

THE TALBERT FAMILY

We wonder how many of the members and guests of Orange County California Genealogical Society have given thought to the name Talbert that we regularly see about us? We know that the Huntington Beach Public Library is located at 7111 Talbert Avenue in that city, on a hill at the edge of the large Central Park. But do many know that the small lake we see below us through the spacious view windows at the rear of the building is named Talbert Lake? We hold our monthly meetings in the large first floor room named the Talbert Room. Have many read the bronze plaque on one wall? It states:

1979

GWENDOLYN R. TALBERT ROOM

IN MEMORY OF

GWENDOLYN R. TALBERT WHO DEVOTED

42 YEARS OF LIBRARY SERVICE

TO THE PEOPLE OF HUNTINGTON BEACH.

There are many interesting accounts of the Talbert family in the background of what we see. Many of the officers of the Society knew Gwen from the year 1975 in which our collection of books and materials was moved into the new Library by mutual agreement. The thoroughly modern and large building was finished in 1975. She was administration assistant to Walter Johnson, Head Librarian. We were accorded a maximum of cooperation from both of them in getting settled in our new quarters on the upper level from which there is a good view, with the lake in the foreground. Unfortunately, she died on May 3, 1979. She was survived by her husband, one daughter Pat Singletary, and two sons, Timothy Van Talbert and Joseph Reeves Talbert. The records show that she was born on October 8, 1912.

She was the wife of Thomas Van Talbert and they were married in 1933. Thomas Van was the son of Thomas Benjamin Talbert, and in 1982 Thomas Van published the book, "My 60 years in California", containing the personal writings of his father, written in 1952. The book gives a detailed account of those 60 years. The Reference Department of the Library has a copy. Gwendolyn's first husband was Samuel Willis Singletary. They were married in 1933 and Pat was their daughter, born in 1937, living with the family until her marriage in 1961 to P.L. Lindquist. After a later divorce Gwendolyn remarried in 1942. Her second husband, Thomas Van Talbert, by a prior marriage had one son, Thomas Flake Talbert who lived with his mother. To the second marriage for both of them were born two sons, Timothy Van Talbert in 1946, and Joseph Reeves Talbert in 1953. Gwendolyn's maiden name was Reeves, a family that was prominent in the area. Her father was Carlos Reeves (1873-1967) and her mother was Mattie Lou Reeves (1883-1960).

Of the Talbert family the oldest record we have commences with James Thomas, born in Muhlenberg County, May 24, 1839, in Kentucky. The family name is of French and English derivation. He married Rachel Weddle on March 7, 1861, whose family also lived in Kentucky. Their children were Nancy, Mary, Nettie, Evelyn, Frances and Lavina, followed by Samuel, Thomas and Henry. The oldest girls were born in a Kentucky log cabin. As the prairie lands opened to the west, many settlers moved in that direction, among them the family of Tom Lincoln who, with Abe emigrated by ox team and raft to settle on the Sangamon River in Piatt County, Illinois. Quite a few years later the Talbert family followed the same trail and settled on that river a few miles below the site of the Lincoln family's former home.

In the early days of the Civil War James joined the Volunteers and was put in Co. D of the 73rd Infantry, Illinois Regiment. Son Thomas Benjamin was born March 5, 1878 in Piatt County, Illinois, where the family had a dairy farm of 120 acres. The wife of James died in 1882 and about 1884 he married Margaret Crumm. The heaviest burden of operating the farm fell on the boys over long hours. But things changed in 1891 after word came back from relatives or friends in California, boasting of the climate, open land, possibilities for growth. The whole Talbert family moved by rail to California on February 4, 1891, when Thomas Benjamin neared his 13th birthday. The father settled near Cerritos taking a 6½ year lease on a dairy farm on which the boys helped operate a successful business. But he sold his interest in it 1896 and bought 322 acres of swamp land below Bolsa. All over the area artesian water flowed freely. Thomas Benjamin was schooled in Long Beach and by 1893 a High School District was formed that included the sparsely settled areas we now know as San Pedro, Wilmington, Downey & Compton. The Federal census of 1890 showed a population of 500 for Long Beach.

