

Down Memory Lane
Mary Etta Broadwell

James R. Hodges

When gold was discovered in California the whole world bestowed upon it the name of the "Golden Statue", and in so doing uttered a prophecy. Much of the free gold has been collected from the ground, but a richer treasure remains. With the planting of fruit bearing trees in Southern California has come a period of great prosperity, far outdistancing the wildest dreams of any seeker after the old-time El Dorado.

This remarkable condition has only come through the patience, skill and unremitting hard work of the pioneers in the industry, one of whom is the late James R. Hodges.

The youngest in a family of five children, young James came to California with his parents at the age of 13. Even then he gave evidence of self-reliance and entered upon an apprenticeship in the office of the Santa Ana Herald. He worked on several newspapers in this part of California, including the Los Angeles Star.

At the age of 20 he left the newspaper business and bought 20 acres of land at a point one mile northwest of the little hamlet of Covina. This was in 1883 before the townsite was laid out.

He reclaimed his land from the wild state and planted one of the first nurseries in the district. It is very possible that his was the very first since no record has been found to prove another nursery was established previously. It is reasonable to assume that this is true since Mr. Hodges' nursery is the only nursery advertised in the first issue of the Covina Independent published in 1885.

In 1886 the white scale had made great inroads on the citrus industry in this locality, orange growers became discouraged and nursery stocks were allowed to die out in order to be replaced with healthy stock.

Under these conditions Mr. Hodges made three trips to Florida, for seeded stock which he sold for 75 cents a tree. He also contracted with the growers to

import the trees, plant and bud them, and take care of the grove for three years. For this service he received \$1.50 per tree.

In the earlier period of his residence here the Covina colony had but few settlers, and although industrial and civic conditions were not prepossessing, he never faltered in his course. With the passing years he won substantial success.

A man of superior mentality, Mr. Hodges effectively overcame the educational handicap of his youth, and it is especially interesting to note that he mastered the German and Spanish languages and also familiarized himself with the difficult Chinese language.

A born linguist, his children remember him quoting from Latin and French literature. Because of his knowledge of foreign languages he was often in demand as an interpreter.

He also gave close attention to the study of law, and on several occasions represented clients in court. From 1884 to 1900 he served continuously as justice of the peace when this valley was under one lower court jurisdiction.

Extremely versatile, Mr. Hodges not only conducted the first nursery in the district, but was one of the first builders. Among the buildings he constructed was the one where Longworth's is now located, the building immediately east of the Buick agency on Badillo street and one or two others on Citrus avenue.

Gaining a reputation as an authority in horticultural industry, especially in the growing of citrus fruits, he gave efficient service in the position of official horticultural inspector for Los Angeles county, serving from 1910 to 1923.

The University of California has credited Mr. Hodges with discovering the "nematode", a parasite that attacks the roots of citrus trees. He is also credited with being the first to recognize the value of nitrate of soda as a source of nitrogen for citrus trees. At that time his theory was contrary to the belief of many experts who condemned its use.

From his ranch work with Mexican nationals he gained a great respect for the culture of that country. A gifted mandolin and guitar player he was always a welcome guest at Mexican weddings and fiestas.

Mr. Hodges' death occurred in 1937 when he was 74 years of age. Mrs. Hodges, who became his bride in 1889, resides in the family home on School street. Three of their four children make their homes in Covina. The only daughter, Mrs. Vivian Campbell, resides with her mother. James G. Hodges of Adams Park Drive is manager of the Valenica Heights Orchards, Inc. Another son, Louis A. Hodges, who served for several terms on the city council, resides on North First street. The eldest son, Dr. Clarence Hodges, is a professor at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Were Mr. Hodges alive he would be extremely proud of his two grandsons, Donald Campbell and James Hodges, III, both in the service of their country. Sharing honors would be his three granddaughters, Dixie Hodges, who holds a responsible position with the International Business Machines Corporation, Lois Vivienne Campbell, employed in the local branch of the Bank of America and gifted with a lovely singing voice, Louise Hodges and Dorothy Hodges, honor student of Covina high school, and three daughters of Clarence Hodges. All worthy descendants of their pioneer grandfather.