

An Interview with Fern Powell Davis by Angela Broadhead and Bronwen Heuer.

Mrs. Davis, a retired teacher and school librarian, talks of the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's in Lafayette.

Mrs. Davis was born on March 17, 1899; she was interviewed in her home on Sept. 14, 1976.

Q: Fern, the Lafayette Historical Society has honored you this year by dedicating its book, *LaFayette; A Pictorial History*, to you.

Fern: Oh, well of course, the dedication of the book was one of the highlights of my life. I can think of maybe one or two other events in my life in which I felt so honored, and the autographing party we had last week at the library was very enjoyable, seeing lots of old friends and people who came for the book and for autographs.

Q: Well, this seems such an appropriate time for you to tell us a little bit about this area, Fern. When did you first come to Lafayette?

Fern: Well, I first saw Lafayette in about 1920, and little did I realize then that Lafayette would mean anything to me the rest of my life, or that I would ever live there or that my family would ever live there. But when I was at Mills College around 1919 and 1920, I use to come out to Happy Valley to visit my favorite uncle, Uncle Art, Arthur Powell, who was living in Happy Valley with his family, and he'd gone into the real estate business in Lafayette.

So, I used to come out to see him and my cousins. He lived in a little unpretentious home out in Happy Valley. All the homes were little and unpretentious then, in 1919, because Happy Valley was just a beautiful, wide open expanse of rolling hills, no large trees, no beautiful estates, just orchards, some vineyards, vegetable gardens and little farms. So that it looked so different from what it does now, because you know, when a town or a city grows up, all of the big shrubs and trees grow from being planted. Well there was none of that then, of course, it was just a little valley that was all farms.

Unfortunately, my Uncle Arthur died in about 1930. My father came down from Sebastopol where my father and mother, David Powell and Kora Powell, had had a Gravenstein apple orchard for 30 years. My father came down to settle the estate, because my Uncle Arthur had been quite heavily involved in the real estate business. He got down to Lafayette and fell in love with it and said, "We're going to lease the ranch and we're coming down here and I'm going to go on with the real estate business." My mother was horrified. She was a great club woman and always very interested in civic affairs and such things, she didn't want to leave Sebastopol. However, they came and they rented for a while, and then in about 1935 they bought a beautiful lot up on Boyer Circle (3562), and built an adobe home.

At that time there were some Mexicans around who usually made the adobe bricks, and built these adobe homes. There were just a few being built. And I remember coming down to visit and seeing the adobe bricks all over the hillside where the house later stood, because they made the adobe right out of the adobe soil and whatever they mixed it with. And so, that became the family home, my folks lived in that home, both of them died in that home, and they lived there from 1935 till the time of my mother's death which was 1959. Then I lived in the home. And I also lived in the home many other times, many, many summers while I was teaching, all summer long I would come and stay. So I was in Lafayette you might say off and on, and knew a great deal about it through my family from the 1930's. But, of course, I'm not really an old-timer, I'm not a pioneer, and I'm not making these comments presuming to be either of those two things. I'm just remembering some of the things as I look back to the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's.

Q: Are you going to tell us about some of the people that you knew?

Fern: Yes, fortunately I knew two of the pioneers, I knew Carrie Hough Van Meter and I knew Jennie Bickerstaff Rosenberg in their late years. And a little bit later on I'll tell you about them, what I remember about them.

But one thing I want to say, when we came out to visit my Uncle Arthur, we used to come through the old, old tunnel up at the top of the hill. That was the one that was just a single bore, well, a 2-bore built for Model T Fords, so it was terribly narrow and very, very dark, no lights in it. But the thing that I remember the most about it and the thing that frightened me the most, was it was so wet, it was running with water. The water ran down the beams. It was all wooden beams just great big square, wooden beams and you wondered as you went

through it if they were really going to hold up while you were in there, and there was this water seepage all the time. It was kind of slimy and scummy and it ran down these beams, and the floor part was wet almost all the time. That was one of the things I remember about the tunnel, that, and the fact that it was so narrow and so dark.

We lived in Ukiah at that time and my two little girls, Jan and Joyce, were about 4 and 8 in those years, and we used to come down often and sometimes my girls would come down and stay a month with my folks in Lafayette. They were their only grandchildren, because I was an only child, so of course they were adored, and we came quite often.

