

# the Valley View



Cascabel...hard to find....harder to leave.

Issue #1

An Occasional Cascabel, Arizona Newsletter

June 2014

In this issue

What better way to launch our occasional newsletter than to bring you some Cascabel history. Tom Orum unexpectedly received hand-written memories from Lillie Bennett Finch, now 89, who, as a child, spent several years living in Hot Springs Canyon. She says she is sending more. To facilitate the narrative, the birth/death dates she's included are at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue. We will pass along other Cascabel histories. If you have historical material or other news, please send it to the Valley View Newsletter c/o Sue Newman. **Welcome.**

## Lillie Bennett Finch Remembers

I will begin this story at Quarks Isle, Texas, as that is where I was born. Jack, who is 2 years younger than I, was also born there. I was born Dec. 2 1924. Papa delivered me at home, along with several of the other children. I didn't get a birth certificate until I was about 32 and lived at Willows Calif. and needed one for when I applied for a job. A lady who attended my birth was alive in Texas to verify that I was born alive at that time. Jack didn't have a certificate so he got school entrance records where Papa registered us for school in 1936 at Sams Valley, Oregon. Eleven children total were born in Texas, except Marjorie and Everett, who were born in Arizona.

Mama told us she met Papa when she was 14 and that he had kissed her down by the pig pen, before his dad took the boys to Mexico to avoid going to war. I think there were seven boys. Two girls had died. He (dad) came back later and he and Lily were married at Kernville, Texas in 1912. Lily died 1-4-1959.

Mama's mother Lavinia Dunlap Shirley (born Oct 26, 1853/died Aug. 3, 1933) raised Mama and her twin

sister alone, as Mr. Shirley was a vagabond, as she called him. She wanted a home. Lavinia's older sons went with their dad. She was pregnant, but she had a place to live and a cow and some chickens. She told us she had milked the cow one morning and as she stepped back in the house the birth began. This was March 3, 1892. She got in bed and not only delivered one baby, but fraternal twin girls. She tied them together in a man's handkerchief and weighed them on a hand held scale. It read 3 ½ pounds. Not too accurate I'd say. She placed them on the wood cook stove oven door to keep them warm. Somehow she fed them by milk, eggs and the garden. They were over three miles from school so they didn't attend and she taught them to read. Mom was a good reader, too.

Besides Lily and Rosa there were several older boys who left with their father, Oliver Silas Shirley. Albert, Wily, Archie and Henry Shirley. Gram Lavinia Shirley had another son by her first husband who got killed. That son's name was Charley Walters. He grew up and

had several girls. I wrote letters to his daughter Irene Walters when in grade school.... 6<sup>th</sup> grade I think.

When Rosa and Lily were about nine years old their mother and father separated for good. They went to live with their half-brother, Charlie Walters on his ranch near Medina, Texas. Rosa was a tomboy, horseback riding and being outdoors. Her twin Lily was opposite. She stayed indoors, cooked and sewed and crocheted, tatted and quilted. When the twins were about 16 their mother moved to Kerrville, Texas. In town they worked as house maids for the wealthy until they married. Rosa married James Monroe (Jim) Wilson (born May 2, 1881) on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1911 in Kerrville. They had a boy Reuben Wilson (August 27, 1912) and Lucille Mae Wilson (February 7, 1918) and Winona Elizabeth Wilson (September 29, 1921).

They later moved to Bonita, Arizona and then to Cascabel on the San Pedro River and then moved to Benson. Jim was a barber by trade but due to a back injury he was a guard at Apache Powder Plant during WW II and later city Marshall of Benson Az. where he retired at 65.

Due to the bad health of Lois and Chester in Texas, Papa and Mama decided on a drier climate... Arizona... Aunt Rosa and Uncle Jim were there already. This was 1926.

