



City's First Two Merchants
Recall Incidents of Early
Torrance as Seen . . .

THROUGH Their EYES

• Harry Dolley Calls on Jack Isen for a Chat About Baby Torrance.

MANY are the stories of Torrance in its early days, for many are the citizens of Torrance who came here at its inception and still remain. Get two of them together and a reporter has a fund of anecdotes at his disposal, as they exchange reminiscences of the days when Torrance was on the frontier of development.

Among these early citizens are the first two merchants in town, Jack Isen and Harry Dolley, both of whom have maintained their stores in Torrance—lo, these 23 years. Both can tell tales that seem almost inconceivable to the tenderfoot of, say, 15 years in the city for the earliest days in Torrance were not at all as pleasant as the later ones.

Bathtubs Brought Dolley

HARRY DOLLEY, for instance, recalls his entrance into the budding community. Let him tell the story. "It was bathtubs that brought me to Torrance," said he, "yet the first day I came was one of the dirtiest I ever saw. Workmen had plowed up all the fields in preparation for building and a severe windstorm whipped up such a quantity of dust and sand that it would have been impossible to see a block away—if the block had been built.

"My father's sister lived in Lomita at that time and he had come from his work in Ontario, where he was superintendent, to visit her. On his way back he had noticed the proposed development, then under way. I had recently graduated from college and was running a store in Azusa. But it didn't seem to me that there was much future there so I was more than interested when he said:

"Harry, you just ought to see that new town they're building over by Lomita. Why they have all kinds of building materials there and are putting up a real city! There was a whole lot just full of bathtubs alone, when I came through there!"

Coaxed From Azusa

"THAT was too much for me. A whole lot full of bathtubs!

"We got off the train and made our way to the Thomas Campbell real estate agency, then handling Torrance properties. I asked the rental of the only store then suitable for our needs and was almost floored when the price was quoted at \$100 a month. Why, I was only paying \$25 in

Azusa, and Azusa was already on the map! But I looked out and saw that lot full of bathtubs and I realized that this town would be populated with a fine type of people; people who would have due regard for their health and would need and use a drug store.

"About that time, one of the carpenters on the building stepped up to me. He explained that he, too, would like to open a store here, to sell hardware. Yes, it was Hurum Reeve. We worked out a deal whereby the store could be divided and I signed the lease.

72 or 87 Houses

"THAT was in the fall of 1912. By the following February there were either 72 or 87 houses here—I forget which—all down on Gramercy, Andreo and Cabrillo; and our store was ready for occupancy. I opened the doors on February 13, 1913—and took in about \$13 the first day. While the business increased to about \$50 during the summer, there were days during the 1914 winter shutdown of the Union Tool Company that made me look back with envy at that \$13. Only the generosity of the Dominguez Land Corporation let any of us hang on through that period. I don't think anybody in town could pay any rent for over a year.

"We merchants used to have a game. Each day, at closing we would compare receipts and the one with the lowest amount of cash in his register won the pool. Hurum Reeve won it one day with 35 cents.

Changed Jobs

"HURUM was just one example of the numbers of men who came here to do one thing,

then changed to something else. He came here as a carpenter and remained to open one of the nation's leading small-town hardware stores. Then there was John Salm, who came to make pearl buttons and switched to abalone novelties. And there was—"

"Me," cut in Jack Isen. "I came here to open a men's clothing and furnishing store. In fact, I did. I had leased the very store in which I now have the Torrance Food Market, but it wasn't ready yet, so I opened my store in temporary quarters in the Colonial building, the only one yet finished. They were building from both ends of the business section at the same time.

Foods Beat Clothing

"WELL, when this building was finished I moved in, but I noticed that there wasn't any grocery store in town and men needed groceries more than they did clothes. I didn't know anything about the business but six weeks later I put in a line of foods and closed out the clothing. I've been in the market business ever since."

"Yes," recalled Dolley. "In the first days there was a fellow came down here from Gardena with a mule team twice a week. He took orders the first trip and delivered the goods next time, and if you didn't remember something on the order you had to go without—that is, until Jack opened his store.