We came and stayed a month one time when the Treasure Island Fair was going on. We went every few days over to see the fair which was a marvelous experience. But when we came down from Ukiah where we lived, we always came the Napa Valley way, because it was such a beautiful drive. We loved it and it was a bit shorter, so we would come to Benicia and take the ferry across, and enter into Lafayette (this was in 1932-33), by way of Walnut Creek. Some of the pictures that we have in our files help to refresh my memory because I can say, "Oh, that's the way it looked when I first came here."

Most of the business were on the left hand side of the street, the South, coming from Walnut Creek. The other side of the street where Peter Thomson's building was, (it was still standing there, of course, when I started coming), was just trees and some weeds and a path, there were no sidewalks and not very many buildings. I never saw the little church, what we call the old Knights' Templar Hall. That had been removed, the hill was still there, but the little Knights' Templar had been removed before I started coming in the early '30's. But Clarence Brown had not leveled down the hill yet.

Of course, I can remember that we went shopping at the Pioneer Store, and the McNeils had just sold it to Mr. George Hinkley. And I can remember going up the boardwalk, it had board walk in front of it, and going in it was a worn board floor! I can remember that and it was just an old fashioned, old country store. Then the other store in town that I remember was Mickey Meyers' store. My mother and I used to go grocery shopping there. That's in the building Louie Stark built in 1914.

Q: That was on Mt. Diablo Blvd.?

Fern: The corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Hough. It's the one that has been newly remodeled for Griffin's Men's Wear, the one they took the old soda fountain out of. So, Mickey Meyers had his grocery store there. Then you know, most people have forgotten and I had forgotten until I saw a picture of it the other day, the Emporium. It was just a little old fashioned general merchandise store of ready-to-wear goods. You could buy shoes, hats, lingerie, lace, ribbons, men's wear, dresses, etc.

Q: It was still there in 1955.

Fern: Is that when it was? They moved over to where Los Gallos is now on Hough. Then it became quite larger. But this was just a little old fashioned place. It was the only place like that in town. And then Lou Borghesani's saloon was there, too, in the 1930's. I don't remember so much about it, because I never patronized a saloon, but it was a very popular place. And Lou Borghesani was a man I've heard so much about, loved by everybody. He was a very popular and fine man. He's still living, has retired and lives up in Lake County.

Q: And where was the saloon, across the street on Mt. Diablo Blvd.?

Fern: No, it was on the same side as the Emporium and the grocery store, it was in one of those little buildings right in between there. And then of course, Lou's Saloon at one time was on Mt. Diablo Blvd., where that little red place, the Nifty Thrifty, was. That building used to face Mt. Diablo Blvd. and at one time was Lou's saloon.

And, of course, as the story goes, and I've heard people say it's true, Ken Brown says it's true, during the Horse Shows, the fellow that won the highest trophy rode his horse into that saloon for a celebration drink. Just rode his horse right through the double doors. So those were the good old days in Lafayette. That was still in the '30's. That's when the Horse Shows were, in the 1930's.

Now, of course, Mrs. Dewing, Jennie Bickerstaff Dewing (she was Mrs. Dewing at that time) was living in her little cottage on Mt. Diablo, where she lived for 85 years. But, more about that later. Up on Boyer Circle where my folks built the adobe, there was one large Spanish type home, and it belonged to Mr. George Spurgeon. He was a very prominent citizen. I don't know his background or history, but he had a great deal to do with getting the Caldecott Tunnel put through, getting the Sacramento Northern Railroad through, getting the Mokelumne water pipes and all that when it came through. He was a very important citizen. I remember him well. He was a testy, kind of a cross man, I mean he always seemed to me cross, but always very respected.

Then, up on Boyer Circle there were a number of very attractive summer homes, little cottages, with verandas all the way around, screened in, and outdoor barbecues. There was one near our house when they built it. These belonged to San Francisco and Oakland people when they came out here for the summer. Boyer Circle was a nice location because it had a beautiful view of Mt. Diablo. And so I'd say there were half a dozen of those little cottages up there when my folks built in 1935.

Q: Were there any other people you wanted to mention from the '30's?

