

Down Memory Lane
Mary Etta Broadwell

J. F. Kendall

In 1899 a black cloud with its center a whirling cone of incredible speed passed over a comfortable Kansas farm house with the roar of a gigantic locomotive. Leaving the house flattened in a mass of debris the famous cyclone of that year destroyed barns, livestock and farm equipment, leaving desolation in its wake.

Emerging from the cellar where he and his wife had been crouched for safety. J.F. Kendall looked on the wreckage of his home and farm and knew that after years of endeavor a new start would have to be made.

It wasn't long before he decided the new start should be in California. As soon as his affairs were in order, he acted on that decision, and with Mrs. Kendall came to this part of the country in September, 1899.

In partnership with his brother-in-law, Charlie Madison, he became co-owners of the Covina Valley Meat Market, a business he conducted for the next 22 years.

Driving a horse and cart Mr. Kendall delivered meat to Covina households, bringing to the housewife, particularly those who lived in the country, a modern-day convenience.

The business grew until it became feasible for the firm to buy cattle for slaughter by the carload, and thereby hangs a tale of one of the most exciting days in Covina History.

Attempting to unload a carload of Texas longhorns into the old corral at the Southern Pacific station, the cattle stampeded. Scattering to the four winds it took three days to round them up. Some of the incidents surrounding this escapade were amusing while others were narrowly averted tragedies.

Declaring that there were (or at least seemed to be) 500 phone calls from people objecting to steers in their groves, Mr. Kendall breathed a sigh of relief when the last steer was accounted for.

Becoming interested in ranching, Mr. Kendall bought a 7 ½-acre grove on Glendora Avenue near Cypress in 1910. Coming to California to escape cyclones, he found the noted freeze of 1913 almost as destructive.

That year the temperature fell to 14 degrees. Not only did many ranchers lose their crops but two-thirds of their trees, the terrific cold actually splitting the trunks.

Is hard to think of Mr. Kendall without also thinking of the Covina Fire Department as the two seem almost synonymous. Joining the department in 1900 when James Hodges, Sr., was first fire-chief, Mr. Kendall served continuously with his department until his retirement in 1914.

In 1907 at the instigation of Mayor J. N. Wilson a meeting of property owners was held at the Harley Garrison Bicycle shop on Citrus Avenue. At this meeting Mr. Kendall was elected fire-chief, a position held for 34 years.

At that time the Covina fire department consisted solely of several assorted buckets and a hose and reel. When the bell in the Methodist Church sounded the alarm, volunteers would gather at the bandstand located on the lots where the city hall now stands. Four of them would grab up ropes attached to the reel while with two others would guide the reel by the tongue, this human six-horse team would gallop to the fire.

Of course if one of the few hydrants in town wasn't near the burning building the hose wasn't of much use. In that case a bucket brigade, dipping water from a nearby irrigation ditch, had to serve the purpose.

In 1911 the town voted enough bonds to build the old fire-hall located behind the present building. Clarence Allison was the contractor and builder and when it was completed the whole community felt a glow of civic pride – this was indeed progress.

At this time the department graduated to the hook and ladder class. The new equipment was built by Blacksmiths A. Nigg and Johnson.

Several familiar names were among those who served on the department with Mr. Kendall at that time including Roy Goodell, Frank Bisbee, Henry Brandon, Elmer Nigg, Ed Adams, and Harley Garrison, W.C. Merwin and Martin Hohman.

The first truck driver to draw a salary was Simon Degree.

Frank Bisbee owned a Winton touring car and that car replaced the six-man team. When the alarm sounded, Mr. Bisbee would quickly drive to the Winton to the fire hall, the hook and ladder would be attached and away they would go.

This served until 1914 when the beautiful new Boyd firetruck, complete with pump and modern equipment, was purchased. The whole town declared a holiday to witness the tests made at the old Covina irrigating reservoir. Guaranteed to pump 700 gallons a minute, carefully watched gauges proved it capable of pumping 875 gallons.

By Mr. Kendall's own admission, this was one of the few times in his life that he missed going home for dinner. That boyd truck is still doing valiant service.

The annual venison dinners Mr. Kendall barbecues for members of the department have become a tradition in Covina. Kendall goes hunting in Utah every year and so far has never failed to bring home deer, for this "firemen's feed." At this very minute, and I hope it isn't a secret, two deer are in cold storage awaiting Mr. Kendall's skillful culinary tactics.

He now devotes his entire time to ranching, owning several groves, but there is no question that the fire department is his first love.

He and his present Mrs. Kendall, who is the daughter of Jeremiah Shank, another early settler, reside at the corner of Third and College street in the house Mr. Kendall purchased in 1913. He is a member of the Oddfellows, a director of the Covina Irrigation company, was city councilman for 16 years, and has been a director of the First Federal Savings and Loan Association since it became established in Covina.

Due to his 34 years as fire-chief Covina residents can feel secure that their property is efficiently protected from devastating fire.

ON OR ABOUT JANUARY 18, 1962.....

The City of Covina expressed, through a Council resolution, its sympathy to the family of J. Frank Kendall, 87, who died January 10 in a traffic accident outside his home at 333 N. Grand Avenue.

The city resolution stated:

"... J. Frank Kendall served the City of Covina as a volunteer fireman for four years, as fire chief for 35 years and as a city councilman for 12 years, and

"..... he further served his community as a member of the board of directors of the Covina Irrigating Co. for 24 years,

"now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of the City of Covina....(that) the passing of J. Frank Kendall is a great lost to the City of Covina and we express to his family our appreciation of his long and devoted service.

"we recognize the great personal loss to his family and we extend our profound sympathy."

Mayor Howard Hawkins signed the resolution following unanimous approval of Councilmen Edwards, Yeager, Colver, Voisinet and Hawkins.

