

501 E. Colorado Boulevard



The Orange Avenue Tract, a subdivision of thirty four lots, was made available to prospective buyers in the summer of 1904. The tract was once part of the Rancho Azusa de Duarte, and had previously been part of two separate subdivisions, the Pacific View Tract and Brown's Addition to the Town of Monrovia.

One of those who invested in the new tract was Harvey W.

Williams. Williams lived across the street from the new subdivision, and he purchased Lot 26. Williams sold the lot in 1910 to Louise Swanson, already a resident of Monrovia, who was living at 211 S. Ivy Avenue when the 1910 United States Federal Census was enumerated. Louise Swanson was a dressmaker and earned a comfortable living in an era when very little ready-to-wear clothing was available.

Construction of a new home for Miss Swanson began soon afterward, and the house was completed in 1910 or 1911. The architect and building contractor are not yet known, but the house closely resembles the bungalows being built by the Tifal Brothers in Monrovia at that time, and may be another of their works.

Louise Swanson shared her home with another spinster, Violet Larson, and the two women continued to live at 501 E. Colorado for the next twenty years. Actually it is more correct to say that they lived at 501 E. Orange Avenue, for Orange Avenue was the name given to this street when it first appeared on the map. The name was changed in the early 1930's as the street was connected to the extension of Colorado Boulevard east from Pasadena. By the time the 1930 Monrovia City Directory was compiled, the Misses Swanson and Larson had moved across the street to 422 E. Orange Avenue, and 501 E. Colorado was vacant.

Mabel Violet Larson was born in Henry County, Illinois in September, 1891, the daughter of Frans W. and Anna Louise Larson. Her ancestry was Swedish on both her paternal and maternal sides. Violet was orphaned by the age of nine, and her two older sisters had died by the time she was twelve. Her whereabouts from 1903 to 1910 and how she arrived in Monrovia is a mystery. Since Louise Swanson was also from Henry County, Illinois perhaps she had a connection with the Larson family and took in Violet when Violet had no other family members. Violet died May 20, 1939 and was interred in the Orion Lutheran Cemetery in Henry County, Illinois with her family.

The last record for Louise Swanson is an entry in the telephone directory for May 1939. After that, she completely disappears.

If the city directories are accurate, the house remained vacant from 1930 to 1938. Bear in mind that this was the era of the Great Depression, and life in Monrovia slowed drastically as it did in the rest of the nation. There may have been no market for either the sale or the rental of the house in the midst of a stagnant economy.

By 1939, however, 501 E. Colorado had become the home of George and Charlotte E. Gibson and their second daughter Mary U. Gibson. George was a retired physician from Fort Dodge, Iowa. He brought his family to Monrovia as early as 1935, and the family lived here in several rented houses.

The 1944 Monrovia City Directory indicates that Samuel W. and Rose E. Yeats were the owners of the house. Samuel Yeats was a native of Camberwell, London, England, while Rose was a native of Hilsea, Hampshire, England. Samuel and Rose immigrated to the United States from the Isle of Wright in 1915 with their sons Leslie and Ralph. It appears that their daughter Grace was born in 1916 after the family had settled in Monrovia. Samuel took over the shoe repair shop of Owen Adams at 610 S. Ivy Avenue. He continued in several other Monrovia locations, one of them being 109 E. Lemon Avenue, now the home of Restaurant Devon.

In 1948, the house was being rented to the Rev. Joseph H. Berg and his wife, Anna. Mr. Berg came to Monrovia from Pasadena to pastor St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Monrovia, and then returned to live in Pasadena. Samuel and Rose Yeats were living in another home they owned on Mountain Avenue in Monrovia. Ten years later they had left the area.

The 1950's ushered in another long-time owner, Mrs. Jessie G. Gentry, a widow. Mrs. Gentry was still employed as a cook when the 1950 Monrovia City Directory was compiled; later directories show her as retired. The 1971 Monrovia City Directory, the last directory published for the city, also shows Ralph Gentry and his wife Frances living with Mrs. Gentry.

Jessie Gertrude Beightel was born June 11, 1880 in New Durham, La Porte County, Indiana one of the ten children of David H. and Nancy Sumner Beightel. Her family migrated to Nebraska, and there she married Edward C. Gentry circa 1897 in Buffalo County, Nebraska. They were the parents of nine children: Everett, Merrill, Myrtle, Ralph, Mildred, Evelyn, Alice, Charles, and David. The family later lived in Sutherland, Nebraska. After most of her family was grown, Jessie lived in Sterling, Colorado, Fort Collins, Colorado, and with her son Ralph in San Francisco before coming to live in Monrovia. Jessie Gertrude Gentry died October 3, 1972 at the age of 92, and is buried at Rose Hills in Whittier. Edward C. Gentry preceded her in death by many years. He died January 27, 1935 in Los Angeles County.

After the long Gentry residence, ownership of the house passed to William B. Thrasher and then the current owners, who purchased the house in June, 1979 and promise to be long-time residents as well. The only change to the house since its construction has been an addition to the rear that carefully matches the design and

materials of the original house. The house was recognized as Historic Landmark #9 by action of the Monrovia City Council on October 15, 1996.