

Pioneer Memories of the Santa Ana Valley

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Volume XII

P I O N E E R M E M O R I E S
O F T H E
S A N T A A N A V A L L E Y

VOLUME XII

1991

published by

OUR HERITAGE SECTION

of

The Ebell Society of the Santa Ana Valley



VIRGINIA LEWIS CARPENTER

MEMORIES OF ORANGE COUNTY

from

A S I L O O K B A C K

and

BALBOA ISLAND

by Virginia L. Carpenter

Editor and Typist

Maureen McClintock Rischard

COVER

Virginia L. Carpenter ca 1908

THE ANCESTRY OF VIRGINIA CARPENTER

Virginia Lewis Carpenter is a bunch of her ancestors. Her family roots represent the pioneer stock that migrated west and settled in Southern California.

In her book, "As I Look Back," published in 1986, Virginia tells what she remembers learning about her parents, grandparents and great grandparents.

Her mother's life contained many contrasts. Virginia Pendleton Orrick whose ancestors came to Maryland, then Virginia, and then back again to Maryland was raised in a strict Victorian family. She went to finishing school in Philadelphia. She was accepted at Bryn Mahr College but didn't attend because of her mother's poor health. Subsequently she enjoyed quite a social life. One winter she participated in ninety teas and nibbled on hundreds of tiny sandwiches tied with ribbon. She kept a scrapbook of all the elaborate party favors.

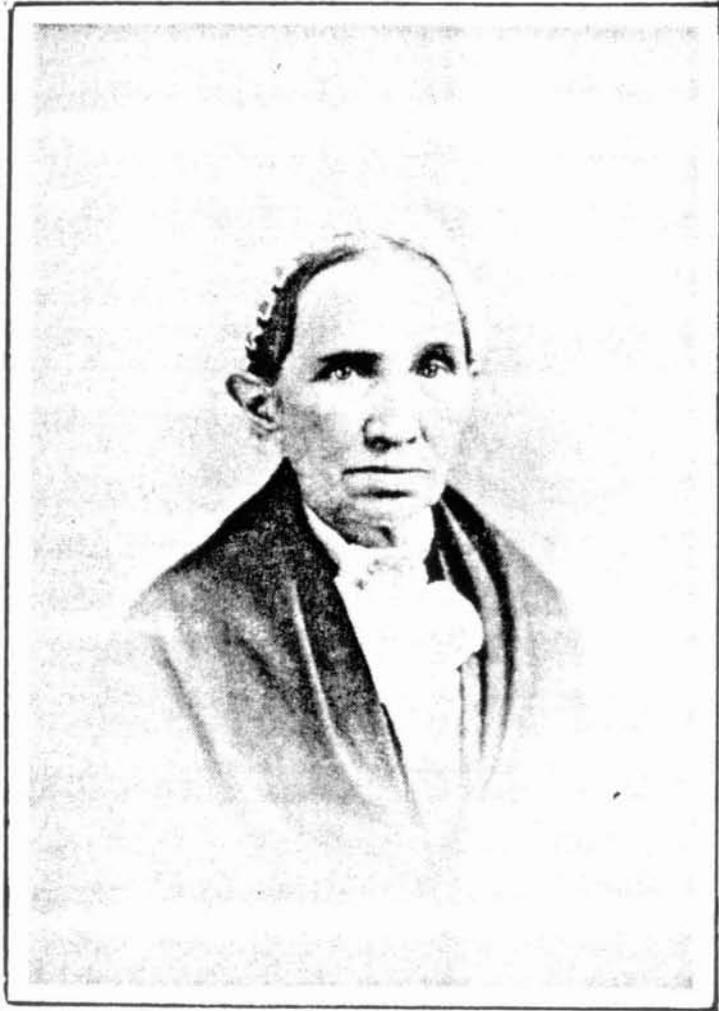
Miss Orrick's aspirations were to be a writer. She did pursue a writing career for a short time in Washington, D.C. before settling down at home to manage the servants and the visitors during her mother's illness.

Virginia wrote this about her mother, "Mother was with the old-line conservative Philadelphia aristocrats who looked down on the famous 400. They called them 'The Brass-Band set.' Now we have the 'jet set.' The Philadelphians dressed almost shabbily on the street, but balls were elegant with velvet and jewels. Mother was lovely, too, like a porcelain doll, her eyes and hair were brown, her skin very fair... There is a photograph I call the 'Three Graces,' the two daughters and their mother. At some time she had a heavy blue cape, a white lace dress over blue satin with bunches of silk sweet peas, another of yellow net over yellow satin and a chiffon painted with pink roses, and tiny red slippers. I still have the chiffon and the cape."