Fern: There were my father's friends, the realtors. There was Mr. Sweet, I can't remember his first name, but of course, all these people have streets named after them, and usually, I suppose, in their subdivisions. And there was George Foye, a good friend of my father's, and surprisingly enough, George Foye and my father died in the same week. And C.C. Morse, who was the owner of the *Lafayette Sun* at that time, wrote an obituary editorial about the two men. It was a long one in large print in the *Lafayette Sun*, outlined in black, you know. That goes way back when newspapers used to do that, well, he was an old fashioned editor. I have a copy of it in the family Bible.

And there was Col. M. Garret, he lived many years after that. And he built his beautiful building which is known as the Garrett Building. He was a hail-fellow-well-met, and whether he was really a colonel, people never really knew. He was an army man, and had retired from the army in 1920. He came into Lafayette and he fell in love with it, went into the real estate business, bought a hundred acres or so out in Happy Valley and later on built his beautiful home in Happy Valley and lived there for 40 years. But he had his office in the very front part of that brick building, where the big plate glass window is, and his desk was facing the window. He always sat at his desk looking out so that he could see everybody that went by and every car that went by, and he'd hail people and tell them to come on in. He had a beautiful collie dog that was his constant companion, and that collie dog was always right by his side.

So, these are some of the people that I remember. Of course I knew Mickey Meyers, and I knew Mrs. Marie Snedeker at that time, she and her husband were in the real estate business, not quite back in the 1930's. Dr. Clifford Feiler was my father's doctor. He later built his home up on Boyer Circle, so that we were neighbors up there, I remember one of Dr. Feiler's first offices, do you know that really old looking building that's right at the corner of First Street and Golden Gate Way, on the theater side, a little shabby looking place, that was Dr. Feiler's office when I first knew him.

Later in the 1940's I got to know my old friend Ted Murphy whom I had known many, many years before in Susanville in the 1920's, before he came here. Ted opened the first modern pharmacy in Lafayette in the 1940's.

In the 1940's, we became rather a celebrity of sorts, Lafayette did, because we had what was called "The Strip". And of course things were wild and wide open then, those were the war years. People were doing all kinds of things, gambling was getting to be rampant around and people were tearing around the country going to night clubs. Don't ask me why people do things like that during war years. But, at any rate, our main street, Mt. Diablo, was called "The Strip". And it became famous, and I guess it was probably known all over the world, because there were so many service men who came out, and officers.

"The Strip" began with the Red Mill, a night club which later became a motel, out beyond Cape Cod, out by Happy Valley. It was a night club and a restaurant, in the 1940's this was. Then the next place was the Cape Cod, then on into town. The next place was a great big brick monstrosity they built, where the Lafayette Federal Savings is now. In fact the Federal Savings and Loan has been remodelled from the old brick building. It had 3 or 4 names, it changed hands so many times and just never could make a go. I guess it was too big or something.

The name that I remember was Acapulco, and that was when it had the rather lurid drapes at the windows, I mean it looked like a red light district, really. When you went by it you wondered what was going on in there. I'm sure it wasn't. Then the next building was the Tunnel Inn (now Petar's). It then had the great big water tank on the corner. Of course, it still has the water tank, but it's all camouflaged. I hated to see it get camouflaged, because in those days when it was the Tunnel Inn and when Jay Bedford ran it (a man by the name of Schultz owned it before Jay Bedford) the water tank was used. It had a great big fire hose that came out of it with a big nozzle on it.

Jay Bedford was a fanciful character, he was a sleight-of-hand performer. People flocked there from all over the Bay Area. And I did too. I used to go in there and just sit and watch him. He'd practically pull rabbits out of the bourbon bottles and throw cards and dollar bills up on the ceiling that would stick. He was not a professional, but he was a very fine amateur. So that was one of the things the Tunnel Inn was noted for. And then the last one on "The Strip" was the El Molino that was down on the corner of Oak Hill. Later on that became Danny Van Allen's. But during the war years we had "The Strip".

If we went back and read old issues of the *Lafayette Sun*, I'm sure it would be fascinating to read about the underworld and the Mafia, who did try to get a holding in Lafayette with gambling interests. We had an editor and owner of the *Sun* then, whose name was Herman Silverman. He fought this, he was the one that first detected it, and his life was threatened, even the county law officers and the sheriff's department set up some kind of protection for him and his family at that time. And we used to read in the papers about midnight rendezvous that he was having with the heads of this gambling thing, out in the country, it was really quite exciting. Somebody some day ought to get hold of some old issues and read about that. It caused quite a flurry. So that's about everything from the 1940's that I can remember.

