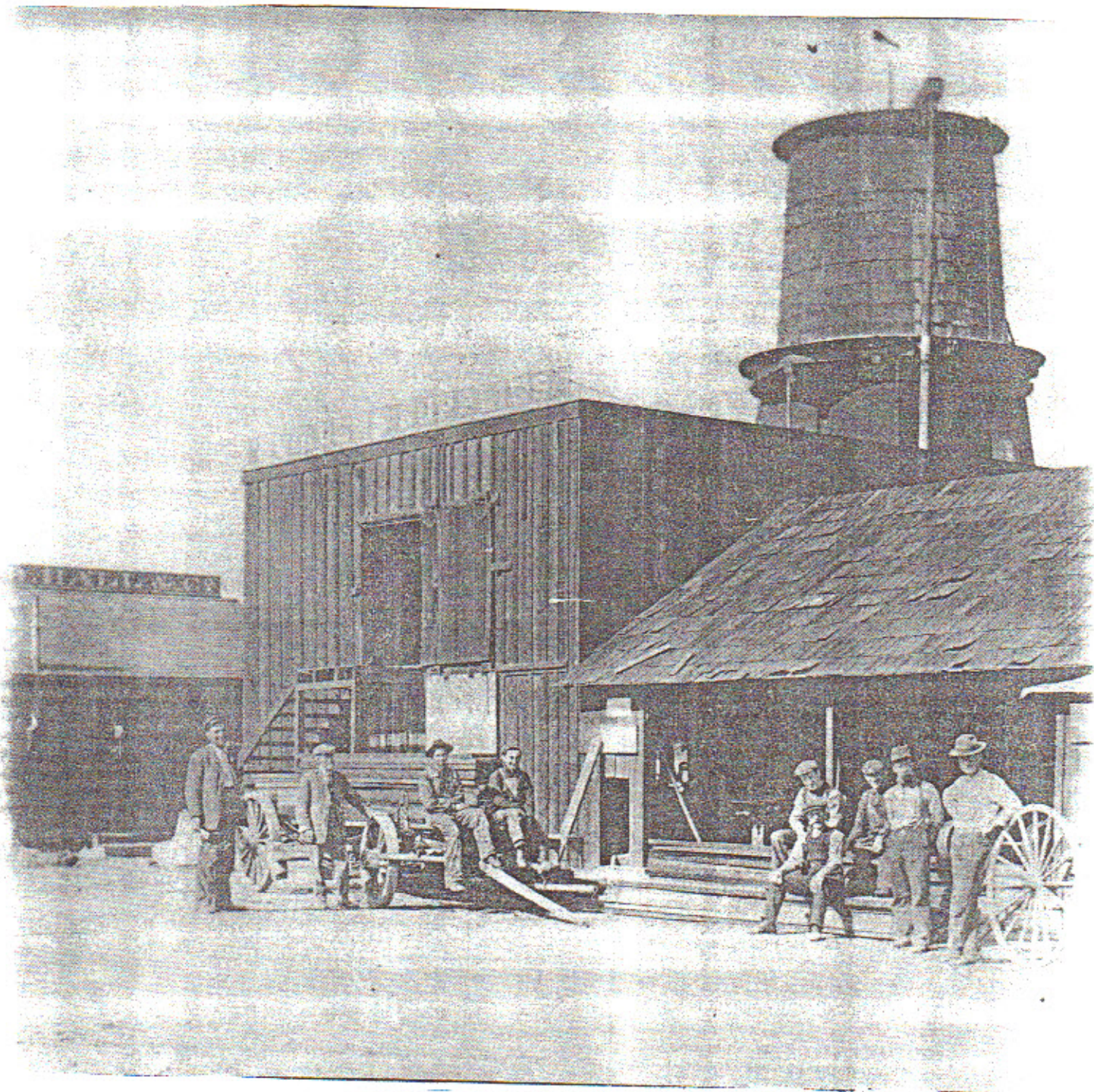
first firefighting equipment, a two-wheeled chemical hose cart, pulled by volunteer firemen.

In order to be closer to his growing business, Hall built a house on his Main Street property where four of the eight children of Wilson and Florence were born. Their family included sons Rexford, Julian and Grant; daughters Marian (Sears), Valerie (Almon), Marjorie (Roether), Nellie (Fansher) and Iola (Roether).

Hall was active in community life, working with the Boy Scouts, and serving as a director of the Cuyamaca Bank and on the Grossmont school board when Grossmont High School was built in the 1920s.

Although Wilson died in 1951, the Hall company continued under the leadership of Rex Hall, with other family members associated in it, until 1971, and was the oldest family run business in El Cajon. Hall's property is a major portion of what is now El Cajon's Superblock with the East County Performing Arts Center on the portion facing Main Street, once a dirt country road that Hall traveled in 1897.

OVER



This is the W.D. Hall Company about 1911. The people are: (left to right) W.D. Hall, E.S. Vacher, Hubert Bischoff, William Eckhardt, Andrew Ballantyne, Allen Culbertson, Charles Bottroff, Arthur Ballantyne and seated is a man named Tommy (his last name is unknown).