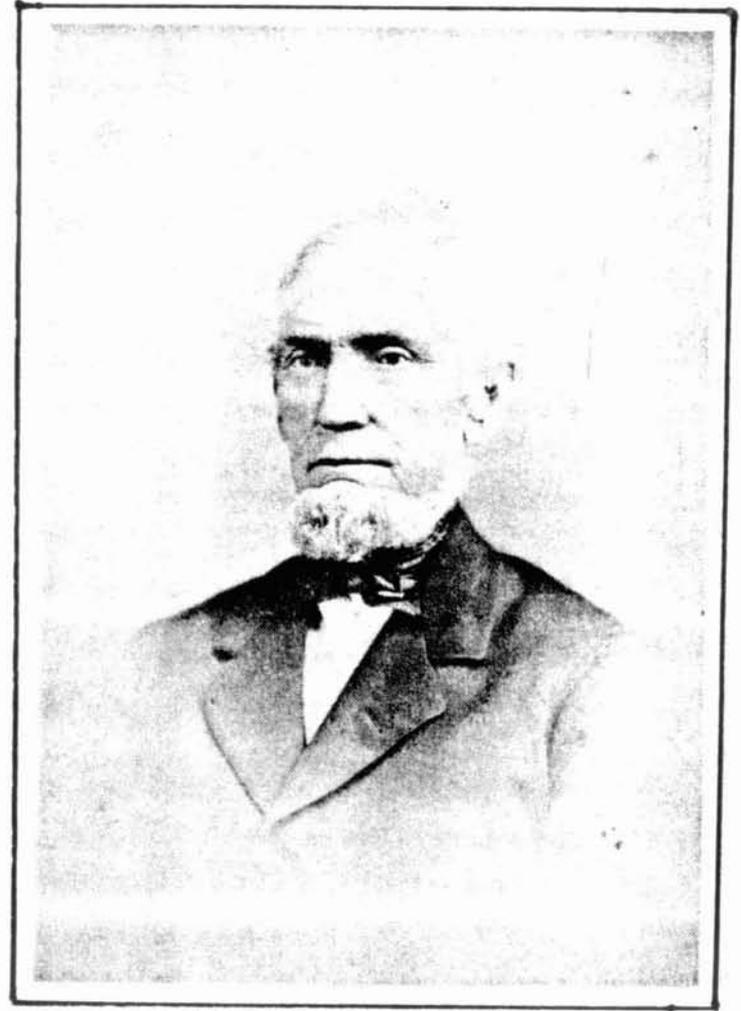
About 1904 at the doctor's suggestion Mrs. Orrick and daughters, Helen and Virginia, arrived in Phoenix, Arizona. Phoenix was a pioneer town with only one paved street a few miles long with Indians sitting on the curbs all day.



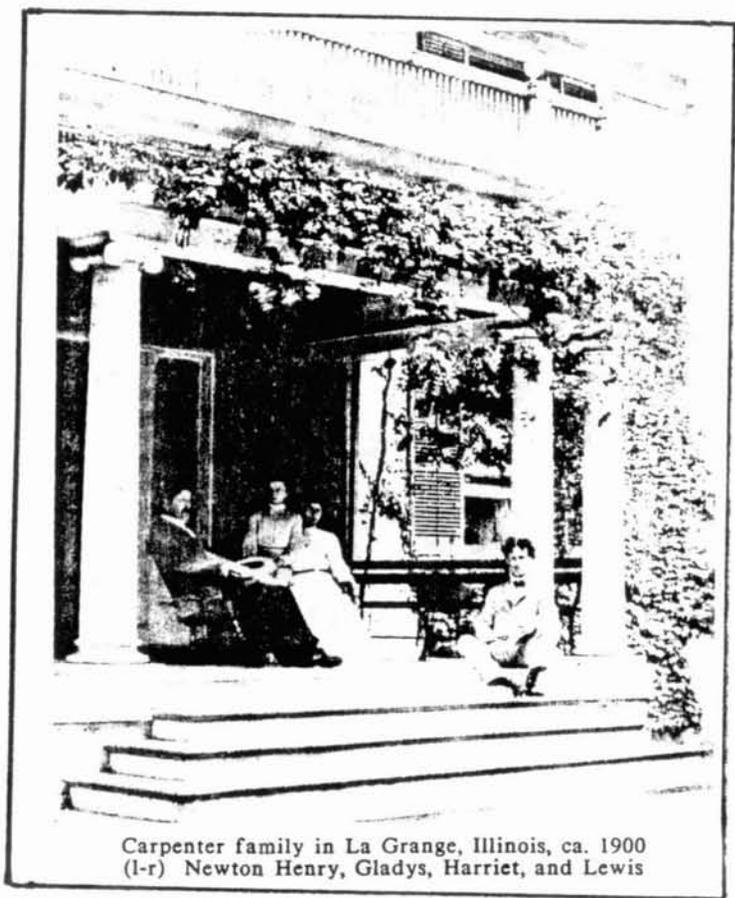
"The Three Graces"
Aunt Helen, Mother, Grandmother Orrick
ca. 1890