In the 1940's, before the freeway was built, the main highway from San Francisco and Oakland was Mt. Diablo Blvd. (downtown Lafayette). Commute traffic, morning and late afternoon, was bumper to bumper, stop and start. There were no stop lights and no median strip. Shopping at that time was a hazard if you had to cross the street.

Q: You were living on Boyer Circle in the 1940's?

Fern: In the 1940's I was living on Boyer Circle, yes, because in the late '40's my daughter, Jan, was going to Acalanes High School. I'd been teaching for a number of years in the Martinez area, Alhambra High School, and my older daughter went to school there, but I didn't want my younger daughter to go there because it just wasn't satisfactory to have your daughter attend where you taught. So I moved over into Mother's house, and lived there five years. I was part of Lafayette then, and commuting to Martinez to school.

Those were exciting years, those were the years that I worked with a group of Lafayette women out at St. Mary's College when the cadets from the U.S. Air Force were getting their college training there. They took over St. Mary's College, literally, absolutely took it over, and there were many lay professors who came in and the Brothers were teaching too. And so there were a number of us women who worked in the dining area. We did the serving from the steam tables, served the boys. I did that every summer for about four summers.

Then the other interesting thing that, to me, was so fascinating, were the Straw Hatters that were in the Town Hall during the 1940's. They were the theatrical group of 20 that came out from the University of California. Elizabeth Berryhill was their director, and they just created a sensation throughout the whole state. They became nationally known, people who visited the West came to see them and they came for four summers and gave their shows in the old Town Hall. All of their music and all of their skits were original. They wrote them all, very talented people.

Gordon Connell and his wife, Janie, are now professional theatrical people in New York, in fact, they're in San Francisco now I read in the paper the other day. She is in something at the Curran, and they were original Straw Matters. I made coffee and served during intermission, and I helped run all kinds of errands. I was just a jack-of-all-trades with them and loved it. One reason that I did it is that I had charge of all of the dramatics at the high school in Martinez, and put on a couple of plays every year, plus many, many programs. I got all kinds of valuable clues and hints and information, of course, and ideas from the Straw Hatters. So, it worked both ways. But I went to their weddings, and when the children were born I saw the new babies, and we were just part of the family. I just loved those years of the Straw Hatters.

Q: Can you describe Town Hall at that time?

Fern: Well, the Town Hall at that time was very much on the inside as it is now, except the down stairs was more rustic. The Dramateurs have improved it a great deal. The seats were good, but not as good as they are now. It was in tiers, in fact the Straw Hatters did that. The stage was just about the same. In order to get to their dressing room down stairs, there was an outside staircase they had to run down in order to get to change their costumes. Their programs were all blackouts, so that it was just zip, zip, and zip. They just went like lightning, so those kids would tear up and down those back stairs to get changed to go from one skit to another.

And the kitchen was most primitive where I made the coffee, a couple of gas burners back there, not really a stove, and an old sink. The plumbing didn't work, at least it worked, but not very well, and of course there was no air conditioning then. The outside of it wasn't shingled as it is now. It looked quite different. It was packed every night, people were turned away. They were past masters at political satire, had people rolling in the aisles at the original skits that they wrote. Those were the things I remember now from the 1940's.

When I first started talking today, I said I was going to refer later to the two pioneers I was fortunate to know back in the 1930's and 1940's. First I'd like to say a little about Carrie Van Meter. Carrie Van Meter, as everyone who reads our historical files know, was our postmaster (I like to call her postmistress, but they tell me postmaster is correct). Anyway, she was postmaster from 1904 until 1927. Carrie Van Meter was a Hough. Her father was Orlo (Orlando) Hough, and he built the little cottage that so many of us knew that was right there on Mt. Diablo Blvd. where the Safeway store is now. It was torn down when they built the Safeway. It was simply surrounded with shrubs and trees, and it was in a state of ruin, not in good condition.

