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Kern County

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ORAL HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY PROJECT
CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD
PIONEER PROJECT

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Dick Apsley
Interviewed
by
Orville Armstrong
on
November 8, 1970
Transcriber: Juanita Millican

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This is an interview with Dick Apsley an early pharmacist in Bakersfield. Mr. Apsley lives at the Clint Smooth home in Kern County. Mrs. Smooth, Martha, is Dick Apsley's daughter. We are at her home. Dick when did you come to Bakersfield?

DA: In February 4, 1909.

A: How did you come?

DA: I came in by train from Tulare. I came in by train at noon time.

A: And you got off where?

DA: At the SP depot. The Southern Pacific depot which was over at east Bakersfield.

A: Was that called Summener then?

DA: Summner, yes, summener was the station.

A: How did you get over to Bakersfield?

DA: They had street cars, electric street cars.

A: About the cars, what was your first impression?

DA: Well, ah, it was the rainy season and the water when we were coming from the station over to Bakersfield, the water would just gush out from each side of the street car. I thought I wouldn't be here very long, I figured I could stick to this thirty or sixty days, I wouldn't be here any longer.

A: You weren't very much impressed?

DA: No, I wasn't very much impressed ther was nothing here than.

A: But where was your home originally?

DA: In Belfast, Ireland.

A: And when did you leave there?

DA: In ah, September 1908. I came right direct to Fresno.

A: Yes, and from Gresno to Bakersfield?

DA: That's where I landed and got this position, got this job in Bakersfield from there.

A: Yes, where was this first employment in Bakersfield?

DA: Hughe's Drug Store.

A: Where was that located?

DA: That was located at the corner of 19th and Chester.

That was the center of Bakersfield.

A: The south-west corner?

DA: Yes, the south-west corner.

A: I guess that's where Vest's Drug Store is today.

DA: Correct.

A: And your coming here from Ireland, did you have somebody sign your citizenship papers for you?

DA: Yes, I had Dr. Sam Smith, who was a Jewish father and ah, Stonewall Whittey, they signed my naturalization papers. My application for naturalization papers. And I got the naturalization papers in 1915. In February of 1915. Judge Mann signed the papers.

A: Oh yes. Who were some of the others who worked at Hughe's Drug Store with you?

DA: Mr. Howard Cravask, who was the brother-in-law of Mr. Hughes. He was married to his sister, Mrs. Hughes, who had two sisters.

A: I see, did Mr. Hughes work there?

DA: He sure did. He worked there till 1917 or so, steady. He worked my shift.

A: Yes, now there were three of you druggist there. Mr. Hughes, yourself and Mr. Cravask?

DA: Yes and then we had an extra perscription clerk there too, you know. There were four registered men all the time including Mr. Hughes. Mr. Hughes was the proprietor, Mr. Cravask was the manager and brother-in-law of his and

I was the pharmacist and there was another pharmacist like me.

A: I see, where did you receive your training as a druggist?

DA: I got that in Belfast Ireland. I went to the world academical institution there and I finished but I hadn't passed the board there. I had to go to Dovelan to pass the board examination where they were held in those days.

A: Did you have a probation period?

DA: Oh, yes you had to have four years in pharmacy to pass and it was a pretty stiff examination. Then I had a job in Dovelan. I had a job there for three years from 1902 to 1905. I worked in Dovelan.

A: Now Hughes Drug Store was on the corner of 19th and Chester. What were some of the other businesses located on the south side of 19th between Eye and Chester? Beganning just about where Wickersham's is now.

DA: Yes, well there was a barber shop whice was number one and next door to that was a cafe called the Gushers. Now the Gushers Cafe was one of the greatest places I have ever seen. There was one big long entrance about twenty-five long and the cooking was done on one lane and service there was very good. Then next one was for the customers and the customers were generally lined up. They had twenty-five or thirty stools there, that would seat that many at a time

and generally there was always waiting behind the stools.

A: Did they have any specialties?

DA: They sure did! They had the hand heavy on the onion!