Susan Verdiere Orrick



James Campbell Orrick



Lewis Carpenter
ca. 1900

While sightseeing in Arizona, Lewis Carpenter became their courier taking them on camping trips. Lewis came west after a bout with pneumonia. He had grown up in LaGrange, Illinois, the son of Hattie Mae Lewis and Newton Henry Carpenter. The Carpenters were English from Kent County. Mr. Carpenter is listed in WHO WAS WHO IN AMERICA, Volume I. He had an active career with the Art Institute of Chicago, serving as secretary and later as business manager. He had an only sister who was studying to become a musician before her death as a young woman.

Harriet Lewis, the mother of Lewis Carpenter, was rather spoiled, first by her father and then her husband. According to Virginia, "She was delicate and an artist, which was how they met and to the end of his life Grandfather waited on her and took care of her, hurrying home from the office when she might be ill, sending her away for the winter; there was always a housekeeper. She outlived him by thirty years... She told me that oil painting has so much equipment to carry around that she turned to watercolor and specialized in flower paintings, de Longpre, the French flower painter complimented her; she had many exhibitions."

Lewis Carpenter had studied to become a musician but became a cowboy instead. He was infatuated with Mrs. Orrick's oldest daughter, Virginia, and asked her to marry him. Although she had her heart set on becoming a writer Lewis convinced her that they should be married. He also said that his lungs were "cheesy" but hoped she would take a chance on his health.

Lewis Carpenter and Virginia Orrick were married in the Episcopal Church, April 1904, in Prescott, Arizona. Their parents were their only attendants. Father Orrick gave Virginia \$500 for a trousseau. She gave it to Lewis towards their future home.

The young couple settled in Riverside. At first they stayed in the Inn. Lewis declined a job offer to play his violin for the hotel guests. He was

set on becoming a rancher. According to his daughter, "He bought twelve acres on Adams Street below Magnolia and planted alfalfa. There was a two-story adobe house, eleven rooms...The family that was living in the house when they bought stayed for sometime and proved a help to mother. The housekeeping she had been taught was to manage servants; she had never, until she went to Arizona, done any work, now she was supposed to do it all!"

Life on the ranch got off to a good start and then Lewis developed T.B. At the suggestion of his doctor the young couple set off for Death Valley, seeking a drier and warmer climate. They camped en route under very primitive conditions.

Virginia writes about her parents, "It was a crazy thing to do, a dying man and a small, delicate, pregnant woman in the California of that day, with few towns, few roads, no direction signs. She didn't know anything about pregnancy and what a woman should not do; she had been taught to obey her husband."

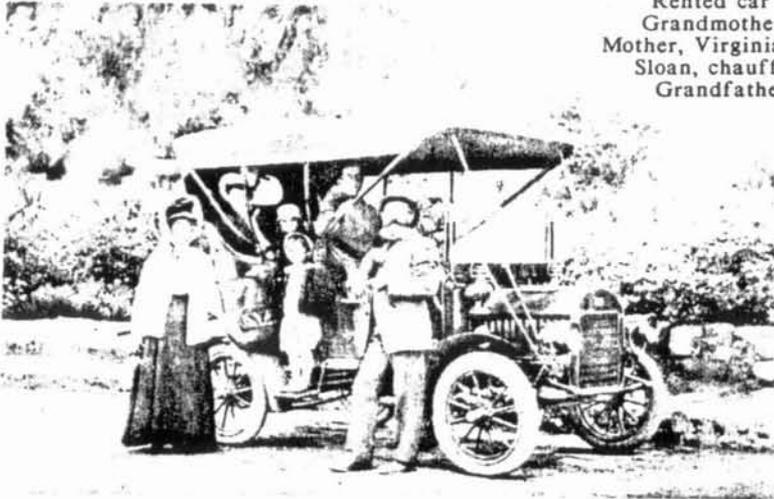
This adventure had a tragic ending. Somehow they ended up in Arizona, in an abandoned cabin above Flagstaff. There Lewis Carpenter died at the end of August.

