

Minnie Hill Palmer Story

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Personal interview and story by: Virginia Watson

My name is Minnie Alice Hill Palmer. I was born here on this property (in 1964 the Devonshire Golf Course at the end of Devonshire St., Chatsworth) which my mother and father homesteaded in 1886. They took up squatters rights on 110 acres, homesteading it. My brother and husband bought another 120 acres later, giving us 230 acres altogether.

My father was James David Hill. He came to Los Angeles from Visalia about 1870 to find work. My mother, Rhoda Jane Enlow Hill, brought by two older sisters to Los Angeles in 1871 to join my father, riding the old stage coach road through the Santa Susana Pass from San Francisco. She went to San Francisco from Visalia to get the stage.

They lived first in what is now Compton and then Downey and then in the area of 118th St. in Los Angeles. My sister, Mary Edna was born in that area. Our family moved to Chatsworth in the spring of 1886. My mother kept house for the Lowry's. It was on Canoga Ave. and Mission Road (it was known later as the Charleton place and much later the Lohman Ranch). She worked for the Lowry's for a short while as a housekeeper and then my parents homesteaded their own place.

I was born on November 30, 1886 although the U.S. Census records showed when I wrote for proof of birth that my birthday was the "end of Dec. 1886". "Mother always told me I was born on Nov. 30. We always celebrated it that day, anyway." My father's birthday was in Dec., and he wasn't very good about remembering dates—he would have been the one to give the dates to the census taker, so he may have made a mistake.

I was born on the same land where this house stands now but not in this house for it wasn't built until 1912.

My brothers and sisters in order of age are: Ruth Jane Hill, Amanda Elizabeth Hill, James David Hill, Lovell Aden Hill, Rhoda S., Mary Edna Francis Hill, Minnie Alice Hill (me) and Calla Lily Hill.

My sister Calla Lily Nelson lives in Oxnard in the Ocean View Trailer Court. My sister Ruth Jane Married a man named Hunter. Later she homesteaded what is now Rim Rock ranch. Hunter died and she married Mr. Ackerman. My sister finally "proved up" on five acres of the land but she sold it and went in to town to live. My sister Amanda Elizabeth married John Glenn and lived on land adjoining the homestead property.

As a girl I played over these hills of Chatsworth, although we did not have much time to play. We went to school and had to come straight home to help out.

Lilac Lane where the stage coach trail is, used to be colored blue in the spring from the many wild lilacs that grew there. There were lots of holly berry there but they burn fast like eucalyptus and after the fire they never grew back. In the winter there was a waterfall and there was water in the stream in from of our house.

I started to school when I was nearly six years old (that would have been 1892). In my class at school were Sterling Thrasher, Sarah Gray, William Barngrover, Delores Miranda, and me. We went all the way from the first grade to high school classes together except for Delores who got married about the 7th grade.

William Barngrover's family was the first family to have the railroad depot, when it was on Marilla St. near Topanga Canyon Blvd. His mother did as much as his father did – she handled the dispatches and things.

When I went to school it was where it is now at the corner of Devonshire and Topanga Canyon. The school's front door faced what is now Devonshire. My first teacher was Lenora Johnson. I visited my sister at school once when the school was farther north on Santa Susana Ave near Andora on the west side of the street.

The long Southern Pacific railroad tunnel was built when I was a young girl. The crew lived up there near the tunnel. They even had a bunkhouse and a big cookhouse. They even had their own power station set up. They were a long time building the 1 7/8 mile tunnel. I think it was about 1898 until 1903 when they were built. There was a big fire in the tunnel once and a train load of cattle were caught in there and died along with several men.

My mother did the washing for the men who worked on the tunnel. She washed out in the yard like everybody did at that time. We had a washing machine – one that you turned by hand and we had to haul water out to the machine.

I had to sew home-made labels in the men's clothing so we could tell the clothes apart. We had a book and each man had a number. As long as he was there he had that same number, I kept them in a book. I made a number of clothe tape with indelible ink and sewed it in the clothing.

My mother would wash the clothes and hang them out to dry, and we would help when we got home from school. We would take the clothes down and sprinkle them. The next day we'd iron them—it was mostly my job to do the ironing. Sometimes my father would take the

clothes back to the men or they would come and get them. My father had a wagon which he drove up there to the tunnel taking fresh fruit to sell to the men working on the tunnel.

I attended school in the Community Church Building when I was in “high school”. I graduated from the 9th grade the last year the 9th grade was held in the Santa Susana School. We went to high school one year in the old shed in back of the school and the next year in the Community Church Building. I got mad before graduating and quit but I went back later and took up commercial spelling. My teachers name was R. Daman—he was my oldest sister’s teacher in another school when they lived in Los Angeles on 118th St., long before I had him in the Chatsworth School.

Mrs. Watson has a picture that shows many of the children I knew as a girl. Her picture (From the Richard Williams collection) was taken later, after I went to school.

Some of the children are Rosie and Inez Miranda, Myrtle Gray, Anna Iverson, and one girl near Anna might be my sister. Others are Clarence Glenn, Edna Daniels, Carl Iverson (we used to call him Isaac) Joe Daniels and the Miranda boys. Also the Butcher girls and the Thrasher boys are in the picture.

Before I was married I worked “cutting fruit”, apricots, -- we cut them in half, took out the seed, and spread them for drying, at the fruit cutting shed on the Gray place near Farralone and Lassen. I worked one summer, the summer before I was married to earn the little extra things a girl wants to have when she gets married. My brother brought the material for my wedding dress and my sister-in-law Eva Hill made it for me.

I was married August 12, 1909 in Hawthorne, at my husband’s house where his mother lived. It was on of the first houses in Hawthorne. My husband was Alfred Edwin Palmer, he had a twin brother who lives in Canoga Park now.

Our first child, a daughter, Edith Mae, was born August 3, 1910. She is now Mrs. Lawrence Butler. Our son Leroy was born June 12, 1912.

I came back to Chatsworth in 1920 and have lived here ever since, except for short trips. When I moved back here it was to care for my bedridden mother.

My brother, Lovell Hill and Fred Graves were in business together in the Graves and Hill general store. My brother was postmaster in 1912 through 1915. The store was located on the west side of what is now Topanga Canyon Blvd. near Lassen.

I am a member of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, Topanga Parlor and attended their meetings. I was a delegate to the state convention for them in June 1963. I went to Alaska

the first year that Alaska was admitted to the Union and celebrated that first Independence Day there. I went to Hawaii with the Bakersfield Farm Bureau on their trip.

I sold the property left to me by my brother (mother left it to Him) to Mr. H.P. Berkencamp, reserving the right to live here the rest of my life.

I get up early, sometimes 6 a.m. and work in my garden (If I don't have any ironings to do) until time for my television programs at 11. I watch and rest until noon.

Some weeks I do as many as 6 family ironings, not because I need to, I like to have something to do and it gives me a chance to meet people. I preserve and can the fruits and vegetables that I grow in my garden. I grow almost all my own vegetables and fruits.

I am an honorary Girl Scout with Troop 1650 and I am very interested in the junior baseball league.