A: What else? Heavy on the onions! (Laughter)

DA: Heaby on the onion, (laughter) boy they would put on a wonderful meal. It was always good. The coffee was ex-alent, the service was good.

A: Even though it was a very small place?

DA: Very small place but they always had business there.

There was always a second line of customers waiting. When you got up there was another fella there all ready to take your place.

A: I see. Now what was the percent of the other business there.

DA: Well there was a Chinese place there sort of a dry goods or toy store.

A: A variety store?

DA: Yes, a variety store. Like Woolworths and there was a branch of them that came from San Francisco you see. They did a nice business. Then there was Tom Burks tea and China shop. He had a little store there connected with ah, the Palace barber shop there. The entrance was through the tea shop to get to the barber shop they were both the same entrance. It was a very nice place. He

did a lot of business.

A: Now was this the Tom Burks that

DA: Tom Burks afterward the assessor. His wife ran the business most of the time, very efficient. I think she is still alive.

A: All right, what are some of the others?

DA: Pass time theater, that was a nice pass time theater which had a very beautiful front and good place that wasn't or didn't have the air cooler then, they had the electric fans. Noiseless if you could get them. Then there was a clothing store ah, a men's clothing store which was fairly good then there was Al's Theodore's Liquor store that was wholesale and retail.

A: So there was a good many businesses along there?

DA: Oh yes, they were small businesses but they did a lot of business. There was a little shoe store there it was connected next to Tom Burks, the ah, tea shop it was all connected together there.

A: Now going down Chester Avenue from Hughes Drug store, down the west side of Chester Avenue to 18th, what were some of the names of some of the stores there.

DA: Well, next to us there was a clothing store, I forgot the name of it now, it's passed away now.

A: Harrisons? Was it Harrisons?

They had it later. It was afterwards that Harrison had it. It was a nice little business. Then the next place was the Bakersfield Hardware, right on the corner there was an alley there. The Bakersfield hardware store was on the south-west corner of that before it moved away right on the corner. It did a nice business and on the south, no it would be the north-west corner, there was a barber shop, the Deluxe barber shop.

A: It's still there.

DA: Yes, it's still there, that's right, that's right and that was a wonderful place. They had a roomy house up stairs and they had the finest beer. It was a nice business.

A: Well, that's good. There was a cafe along there some place too, wasn't there?

DA: Yes, the May Cafe.

A: There were quit a few little businesses there too.

DA: Yes quit a few. Duncan's grocery store was on the corner, and they did alot of business. Disday utilized that afterwards.

A: Now you being a pharmacist did you ever go with any doctors on their home calls?

DA: Yes, after I got through at night I'd go around for the company. They were glad to have my company as a rule. There weren't many electric lights then. There were just

electric lights in the center of the plaza, the center of the squares you know and also the crossings. They didn't have many of them you had to take your own electric lights.

A: Yes, now did you go with the doctor too. Do you remember any

DA: Yes I went with them of their calls. You know sometimes I'd go in with them and sometimes I'd wait for them to come out from checking the patient.

A: Do you remember any one incident that you happened to go along with this doctor?

DA: Well ah, yes. I went with one doctor and he had a horse and buggy in those days. He would drive the horse one night and I would be the passenger. I had a forty-five caliber revolver and it was loaded too. My instructions was from the doctor if anybody stops us, don't wait, shoot pull the trigger and that was that. We never had to kill anybody. We did get a dead one most every two or three times a week generally from the morgue you know that was kind of a rough town.

A: I see.

DA: He would have some patient out in east Bakersfield and between east Bakersfield and Bakersfield there was about one half mile. There were no houses out there and it was a pretty dangerous place in those days.

A: So you were instructed to shoot to kill?

DA: I was instructed not to wait just to pull that trigger!

A: Well what were some of the tools of that trade of the druggist in the early days?

DA: Well we had the morter pastel, that was the good old stand by. You would mix all your recipients, put them all in one thing and there might be about five items in one pill. When you'd mix those up, some would be dry and some would be moisten, you'd have to make them into mass soliable mass pills so that it would dissolve in the patients stomach.