"The cowboys must have mailed some letters for her, for Grandfather Carpenter came out and stayed. When Father died his body had to be carried down in a basket, then on the train to Chicago...the funeral was in Chicago. Mother would stay with them until my arrival."

Virginia Lewis Carpenter was born December 7, 1905.

"Mother was determined to return to the Riverside Ranch as soon as she was able...Grandfather paid

Rented car and (l-r)
Grandmother Orrick,
Mother, Virginia, Orrick
Sloan, chauffeur, and
Grandfather Orrick



for the Irish nurse, Moira Jane Currie to go with, can I say, us? Giving her a return ticket which she never used."

Mother and daughter remained in Riverside. Virginia was called "Lewie" in memory of her father. Her mother was determined to support herself without asking for help and she did. Eventually she did move into town.

About 1913 during "the big freeze" when the smudge pots were belching black fumes to save the orange crop, Virginia came down with whooping cough. She wasn't recovering as she should so the doctor prescribed ocean air. This pair moved to Long Beach. Several years later they moved to Los Angeles. Virginia's memories of all these places are vivid and interesting. All are described in her autobiography, "As I Look Back."

The following narrative tells about some of her memories in Orange County and includes several references to her abilities and accomplishments.

BALBOA ISLAND

by Virginia L. Carpenter

When I was 13, in 1919 and in '20 and '21, mother and I spent our vacations on Balboa Island. We lived in Pasadena and as I was slow in recovering from the flu, Dr. White suggested sea air. His brother-in-law, Joe Beek, on Balboa Island would see that I had a good time. Beek ran the boatyard, the only business, was the real estate agent and took care of the island generally; there were only a few houses at that time. Mother had him build a rowboat for me; I named it the ARIEL and the man who did the work carved a tiny pair of wings on the prow.

So it must have been the next year, 1920, that Beek said there would be a parade of decorated boats and we should enter the ARIEL. Mother decided to make the boat into a swan, using wings made out of sheets and I would be in front for the head of the bird, mother sat in the back. A motorboat came to tow us and then mother called out that the boat was leaking! We were pulled ashore and as the parade was starting there was no time to do anything, but they put me on the barge of the Masonic Home orphans, so that I would at least be in the parade. We never found out what caused the leak, which of course was repaired, and had no more trouble.

A day or so later, Carole, Beek's fiancée, who was helping in his office, came to see us. She was carrying one of the new electric irons and said it was our prize. The boats were judged before the parade and we were one of the winners.

Mother decided that if we were going regularly to the island that we should have our own place. Prices were very low then, she could have bought a house on the bay front for very little, \$1200?, but I wanted to build our own, and she foolishly gave in to me. She bought a lot on the canal, then I drew a very simple house plan, one large room and a very small kitchen and bathroom with a shower. She engaged a carpenter and arranged with the Balboa bank to take care of the payments for lumber and labor, then she had to go back to work in Pasadena. There were just the two of us, widow and child.

Mother, having been raised in Maryland, on the B and O Canal which flooded often, was concerned by the fact that the island was barely above high tide. So she ordered the house to be built on piles, two or three feet above the ground. The carpenter built the walls, the floor, roof and windows, connected water to the kitchen and shower and decamped with the rest of the money which the bank let him have. So mother was cheated, but didn't manage to do anything about it because family affairs took all her attention then and for the next years.

In 1921 we had our only vacation in the Balboa Island house. Mother stopped in Santa Ana first and bought two army cots, canvas chairs and an unfinished table, she probably took pans and dishes from home. I was quite satisfied with the arrangement and hemmed cotton curtains by hand.