Anyway, her father built that home in the 1860's. After her father and mother died, Carrie lived in it. Carrie Van Meter was a very unusual woman. Things I've heard and read about her and imagined about her are interesting. To me she had a sad life. She married, but nobody ever said much about her marriage. Mr. Van Meter was an outsider, evidently he was not known in Lafayette. She wasn't married very long and she divorced him and came back and lived in the family home. She had her little girl, an only child, Pearl, who of course was the light of her life. We have a number of pictures of Pearl as a little girl, in front of the post office, with her mother, and pictures of her later on, too.

So, Carrie had no formal learning beyond, I would judge, the 8th grade. She was very different in that way from Jennie Bickerstaff, who had a college education. She'd been to Teachers' Normal school and got her teaching credential, Jennie did. Carrie didn't have any such schooling, but Carrie was a very bright woman. I would say she was a brilliant woman in some ways. So, she lived alone with her daughter, Pearl, and when I say her life was sad, she lost her daughter in her early 20's. In fact, in 1922.

One of the things that has interested me in the historical files when you go through them, in the old cemetery records which we have in the files, the old, old records dating back to the 1800's. In 1922 it records the death of Pearl having died suddenly in the tunnel. That's the way it's written. I have copies of those records, and when I read that I was so surprised, so I began asking some of the old timers, what was wrong with Pearl. It seems that she had some kind of a bone ailment, rheumatism or arthritis or something like that, and she was going to a chiropractor in Oakland, and they always thought that her sudden death had something to do with the treatments that she had had with the chiropractor. Now that, of course, may be all hearsay and the years have gone by and it doesn't matter now. So, that was a sad thing that happened to Carrie, that and her marriage.

She was a very fine postmaster. You should see her handwriting. We have some of the 1902, 1903, 1904 post office record books in our files, and, of course, whole books are filled with her handwriting, recording everything. Beautiful handwriting. Well, after 1927 she became the librarian in Lafayette. She had been the librarian up to that time, too, because back in 1904 she had books in the post office. And when the County Library was started, around 1915 I think, we did have a branch in Lafayette, and she was in charge of the branch. Before that time, back to 1904, she had books in the post office, I don't know where she got them, but she had always been interested in reading. So, in 1927 she became the official county branch librarian.

I can remember in the 1930's, when I used to go down with my mother, in the 1940's too, as long as Carrie was in the library, and get an armful of books. My mother was quite a reader, and she'd finish those in a week and go back for another armful. She and Carrie got to be very good friends, they weren't one bit alike, Carrie was

kind of rigid looking and had a long severe face, wasn't the slightest bit interested in chit-chat or small talk, she wasn't that kind of a person at all. But she and my mother became very good friends, and she got to know mother's reading habits. And she saved all the books that she knew mother would be interested in and set them aside for her. I used to go many times in there and talk to her.

In her later years as she grew older she became sort of a recluse, and after she became unable to work in the library (at that time they were demanding library training in college) she was an eccentric even then. Because one of the things that struck me as so funny and I was always amused by it and can still see her sitting at that desk, she always wore a big hat. You never saw her in that library without that hat on. But of course, everybody knew Carrie and they knew that that was just the way she was. But as she grew older she became a recluse, and she lived in her house then and was not well. And her friends looked out for her, especially Jennie.

Now she and Jennie were old school chums. They'd always been very close friends, and all through the years Jennie always looked out for Carrie. Of course, Carrie was very independent, and even at the last she wouldn't do what people told her to do, she wouldn't get out of that house when she was very, very ill. But when she left the house, it was the kind of thing you read about in the newspapers about recluses, you can't get into the house because the newspapers are stacked inside the door, and that's the way the house was, I guess.

There were people that went in that house (it couldn't be locked, I guess), nieces and nephews, and people just took what they wanted to. I know a man in Lafayette who told me (and I've been trying to get it from him for the historical files ever since he told me) that he has a copy of Carrie's wedding certificate which he found up in the attic. I'm still going to keep asking him for it. But I'm sure that there was a mint of historical things that people took out of her home, because she just never threw anything away.

Fortunately, we have all of the Orlo (Orlando) Hough letters in our file. That's another story, I could take hours just talking about those letters. They were written by Orlo to his fiancée in New York and her return letters. Sandy Kimball and I took the slides that are over at St. Mary's of all of these letters, over to the county library and ran them off on the reader-printer so that we have them on paper instead of being on a slide. And they're absolutely fascinating reading, about Lafayette in 1860, things about Benjamin Shreve and old timers, some of them even scandalous, very interesting reading. So, that is how I knew Carrie Van Meter. She, of course, was finally taken to a rest home and died. She is buried in the Hough plot in the Lafayette Cemetery. I don't remember the date of her death.