A: Well, you had the morter pastel

DA: Morter pastel and we smashed them in quantities in a couple of dozens. We generally made two dozen, one dozen at a time, so that the patient would get them fresh and they would dissolve in the stomach easly. We would divid them up and dake them int a mass and we would roll them. Afterwards we had a pill roller and the machine would cut the pill into two sizes. You know, two different sizes, a three gram one, five gram one that was so they wouldn't be to large so that the people could swallow them easily and they were tasteless and they would dissovle quickly and the reaction was much faster that way.

A: There were some pills that were covered weren't there?

DA: Oh yes, some were silver. They were covered with

silver leaf for the aristocratic trade that wanted to pay for it. When we coated them with silver, a lot of high class pharmacist did that.

A: Was it just for the effect though, it had

DA: Just for the effect, it looked nice and no taste and they dissolved quickly and they just looked like real silver leaf. You just rolled them on that when still moistened and kept them on the water, not enough to put or to go through the coating on those, so when they dried they were fine, they looked just like silver pills.

A: Did you ever have any of the drugs put into papers?

DA: Yes, I'd have that done for the ladies who didn't like the taste of those pills. You know we had the dry powders like paper powders, things like that and good size they were. They were in little rive papers the little capsul. There was a top and a bottom to them and these were held about

A: Were they about an inch across?

DA: No, no, not that big, about one-fourth inch across and they were meant to fit on this little special mold, you see, and then there were two parts and you rolled them and then wet or moisten the top part where there were no powder or anything, no medicine and you just moisten that and fit clamps and filled the things just perfect.

A: What were they called?

DA: Cachect, c-a-c-h-e-c-t, cachect. Tasteless and dissolved immediatley.

A: In your mouth?

DA: Yes, the dissolvent would just dissolve way down in your mouth.

A: What about the capsuls themselfs. Did you buy the capsuls already made?

DA: Yes, they were already molded.

A: How did you fill them.

DA: You just took them apart you see and filled one end and moisten the other with a little moisture and pushed that, closed that over and seal them that well.

A: The capsule was made of what kind of material?

DA: Jellaton, just some jellaton.

A: During the flue epademic after World War I, what drugs were most popular? What drugs did you really, were you very, very busy?

DA: Oh yes, Asprin was the main one and then there was this one called fanesation, its a fever medicine relieving pain and the use of a little caffin to stimulate their hearts you know. We had to mix those up toghther and put them in capsules just like that.

A: What was the nature of the flu, the flu it's self,

the nature.

DA: High fever, oh they would burn up, but the capsules dissolved in about fifteen minutes or so. Some of them would just take the powder out of the capsule, put it on their tongue and that would cause the drug to react quicker.

A: Did you have the flu?

DA: No, I did not have the flu.

A: Then what was the secret of your success?

DA: Well I'll tell you, we worked awfully hard from nine in the morning until nine at night and never left that prescription case. The proprietor, he was a fine pharmacist and the other pharmacist and myself we'd drink port wine every two hours, and he'd have a small glass of that. He would drink about half a gallon to a gallon a day for about three weeks or a month.

A: That kept your nose and cheeks rosey too?

DA: Half as rosey! One time I went home and laid down on or in the tub. We'd get home at night at nine o'clock and I'd take a bath for about one half hour and sleep with the rest. The next morning I was at work at eight o'clock, sober and industrious.

A: Did you ever work at the hospitals, the early hospitals?

DA: Oh, yes.

A: Did you work at the hospital Elm Grove, over where the

High School is?

DA: No, that was gone before I came.

A: Where was the hospital when you came?

DA: When I came it was at the corner of 19th street where Oak and 19th join on the north, tha's the north-east corner.

A: North-east corner?

DA: I used to go up there. I went once a week and made up or mixed them up a fever pill, a fever powder to make the capsul's out of and I'd do that for the good of the order. Once or twice a week, one a week or any time they wanted any I'd

A: How did you get out there, that was quite a little ways?