The next year we moved to a ranch in Chino Valley and I quite literally forgot Balboa Island. I only remember that mother kept the house for several years, (it must have been an eyesore in its unfinished state) and that she mentioned assessments for bulwarks and flood protection for the island. I don't remember when or how she finally sold it. The house has been entirely remodeled and I wonder what later owners thought of it.



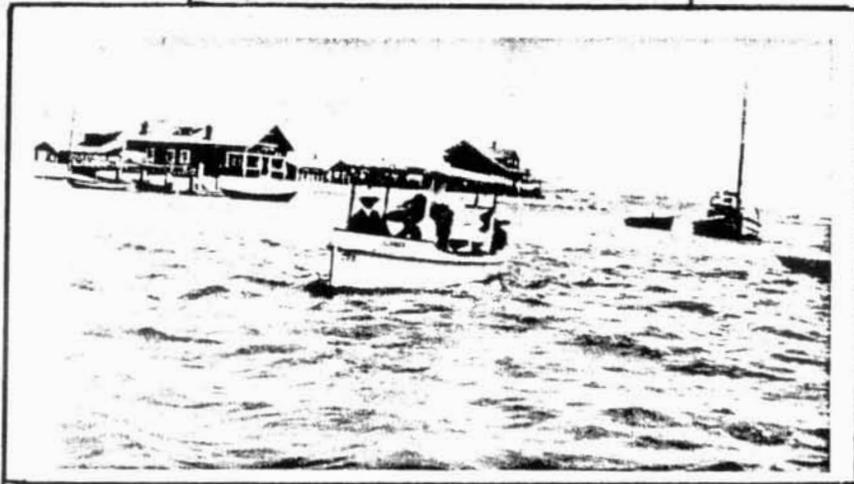
Virginia in her boat

The final chapter of our island experience came years later. We lost the Chino ranch in the Depression of the 1930's and went to Los Angeles to find another home to buy. I accepted mother's conviction that one owned one's home; but what to do about the down payment? Mother thought of the lot on the canal which she had kept, so we drove down and found there was a small grocery store nearby. The grocer said he would like to buy the lot but had no cash (no one did in those days), perhaps if something could be arranged? A deal was worked out with the Los Angeles realtor, the grocer had government food orders (given to people without money or jobs), the realtor would take those and make the down payment on the Los Angeles house for us. We moved in and I finally got a job in a pottery at 19 cents an hour, later upped to 33 cents, but not steady work, they sent us home when they ran out of orders. Our house payments were \$10 a month, utilities \$10, no phone.

So we had our home and lived there until after World War II when we moved to Yorba Linda in Orange County. We didn't go back to the island or even the beaches very often, we were too busy making pottery.



Joe Beck
1920



Balboa Island ferry
1919

BALBOA ISLAND HISTORY

Virginia L. Carpenter

Very Long ago the Santa Ana River, beginning in the San Bernardino mountains ended in the ocean near what is now the city of Newport. It formed a shallow bay and wide-spreading marshes. It was also the dividing line between the Yorba's rancho, Santiago de Santa Ana, on the west and Jose Sepulveda's San Joaquin rancho on the east. They were cattle ranchos. But even before California was annexed to the United States in 1848, Americans were moving in, seeking land and gradually the old ranchos were sold and subdivided.

Two of the new owners were James and Robert McFadden, in 1868 they bought land running from the bay towards Santa Ana for a farm. In those days supplies had to come by ship and the port was San Pedro, a very long drive for horses; there were no regular roads, only tracks across the country. They ordered lumber for their house and found that a small steamer was willing to come to the bay where it could unload on their land. Immediately neighbors arrived asking to buy lumber, so the McFaddens sent for more and found themselves in business.

Twenty years later they built a long wharf on the ocean side to accomodate large ships and continued to buy land. In 1897 they added the part where Balboa Island would be one day, it is manmade. Dredging the shallow bay to deepen it, began early and continued for intervals for many years, even in recent times.

Then in 1902 the McFaddens sold their lands to W.C. Collins and A.C. Hanson. They had something to do with Congress passing a bill to include tidelands in the regulations governing the ownership of 'swamp and overflowed lands.'

Collins visualized an island of fine homes and beginning in 1906 had the dredges pile their loads on a sandspit to create what he named Balboa Island. Two years later the first lot was recorded. The island was not as large as he had wanted it to be, so the lots he mapped were rather small and the streets narrow; the planned park was not built. Seven years later the dredging for the island was finished with the ground level just above the high tide line, so a wooden bulkhead was built for protection as storms created problems. A ferry service from Balboa began and there was a wooden bridge to the mainland on the other side of the island.