The small pioneer town of Talbert was started as a drainage district around 1900. It was located at the present intersection of Talbert Ave. and Bushard St., now in Fountain Valley. Today about all that remains of the old town of Talbert is a small church approximately 80 years old across Bushard from an old mercantile building which is thought to be the one Thomas Benjamin operated briefly when 26 years old. In those early years Huntington Beach was named Shell Beach, with 40 acres of frontage on the beach. But in 1901 the name was changed to Huntington Beach and so dedicated July 4, 1904. These were boom years in real estate but T.B. Talbert entered that field even though there were 52 real estate agents in the town.

In 1902 a wooden pier had been built but it was replaced in 1911-1914 through sale of pier bonds. Not until 1915 was there an improved road between Huntington Beach and Santa Ana. Oil was discovered in 1918.

Thomas Benjamin had considerable ability in politics and community development, as well as leadership in improving the whole area. When in 1909 there was a vacancy in the Second Supervisor District of Orange County, he filed in 1910 and went on the Board in 1911 as Chairman. He was reelected every two years until 1927 and it was a great period of growth in the city and county. In 1922 he was elected President of the State Supervisor's Association of California. In 1934 he was elected mayor of Huntington Beach for 4 years and 5 months. The Chamber of Commerce honored him in 1950 as "Man of the Half Century".

It is interesting that in the last part of his writings in 1952 he envisions the future of Huntington Beach and nearby areas, telling of the growth and wonders yet to come. Little could he foresee then everything that far surpassed his optimistic outlook, but he lived to see some of the progress until he died in 1968, at age 90. The family burial plot is located not far away from the main gate of the Good Shepherd Cemetery, corner of Talbert Ave. and Beach Blv'd in Huntington Beach. The plot of the Reeves family adjoins it.

E. R. BARTON

ROADSIDE ATTRACTION

Talbert Avenue honors founders of Fountain Valley

Talbert Avenue begins in Huntington Beach, the city where Tom Talbert's life ended, and ends in Fountain Valley, the city that he and his brothers began. The irony is something Talbert might have found amusing and appropriate.

The eighth of nine children, Talbert was born March 5, 1878, in Pratt County, Ill. The Talbert family migrated in 1891 from Illinois to Long Beach, where they operated a dairy farm on land leased from the old Bixby Ranch. In 1897, 19-year-old Tom and his brothers, Henry, 17, and Sam, 21, bought a 322½-acre ranch at \$40 per acre, using a \$1,500 down payment borrowed from their father.

It wasn't a promising investment: Much of the land was peat swamp and mud, but the three Talberts managed to find

enough dry land to build a general store and a smithy. Over time, the unpromising bog was drained and the businesses became the nucleus of a new town: Talbert.

The Talberts hadn't wanted to name their town Talbert. Because artesian wells bubbled out of the ground throughout the area, they had wanted to name it Fountain Valley. But the U.S. Post Office would not accept a two-word name, except in cases of unusual historical significance. So Fountain Valley was named Talbert by default. The town's name officially was changed in 1957.

In 1904, Tom Talbert sold his business and his interest in the ranch, moved to Huntington Beach and became a real-estate agent. He was appointed Orange County's 2nd District supervisor

in 1909 when George Moore resigned the post for business reasons. Talbert was elected to the post in 1910 and later was appointed chairman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, a post he held eight times during the 17½ years he served on the board. He stopped running for the office in 1927.

He became mayor of Huntington Beach for two years in 1934 and was elected to the post again in 1942 and 1944. As a politician, Talbert was instrumental in constructing the Huntington Beach Pier, extending Pacific Coast Highway from Laguna Beach to Malibu, developing the county's system of parks and fighting for municipal participation in tidelands oil revenues.

He died at Huntington Beach Intercommunity Hospital in January 1968.

— Kim Hefner/The Register

