

C. Lillian Whaley

newspaper clipping
(the eighties)

OLD SCHOOL DAYS VIVIDLY RECALLED BY MISS WHALEY

BY NAOMI BAKER

She is Russ school's original sweet girl graduate and she remembers that thrilling day in June, 1883, when she and her five classmates received their diplomas at exercises in Horton hall. Sixth and F street. Miss Lillian Whaley, who lives in the historic old Whaley house at 2482 San Diego avenue, Old Town, is, so far as it is known, the only living member of Russ's first graduating class and the celebration of its founding 50 years ago, to be held Wednesday by San Diego high school, will hold keen interest for her.

Streets hadn't achieved the distinction of being called avenues then, nor were there sidewalks or pavements, and San Diego streets, even down-town Fifth and Sixth streets, were "mudholes," Miss Whaley says. So she had to gather up the long skirts of her graduation gown (it was a pleated affair of cream-colored bunting trimmed with Spanish lace and ribbons) and make her way carefully to the family buggy. Off they went in a flourish, while wide-eyed Mexican children looked on.

Writes Poem, Song

Hitching posts around Horton hall were at a premium and the hall was thronged with proud relatives and neighbors. Probably proudest among them was Samuel Whaley and his wife, for their daughter, Lillian, recited the class poem which she had written—recited it "with gestures," she laughingly relates. She, too, had written the class song.

There was only one boy in the class, Clifford Hubbell. The other girls were Claudia Robinson, Clara Buckner, Myrtle Millard and Mildred Strong.

It was a high necked-long sleeved mode then as now and the girls wore their long hair in "buns" in the back and in fetching forehead bangs.

J. A. Rice, who now lives at National City, was principal and Miss Whaley recalls him as a good disciplinarian and a person who had the knack of making them learn.

Miss Whaley later passed the state teachers' examination—California's were notably "stiff," and she was the only one at that time who passed. She taught school at San Luis Rey and National City. For 35 years, until she retired two months ago, she was a member of the San Diego public library staff.

It was only 33 years after California had become a state that Russ school graduated its first class. George Stoneman was governor then.

Until Russ school opened in 1882, Miss Whaley went to grammar school in Old Town in a little brown schoolhouse that stood on the site now occupied by a filling station opposite Ramona's home. She remembers her first teacher, a Mrs. McGillivray.

From Graduate in 1883 to Pioneer in 1932

Miss Lillian Whaley (top, left), was a member of Russ school's first graduating class of 1883. At top, right, she is pictured as she appeared then. Below—Miss Whaley standing on the steps of her home, the historic old Whaley house in Old Town, one of southern California's landmarks. Miss Whaley is believed to be the only living member of the Russ class of '83.



The Whaley house is rich in historical associations. Its "big room" served as the San Diego courthouse in the 70's and has been successively a dairy, a kindergarten, Sunday school and family living room. Whaley house has been the scene of many festivities for early San Diego social life was gay. It has seen several notables, including George Horatio Derby, whose writings under the name of John Phoenix mightily have amused San Diegans from early days to the present. The Derby, Whaley, Pohl and Morris families were great friends.

Recalls Earthquake

Miss Whaley wishes she might say she was born in San Diego, but San Francisco was the place of her birth. Her father, Samuel Whaley, came to San Francisco in 1843 from New York state, returned east in the 50's and brought back a bride. He built the Whaley house in 1856—the first brick house to be built south of Monterey. They moved to San Francisco and lived there until the big earthquake of '83, which Miss Whaley, then only four years old, recalls vividly. They came here by boat in '88 and drove out to the Whaley house on a chaparral-lined road along the bay.

Whaley house is made of bricks burned in Samuel Whaley's own kilns and its plaster walls are of ground white sea shells. Its white cedar woodwork was brought from the east. The old furniture has been kept and the whole house fairly breathes stories—so do the four giant pepper trees in the yard where happy children of six generations have played.

Miss Whaley lives at Whaley house with her cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick James, and their son, Frederick, Jr.