Several years before the dredging was finished a young man named Joseph Allan Beek in Pasadena became the island's salesman, it was to be his lifetime commitment. At first, then for fifty years, in fact, his winters were spent in Sacramento as secretary of the State Senate, but all his summers belonged to the island.

He opened a boatyard, the first and for years the only business. Later he took over the unsatisfactory ferry service with a small launch, the ISLANDER and later built one which could take automobiles, the FAT FAIRY. He entertained visitors with picnics at the Point to see the tide pools and took them on evening boat rides with singing. He had a good voice and there was nothing else to do in the evening except to have a BONFIRE.

When the dredging was finished there was a parade of illuminated boats, starting a long tradition with some unavoidable gaps. It was held every year from 1919 to 1946. Collins had his own house on the island and he gave a lot to the Masonic Home, so their orphans could camp in the summer. Then in 1915 there was a Depression and Collins lost so much that he left, so the next year the island was annexed to Newport Beach city.

Storms and business depressions did damage, but the island continued to attract people, it is entirely built up now. Much later the county took over management of the harbor, then improved the entrance and built a new bridge. That was after Joe Beek had died in 1968, aged 87, his wife, Carol lived a dozen years longer.

In 1981 Newport and Balboa Island celebrated their Diamond Jubilee



Pottery kiln built in June 1938

YORBA LINDANS WIN FAME FOR CERAMICS

These were the headlines in the July 5, 1956 FULLERTON NEWS TRIBUNE article by Helen Emmerick. The copy reads:

"From the first spin of the potter's wheel centuries ago to the present age of automation and machines, talents of imaginative persons have been mixed and molded with the clay of ceramics.

"Generations of families have followed faithfully the skilled trade of sculpturing and ceramics. However, it remains an oddity that a mother and daughter team would be so equally endowed.

"Few present-day families make their living on the spin of the wheel, the fire of the kiln and the cosmic splash of colors burned deep into the fiery depths of a bowl.

"Mrs. Virginia Pendleton Carpenter and her daughter, Virginia Lewis Carpenter, of 5332 S. Lakewood Boulevard, Yorba Linda, are a coveted combination of old world skill and present-day imagination.

Mecca For Talent

"The Carpenter Studio, located directly behind the house, is a mecca for talent, set in a hodgepodge of crumbled clay and fashioned in a fiesta of color and care.

"Ingenuity breeds a peculiar race of its own - peculiar, but only to those who do not have a taste for beauty.

"Mrs. Carpenter belongs to the generation which at the turn of the century demanded that their women be of genteel nature, loving ornaments prettily placed about the home for their pleasure and soothing amusement of the breadwinners, the men. Few people recognized either women's spunk or talent at this time.

"However, Virginia entered the picture at a time when the country was in the chaos that got the Carpenters started on their ceramic careers.



Virginia Lewis Carpenter with award winning sculpture
Los Angeles, California
1935

Education Cut Short

Money was at a premium, and Virginia had to cut short her education at the University of Southern California. However, she did complete advanced courses in both sculpturing and ceramics.

"After working for pennies at a ceramics factory, the two ambitious Carpenters decided it was time to strike out on their own for greener pastures.

"Virginia's first endeavors were in sculpturing and hammered bronze, and both of them won her prizes at exhibits. She is well proud of the first places she won at Los Angeles Fairs. One of her earlier works was exhibited at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

"Things were progressing nicely for the Carpenters when World War II broke out, and metal for bronze work became next to impossible to buy. It was during this time that ceramics became the center of attraction.

"New York buyers, hard put for buttons, ash trays, vases and other objects de art, made a path to the Carpenters' door. Thousands of hand-carved ceramic buttons were marketed by the talented pair. There seemed to be an unlimited market for their wares.

Do Own Modeling

"However, when the war ended and the foreign markets opened with high volume and low prices, the Carpenters lost their eastern markets and a great percentage of their earning power...

"Unlike most pottery workers, the Carpenters do their own modeling, make their own designs, mix their own colors and make all of their sales completely to order...

"Virginia is librarian at Placentia during the afternoon and evenings, but in the early morning she can be found working on special orders, making moulds, or painting nearly finished pieces.