First we went to Bonita, Az. where Uncle Henry lived (Mama's brother). Then Papa got a 'homestead' up Hot Springs Canyon about 4 miles from Cascabel. He was required to build a house and dig a well. This was called 'proving up' on a homestead of 180 acres and land was free. This trip to the new homestead is my first memory of it all. We unloaded our mattresses near the creek and slept on the ground. Us kids were so excited we were playing and laughing and just wouldn't shut up. Well, Papa removed his belt and we got it. You got hit again if you didn't stop crying... seems like I always cried the longest. It got quiet. The next morning we loaded up this open topped car and Papa hit the sand bed of the creek that was dry and the wheels turned sideways and Mama and Baby Jack

landed in the sand. They weren't hurt but we were stuck in the sand. We got brush and put it under the wheels and made it out. We went a little further and found a place back from the creek and flood area with a tall rock hill behind it. There Papa decided would be our home place. We could carry water for house use from the creek until it dried up in summer. Then we would follow the creek as it dried up and fill barrels in a wagon pulled by donkeys. When we washed clothes we loaded them on the wagon with a large black 'boiling' pot and rinse tubs and rubbing boards and all the kids and the dog went to meet the creek. There we spent the day. We would build a fire to heat the water. There were lots of kids to carry the water to the tubs. We sorted big piles of clothes and bedding. We kids jumped on these big piles of dirty clothes like a trampoline. We caught minnows – very small fish – and cooked them on sticks. There weren't many of them. We cooked a pot of beans on the fire. I don't remember what we all ate but I sure don't remember being hungry. Momma, Ruby and Ruth were the 'scrub' women. We must have cooked 2 pots of beans or we wouldn't have had anything to eat when we got home.

And there were floods in Hot Springs Canyon. It was scary at times because big logs would come down in the foam in front of the floods. Once the boys were playing in the foam and the logs almost snagged them and carried them away, but they made it out okay.

A family, a man and his wife and their daughter, lived at the windmill there in Hot Springs Canyon in a tent on a concrete pad. Their daughter's name was Jean and we were good friends. They had put a linoleum floor on the concrete pad and it looked good. This family seemed rich to me since Jean was an only child.

Papa was most likely working on road work for the WPA. Pick and shovel work from Ranch to the main road by the San Pedro River at Cascabel Az. He made his shoes with rubber tires by cutting out the soles. He punched holes in the sole and put rawhide straps on them.



**Looking out toward the San Pedro from a box canyon near Bennett homesite.**

For entertainment, Marvin and cousins (Reuben Wilson) would run wild horses up a box canyon. The walls were so high, we could sometimes see stars in the daytime. They would rope colts run up the canyon and work with them until they were tame enough to ride. We also had burros. One was 'Gotch Ear' Old Black, my favorite and several others. One time I was on old Black and Chester rode a horse and we were to go up a canyon maybe 2 miles to borrow a rake. Of course, I carried the rake. Chester had a Prince Albert



photos Sue Newman

tobacco can with rocks in it. He came up alongside of me and rattled that can in old Black's ear. He jumped right out from under me at full run. I landed in a big cholla cactus and crashed to the ground. I got up and

slung my arms and legs to get the cactus off of me. Blood was oozing out and I was crying. Chester thought it was so funny. Well, he carried the rake and I got on his horse behind him and went home. Of course, my burro old Black had already made it there.

Papa had a lot of angora goats at one time. He kept them on 'share' with the owner. He had to shear them with hand clippers. The goats had long, curly wool. It made beautiful sweaters. Angora sweaters were still the 'in' thing in the 40s when I was in high school but I never could afford one.

We had one old 'Billy' goat that got mean from the kids teasing him. One day he got in the house and cornered Mama and butted her until she was bruised quite badly on her hips. We kids got him out of the house. There was a large hanging limb on an old cat claw tree. We would tease old Bill until he chased us and then we would jump up on that long limb and he would rub his big nose under it and try to shake us off. Never did. There was room for 4 or 5 of us on this limb.