DA: I'd just walked out, or got a horse and buggy. Every one used to take a horse and buggy but I would just walk out there and walk back.

A: What did or what was that building like, was it the old concret builing?

DA: No, no two story dwelling house apparently and there wasn't very much pharmacist there. Well Dr. Hullten came there, about 1912 and he made a sort of a change there, he changed the thing over. He was a very expert man, a very good man. And then

A: Did you ever work at the Kern General Hospital?

DA: Yes, I worked there steady from 1929 to 1941.

A: What was the nature of your work there?

DA: Oh I

A: Where or were there many pharmacist there?

DA: No there was just the one, I was the key pharmacist, I was the only pharmacist there and I worked from 1928 to 1941. I used to sleep there at night and I'd get night calls at least twice a week or more and

A: Now what did Hughes drug store look like in the early days in the inside?

DA: Just, it had a balcony, a restroom for the use of farmers and our good costomers. Most were farming people connected with farming and I'd have to make thier appointments there for themselves and I had nice

A: Was that good for business too?

DA: I'll say that was, very good! There was a big table there, a big round table.

A: This was an up stairs balcony?

DA: Up stairs, there were very comfortable chairs there was about six or eight comfortable chairs around there so that they would have thier meeting or to have their talks.

A: On the first floor did they have all their drugs?

DA: All the drugs, underneath, this is where the pharmacy was, underneath the restroom. He did a nice business.

A: Did you sell everthing like drug stores do today? Did

you sell clothing? Did you sell ah,

DA: No, no we didn't!

A: Ice cream?

DA: We sold, we had a little fountain by the way, soda pop. He won the first soda fountain in town. Thats right another one was six feet, well about six feet.

A: Six feet long?

DA: Yes, six feet long and would accomadate four people at a time.

A: I see.

DA: That's right.

A: But most of the business was in drugs?

DA: In drugs yes, strictley a pharmacy, a very good one too.

A: Yes, with all those people coming in from the country did you have any parking problems at 19th and Chester?

DA: Oh yes, they (laughter) had lighting posts you see, only so far apart and when they were taken up, they had to go up further up on down the street side there and park their horses there by the hitch post.

A: What were hitch post like?

DA: They were metal with a ring on top where they put their horse, tie them up that way. For them to be firm too so the horse couldn't pull them out.

A: Do you have another early recollection of your pharmacy work in and around Bakersfield?

DA: Yes, the first emergency that I had in 1910 with Dr. S.S. Smith MD. He had a case of poisoning. A youngster drank soda tincture of by mistake out here at the Beardsly corner, they lived out there on the corner there. And they got word in that the child got that and I went out with him and took the antidote with us. And we gave it to the child which was about six years old. The child lived and here it is. That was the first emergency treatment I had at Bakersfield in 1910.

A: Today we have a problem of the misuse of drugs in our society, what about early Bakersfield, did they have the misuse of drugs?

DA: No, they just had the use of drugs very few missuse. Occasionaly they'd get one addict. He would stay by himself, he would go and get his prescription and go get one order from the doctor and he would get little quantities and when that was used, you'd have to go get another order for it. But before I got

A: The doctor would give it to him?

DA: No, the doctor gave him an order to get it at the store.

A: I see.

DA: There wasn't much to it then, but in 1915, the narcotics law was passed. They called it the Harris Act. The finist act that was ever made. And if it was lived up to why there would be no addiction in the country. You had to have a perscription from the doctor, and have to have it today but, we got law with it you see and couldn't buy it without a perscription to have a certain amount.

A: What was the drug in those days that created the most habit forming?

DA: Oh, they used a little morphine and that was about all. Morphine a little codine, the hypodermic morfine. That was the one thing they used, the old timers, they used that when they really needed it.

A: Morphine was given as a

DA: Pain reliever. Then the Norcen Law was passed in 1915 H: Harrison. They had to have the name, date, and address on every perscription. Written in the doctors own hand writing. That law, they still in existance but they don't all carry it out. That was the finist law that was ever made.

This interview was conducted by Orville Armstrong
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