"According to the Carpenters, there is never a dull moment in ceramic making..."

PLACENTIA AND THE LIBRARY

After the pottery business tapered off income was not meeting expenses. Virginia had been working part time at the Yorba Linda Library but when she heard that the nearby Placentia Library needed more help she applied for a job there. She was hired because she was willing to work Saturdays and evenings as well as week-days. Her almost fulltime work pay was \$125 per month.

Virginia writes, "Placentia had a high school called Valencia, an elementary school up the street and another elementary school in what was called the La Jolla district. That puzzled me at first as I had only heard of the town on the coast. The Placentia La Jolla was where the Mexicans lived, the segregated school was for them. The library had a room there with children's books and Ruth and I went every week for a time to check out books and for her to tell a story. Some of the girls hated to give the workers' camp as an address, they said they lived in the Shamrock Apartments. That was a long building divided into rooms for many families. It stood on bare ground, everything dirty and shabby. It was generally called 'the camp.' Ruth and I went there for overdue books.

"Placentia was considered a Mexican town then...Later when I was researching, I heard the town called the Beverly Hills of Orange County, because of its wealth from oil. Later the La Jolla School's name was changed to the William McFadden School for a town pioneer and much later it was closed."

As the population increased the library staff increased. When Mrs. Tracer was head librarian Virginia had the opportunity to represent the library. She says, Mrs. Tracer sent me to the meetings of the Orange County Library Association which I enjoyed and where I made friends. Then she asked me to go to a special dinner given by the Orange County Historical Society at the Saddleback Inn. I had never been there or thought

about county history, so it was something new for me. She also told me that every library should have the history of its area and state; she began to buy books about California and Orange County, starting the history collection which now has its separate room. I was to be in charge of it, although I felt rather handicapped by my lack of knowledge about California and Orange County. This has been remedied by much reading..."

Virginia Lewis Carpenter launched her writing career with "A Child's History of Placentia," in 1969 (revised in 1984). In 1977 an adult book, PLACENTIA, A PLEASANT PLACE, appeared (revised 1988). A booklet, "Canada de la Brea: Ghost Rancho" was published in 1978. In the 1980's she compiled the INDEX for the 1938 WPA Project #3105, A HISTORY OF ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA. This was published in 1988 by the O.C. Historical Society. Her fourth book, "Don Pacifico Ontiveros" tells about the owner of the rancho on whose land the City of Placentia stands. Virginia's autobiography, AS I LOOK BACK, is her most recent work. Her current project is a book about the early Orange County ranchos.

Virginia says she learned a lot about Orange County when she started her research. She says, "One of my first surprises was that Placentia is not on Yorba land as one book had it. In fact the general idea seems to be that the Yorbas had the only old rancho. Actually there were over eighteen in the county and Placentia is on the land granted to Juan Pacifico Ontiveros in 1837 which was a Mexican grant. There were only two Spanish ones in the county, the Nieto's and the Yorba's.

"Who were the Ontiveros? I began to wonder. I found that they had moved to Santa Maria..." Virginia corresponded with the librarian there and learned that there were many descendants still living. She suggested that Virginia contact Mrs. Porfirio Ontiveros, Erlinda. This she did and later visited her several times gathering information for her book. Erlinda read the final draft of the Ontiveros book and gave Virginia much helpful criticism.



About two years after the death of her mother Virginia bought a 1920's bungalow home in Fullerton with a small yard. She knew retirement was just around the corner. Fortunately, at the same time, the realtor found a buyer for the Yorba Linda property. The two deals were made and Virginia moved to Fullerton.

Virginia is truly a bundle of her ancestors. One can clearly see that many of her abilities can be traced back to her parents and ancestors. For instance take her mother's desire to be a writer, her grandfather Carpenter's organizational ability and his wife's artistic talent, her father's love of the land and the wide open spaces, all of these genes can be found in Virginia Lewis Carpenter which is the reason so many of us find her such an interesting person and a valued friend.

HISTORY WRITER GETS NEW APPLE

A delightful surprise for Virginia came from the Macintosh Computer company. The following story explains the above headline. It appeared in the FULLERTON NEWS TRIBUNE on September 26, 1991. It was written by staff writer, John Kane:

"Virginia Carpenter has another, if underpublicized, distinction besides being an author of four and soon five books on local history.