Another fun thing we did was roll old tires. I can't even imagine the miles we rolled 'em. Many trails and round and round the house. Of course we made noise like big trucks on the hills. This was Lois, Chester, Lillie, Jack and Margie. We would curl up inside the tire and someone would start it rolling down a hill. We could slip our feet out of inside and stop if we weren't going too fast. There was a large mesquite tree not too far from the house. In the spring when leaves came out it was cool up in that tree. We took old net wire and made bird nests and tied them to the branches. We each had our own nest with others helping. We would sit up there under the shade in our nests and pretend we were birds. What a racket we made. Sometimes we sang songs we had learned. My Mother was a Lady, Little Jack the Wrangler, Cowboy Jack, Old Dunn. It was a pretty nice place to spend a few hours when it was 105 out.

We played cows too. We made corrals out of sticks for fence posts, with twine from the grocery store. Our cows were glass bottles of different sizes. We sat in

sand by the hour moving the cattle like kids play with little cars now. At a later visit – 1962 I think - we found several of those bottles. The sides were all scratched by being rubbed in the sand. Lois found an old tin measuring cup of Mama’s. I have it now. It was red inside from Easter egg dye.

One time Papa brought small dolls home to us. Lois said hers died, so we had a funeral for it. (Ruby reminded me of this story.) We went up canyon behind the house. The canyon walls were high. We dug a hole in the wall and buried the doll and had a funeral. Later we tried to find it, but could never locate it. It may be still there.

We rode burros and horses everywhere. When the creek dried up we rode quite a way to play in the water. We could only get wet but there was not enough water to learn to swim.

When we went to catch the burros, we caught Old Black first and used a stick to guide him to the house. We tapped him on one side of the neck to move one way or the other. He was stubborn, as he knew what was up. He was tall, too, so I led him to a tall rock or stump, pushed him sideways and would hook my big toe over his shoulder blades to get on his back. Sometimes so many got on him from his shoulder to tail, like 4 or 5 of us, and we would hang on to each other. You guessed it: If he went up a steep bank we all landed stacked like cord wood. Lots of fun and never got hurt. One day, Ruth was going to ride Old Black and go with Papa to rob a bee tree for honey. Papa took off on his horse and Old Black increased his speed. Suddenly Old Black decided he wanted to stay home. He braced both front feet and ducked his head and Ruth was running full speed ahead on the ground. All of us kids thought it was funny, but not Ruth. She was embarrassed and started crying.

A short way past the homestead, up steep hills, over large bounders, to the right of Hot Springs Canyon, up a side wash probably before the narrows (Yellow Cliffs) we found a swimming hole. A water fall filled it in winter. Sometimes it was filled with sand and no water. Other times it was 3-5 feet deep. Maybe 8 ft. across. There is a rock ledge above the pool about 4 ft.

wide. One time Ruby swam back under that ledge and had to feel her way out to the air. Our old dog Spot was going to rescue her. We couldn’t go there without Ruby taking us there. Just below the rock pool are huge rocks with large footprints of some kind. They are embedded deep in the rocks. No doubt it is still there, as they would be impossible to move. It was all big tumbled rocks like that. One time when we went up to the pool, the canyon was blocked by a big boulder, maybe 3 ft. by 3ft. We had to climb the rock to get to the pool. (In a phone conversation, Lillie asked Tom Orum if he knew about this swimming pool. He didn’t.)

We lived on venison and goat meat. Papa was known to go hunting on a horse, taking only 2 bullets and bringing home 2 deer. He was a crack shot. He always said “your character is what counts.” He would hang it in a tree in the back yard to dress them out. We loved to watch and hold a pan for the liver or heart. Mama would cook that for supper. Most likely with fried potatoes and hot biscuits. Papa wasn’t much of a gardener and we didn’t have enough water for a garden. One spring Papa’s dad lived with us and he planted beans and us kids helped ‘thrash’ the beans.

Next issue – building the house, digging the well, going to school in Cascabel, going to dances. Stay tuned; she’s promised more!

#### Cascabel Community Center

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Valley View Logo - Dave Shreeve and Barbara Clark

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