Then Mrs. Rosenberg, who was Mrs. Dewing when I knew her, Jennie Bickerstaff, was the very beloved early school teacher in Lafayette and in the county. Her mother's name was Delilah (I love that), and her father's name was James. So James and Delilah came to Lafayette in 1879. Jenny was born in 1872, and I can always remember that because that was the year my mother was born. They (Carrie and Fern's mother) were the same age, and she and my mother had become very good friends and were interested in the same things. They were both interested in libraries and civic betterment and things like that, and were always working together on these things. I can remember my mother telling me and I can remember seeing them go out, knocking on doors and asking people for a dollar to raise money to build that little cottage library that was on the corner of Moraga Road and Moraga Blvd. It was built on school property. They took it off, of course, because it was practically in the parking lot of where the present library is.

Well, Jennie and my mother and some other women who were dedicated to that raised the money to build the library, and she and my mother were charter members of the Library Association. They were charter members of the Women's Forum, which is now the Women's Club, the Lafayette Women's Club. And they both held offices, president, and Mother was historian for years at the very end. So, I used to see her often and then she was Mrs. Dewing. Such a charming woman, always had such a sweet smile on her face, and she had kind of a round rosy face, and very quiet and demure. She was one of these women who had an iron hand in a velvet glove. She always seemed so charming and so feminine, but she could always get things done.

Then, as an only child of Delilah and James, she was 7 years old when they came to Lafayette. She knew Elam Brown, and I can remember her telling me what a fine old man he was, and that although he looked so stern, (he had these heavy frown lines in his face), but he was just a darling, she said. And everybody called him Grandpa Brown. And she used to, when she was a little girl, hold his hand and walk with him over to the Pioneer Store to get his mail. One of the greatest regrets of my life was that we didn't have this Historical Society going when Jennie Bickerstaff was alive. Oh the things she could have told us! She could have told us exactly where Elam

Brown's Mill was, and what it looked like. And, dozens and dozens of other things she could have told us. But that's the way life goes.

But, you know, there was a story about her when she went away to Normal, I'm not sure people will find this, but it's in the files, when she finished grammar school in 1888, she of course was going to go on to get her teaching credential. So, she was going to San Jose Normal, which was a two-year course. Well, her father and mother wouldn't let her go down there and board and room some place, so they leased their little ranch that they had bought from Elam Brown, and went down there and lived for two years. This is the way they went: they had a wagon and a team of horses, and they had a cow on this little ranch, and Jennie had her horse, Topsy, whose picture we have seen so often in our picture files. They took the wagon and team and packed their things. They tied the cow to the back of the wagon, Jennie rode Topsy, and they went to San Jose.

I think that is a priceless story about her going to college. I can remember this so well, because this was later, in 1942, when Jennie was 70 years old (she lived to be 93), she married William Rosenberg.

Q: Fern, may I interrupt, would you tell us a little bit about Mr. Dewing?

Fern: Yes, I do know a little about him from his granddaughter in Martinez, Laurie Laird, who is a good friend of mine. She is going to give us a picture of him for the files. Stephen Dewing was a prosperous, well-known rancher in the Saranap area of Walnut Creek. His wife died in about 1915, leaving six children, the oldest 25 years. Stephen and Jennie were married in 1918 when she was 46 years of age (her first marriage), Stephen died in 1928, leaving Jennie a widow for the next 14 years when she married William Rosenberg.

Mr. Dewing has two streets named for him in Lafayette and in Walnut Creek and also a park off Olympic Blvd. Jennie was also a foster mother to the two Boyer boys who owned a ranch right next to theirs on Mt. Diablo. Later on Rex Boyer became a very well-known attorney in Martinez, for years. His brother became a judge and lived in Antioch and just died not long ago. It was a granddaughter of this Judge Boyer that gave us Jennie's portrait.

Jennie had been a widow for 14 years when she went down to Santa Cruz to summer school. She was always going to school even when she was old, and she had become interested in learning to play the harmonica, that's what she was taking down there, when she met William Rosenberg, a charming gentleman of the old school. He was born in Austria and was a very fine antique furniture restorer, making it and repairing it. He'll be 89 this month and is living in a rest home in Oakland, I talk to him occasionally and he told me many things.