"The Fullerton resident was one of the first purchasers of the Apple Macintosh personal computer when it came out in 1984.

"Which makes her, at the age of '85-plus,' 'one of the oldest Macintosh users in the world' to 'Computer Currents' columnist Nick Anis.

"When Carpenter's prolific writings finally overwhelmed her Mac 128, Anis went to work convincing computer suppliers to donate a new computer and software to her.

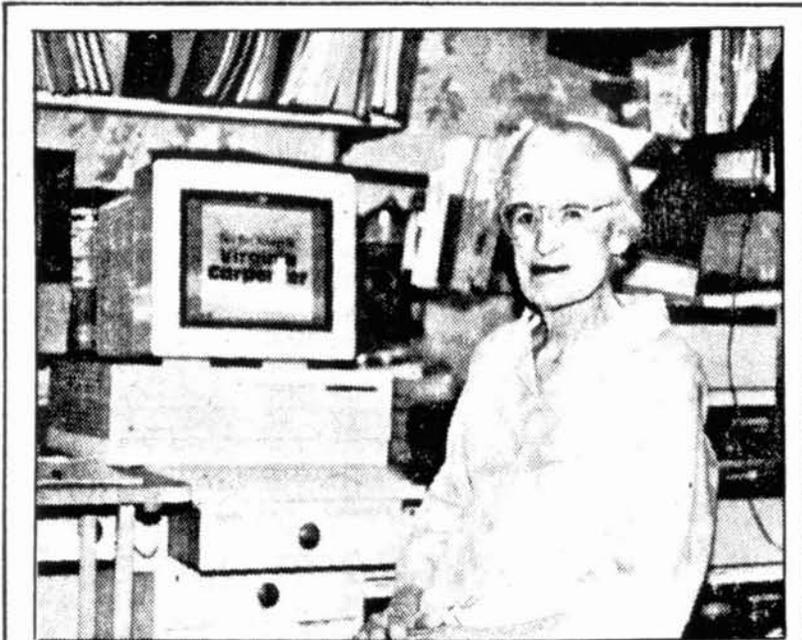
"'For younger folks like us...obsolescence is not a big deal. We whip out the plastic and upgrade to a new model,' said Anis.

"'Virginia can't do that. Her fixed income is limited. She has not color T.V., no microwave, no VCR and no stereo. The only real gadget Virginia has ever had in her modest home is her Macintosh.'

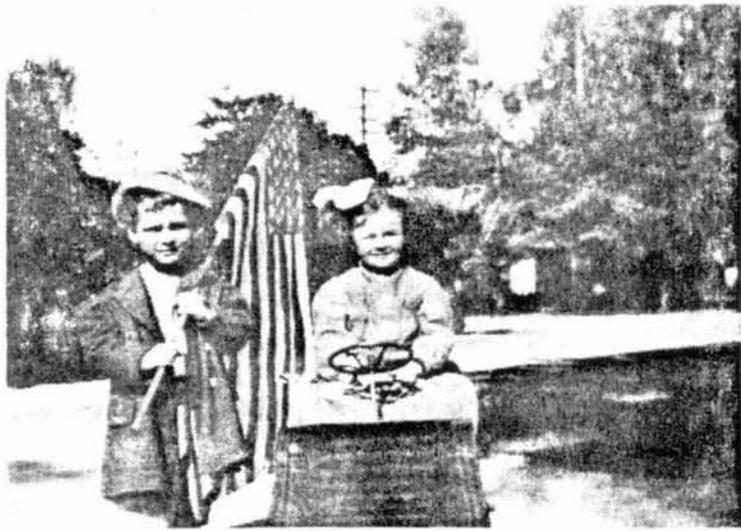
"Last week, Anis and the City Council presented the smiling Carpenter with her new computer, a Macintosh II FX Color System.

"Anis also presented Carpenter with his magazine's 'Computer User of the Year' award and a certificate of appreciation.

"Carpenter, who has lived nearly all her life in Southern California, became an author 20 years ago when she retired after working over the years as a ranch hand, potter and librarian. She is in the process of completing a book on the ranchos of Orange County."



Virginia Carpenter and the new Macintosh donated by computer companies after her old computer finally wore out as she worked on her most recent book chronicling local history.



Cousin Orrick Sloan and Virginia
ca. 1910



Virginia on Top
1917

TOURNAMENT OF ROSES

Pasadena, California