"And it was like that with milk, too. We got what was left if Gardena didn't use it all up. As sure as you were planning an extra need for milk there wasn't any to be had.

Jones Kept 'Em Smiling

"I REMEMBER Jones, the butcher. He was quite a card. It was a favorite joke of his to talk about Chicago and how our city was growing. 'Looks more like Chicago every day,' he'd say—even during that tough 1914 winter. He kept up our spirits during those days. If we'd send one of the youngsters in for 10 cents worth of steak he'd grin and comment, 'What are you folks going to

do; going to have company to-night?' And it was pretty nearly that bad, too, wasn't it, Jack?"

"And how! But we had a lot of fun, anyway. The Llewellyn Iron Works were what we expected would pull us out. We had been told they were coming, and whenever things looked worst we'd smile and say, 'Well, everything will be all right when Llewellyn gets here.' It got to be quite a town saying—always looking forward to Llewellyn as our salvation.

"But the old fire company kept things humming for us. Remember it?"

Lone Fire Cart

"SURE. It had a reel of hose on a two-wheeled cart and later we got an old buggy body and fixed it up with hose. Then we were in good shape. Two carts for any fires, and we all grabbed the ropes and pulled whenever the alarm rang. Remember the old fire alarm?"

"I certainly do. It was an old locomotive tire that hung from a tripod and you sounded it by walloping it with a sledge hammer. I wonder where it is now."

"Why Al Bartlett tells me it is still down in the corporation yard. But the fire company was even better from a social angle. They supplied all the life. We didn't have any movies in those days—not until I helped out on the auditorium that's got my name on the cornerstone—only I was Isenstein in those days. And I'm mighty glad to leave that as my monument here in Torrance. I'm proud of the work I did on that, just as you are proud of being city treasurer here since 1922, eh, Harry?"

Saturday Dances

"YOU BET. But we were talking about the fire company. Remember the dances every Saturday, down in Campbell Hall?"

"I certainly do. And that was the highlight of the week. Other nights the only thing we could do was go down to

your store—you were the only place in Torrance that was open after 7 o'clock."

"Yes, we were. We had a big soda fountain and an old phonograph with lots of records. We had an agency here in those days and that made our store the Torrance 'night club' only it wasn't much like night clubs nowadays. But don't forget, Jack, you had the only automobile in town at first and you could get away whenever you wanted to."

"Not very far, though. We didn't have many good roads at that time and it was just about an all-day trip to go to Los Angeles."

Who-o-o Remembers L. A. Trip

"SPEAKING of Los Angeles, that was a trip for those of us who had to ride the cars. Last car out at night left at 9 and if you missed it you had to wait till next morning. And if you caught it, you weren't much better off. You rode it to Hermosa and then laid over about an hour for another car to transfer to. Then it brought you to Carson and Normandie, which was as close to Torrance as it came, and you walked the rest of the way in the dark, with the old hoot owls—and the country was full of them—swooshing by you and going 'Who-o-o-o' at you."

"Yes, I remember the time when Smith—"

"Which Smith? Dick or Story-and-a-Half? Did you ever hear about them? Well, you see, there were two houses over on the corner of Carson and Gramercy. One of them belonged to Dick. It was like the rest of the houses around, one story high. But just across the street was George Smith's house, and he built that half a story higher. The trees hadn't grown up much yet and this taller house stuck out like a bandage on a man's thumb. So we got to know them as Dick Smith and Story-and-a-Half Smith. But those were the good old days, weren't they, Jack?"

"You bet they were," said Jack.

• Celebrating the Announcement, February 22, 1913, of the Coming of Llewellyn Iron Works.



George A. Proctor C. A. Paxman
Harry Paige F. L. Parks Jack Isen B. M. Knutson A. H. Bartlett Charles Walker
George W. Neill Charles Long Hurum E. Reeve Burr Peck Vern Zuver J. S. Torrance