That's one thing, we're definitely going to get an interview with Mr. Rosenberg. He's one of the first ones on our list. He can tell us many things about Jennie. He didn't call her Jennie, he said that she did not like the name of Jennie and as she grew older and became a teacher, she was called Margaret. To me it's rather interesting that we have gone back to calling her Jennie in all of our records and pictures and everything, but he said that she did not care for that name. At any rate, I can remember my mother and all of her friends and all of the club women were absolutely horrified (when they learned of the wedding plans).

He told me that he courted her for 10 years. She met him in Santa Cruz in the harmonica class. She was very musical and had the most beautiful rosewood spinet piano. He has it now where he's living. So he fell in love with her, of course, and courted her for 10 years before he could talk her into marrying him. She had a feeling of how it would look, and in addition to that, he was much, much younger than she. She looked young and acted young, but she was 72. Anyway, they got married and it created a regular furor. Everybody was horrified and said he was just marrying her for her money. Well, I don't know how much money Mrs. Dewing had, but anyway, everybody lived to eat those words, because he was just marvelous to her, he was so loving to her and perfectly charming. He took her every place. He just waited on her hand and foot right up to the very last. Every thought was for her. So, the story turned out very, very well.

And then, I wanted to say, I went to her funeral, she died at age 93. And to me her funeral was very meaningful. It was the kind of a thing, that here was a woman who had lived such a full life, and it wasn't too sad, it was kind of nice. They had the funeral services in the Lafayette Methodist Church, and right next door was the school room in which she had taught for a number of years. She was a very religious woman and had been an ardent church worker there, all those 80 years or more. It was mentioned during the service, it was such a happy feeling that everyone had, that here she was back where she began her teaching in 1900. She was

buried in the Lafayette Cemetery, in the family plot with Delilah and James. So, Jennie Bickerstaff Dewing Rosenberg is a very special kind of a pioneer, part of Lafayette from the very beginning. And I always felt so fortunate that I had known her and enjoyed her so much.

Q: Before we close, Fern, won't you tell us a little about your association with the organizations in Lafayette and the county?

Fern: Well, I guess this might have something to do with Lafayette history, I'm not sure. I have been active in the county, starting with my early days in Martinez. When I went there to teach English in the high school, they gave me what few books they had. I was in charge of the books and 11 years later I had a library of 6000 books, and had become a librarian and had gotten my library credential. So, then I started on being a school librarian.

Then I worked for the County Superintendent of Schools, B.O. Wilson, and a number of the officials in his department, in the study of all the school libraries in the county. I was on the committee, it was a large committee, drawn from people from all over the county, educators. I was on that committee for 3 years. We made studies of school libraries and then recommendations. And by that time, of course, I was a professional librarian, and in the county at that time, of all the schools in the county, there were only six professional librarians.

So that was what we wanted to stress, we wanted to get professional librarians into the schools, which we did. I worked on that committee and became very active in it. I wrote some pamphlets that are in the county, and I wrote some manuals that were used by other school libraries throughout the state, and some went farther than that, I suppose. It was through that work that I got my final position that I loved so much the last 11 years, as a supervisor of school libraries in Pittsburg. There I had 13 libraries, with professional librarians in each building, and it was simply a marvelous way to end one's career. So much for my work with the county and helping to advance the school library program.

Then, of course, I was a Mills graduate, and was interested in the Mt. Diablo Mills Club. And after I retired I had time to serve as president and in other areas for a number of years. And then I was on the Mills Alumnae Board for 3 years in the late '60's. In Lafayette, as soon as I retired, someone asked me to be president of the Lafayette Library Association. So I took that job on, and was president of that for a couple of years. Then I was on the Library Board in Lafayette for five or six years. While Joan Merryman and I were on the Library Association in 1967, circumstances came up about some historical materials in town, whereby it seemed necessary for us to organize a committee. So, Joan and I organized a historical committee, which became the Lafayette Historical Society in 1971.

Q: Thank you, Fern for talking with us this afternoon. You've given us some interesting highlights of Lafayette, especially of the '30's and '40's. Thank you again.