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Phelan's Yesterdays

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Edited *by george*

Residents of Phelan Are Proud

Residents of Phelan are especially proud of their rugged individuality and pioneer spirit. Many who originally came to the area did so as homesteaders, while others who bought land saw this community as an opportunity to stretch out and carve out their own unique lifestyles.

Ruth McDaniel is a Phelan Pioneer.

Ruth McDaniel, who lived next door to Phelan Elementary School, is one Phelan Pioneer. She came to the area in 1939, at the age of 24, with her first husband, Gordon Mannigel. In 1940 they bought five acres, which included the Phelan Store on the corner of Sheep Creek and Phelan Road.



Mountaineer-Progress
Southeast corner of Phelan & Sheep Creek
Roads

The First Phelan Post Office

The first U. S. Post Office, which came to Phelan in 1916, spent many of its early years housed within the Phelan Store. From 1939 to 1970 Ruth McDaniel was Phelan's Postmaster. And for 18 years she served as a custodian for the San Bernardino County Library. Until the bookmobile began servicing Phelan in the 1960's the Phelan Store contained two cases filled with library books.

The Store Was More

Yet, the store was more than a mini-library and post office. It carried groceries, hardware, kerosene and had gasoline pumps. It was an old fashioned general store, with a potbellied stove brewing for visitors.

Ruth McDaniel sold a portion of her land in 1947, after her husband passed away from a heart attack. She continued to run the store until 1955. At that time she leased out the store, yet continued to serve as library custodian and postmaster. And in 1960 she sold the store.

Phelan has always been pronounced "Feelin"

According to her, Phelan has always been pronounced "Feelin". Before she came to the area, when the residents were trying to decide on a name, the Post Office named the area for Senator Phelan from San Francisco. The residents, who had been unable to agree on a name before the Post Office stepped in, were upset with the Post Office's choice. And so, while Senator Phelan pronounced his name "Fa lyn", the residents began calling their community "Feelin."



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Ruth & Al McDaniel & children, Barbara Mannigal (Koop), Betty McDaniel, Tommy Mannigal & Stephen Mannigal

Ruth Came to Phelan in 1939

When Ruth first came to Phelan in 1939, land could be bought for \$10 an acre. The local industry consisted of orchards, such as peach and apple, and one or more chicken ranches. World War II brought in more residents, as servicemen's families searched out places to live close to the base. After the war, according to Ruth, everything changed. People expected things would settle down and be the same, and they never did.

Phelan Hooked to Electricity in 1947

One change, which occurred in 1947, was Phelan's hook up to electricity. Yet, this was no simple task, it took several years of hard work to come about. According to Ruth, it was a Sue Wilkerson, from Pinon Hills, who initially instigated the project. Community residents from Phelan and surrounding areas banded together to form a Rural Electrification Administration (REA). While the success of the REA might allow them to produce their own electricity, they also negotiated with the electrical companies.

The President of their committee was Henry Johnson. He was presented with an opportunity to acquire electricity for himself and decided to go ahead and get it. Apparently many of his neighbors were incensed, feeling it was unfair for him to have electricity when they couldn't. A few people held a 'sit in' of sorts, until an injunction was granted, to prevent the installation of his power lines. For a time a bit of a feud existed between Johnson and the community.

Finally, in 1947, agreements were made with California Electric and all but 3 Phelan residents received electricity. As for the feud, according to Mrs. McDaniel, it finally was all but forgotten. She recalled Henry Johnson fondly, remembering he worked hard on the school board and brought the Grange to the area.

Telephone Service Came In 1950

Telephone service didn't come to Phelan until 1950. And then it wasn't quite the service we think of today. It consisted of 3 or 4 crank style pay phones through Pacific Bell. Home phones arrived in the area a decade later.

Ruth McDaniel Was Active in Community

Until 1979 Ruth McDaniel was active in community affairs. As a mother she was active in the Phelan Women's Club. For a time the club (no affiliation to California or National Women's Clubs) provided hot lunches for the school. Ruth recalled that even when she first came to the area in 1939, the school children received hot lunches. Often the Women's Club meetings were held in her home, so that she would be able to run over to the store and wait on customers.

The Women's Club and Grange also held a yearly bazaar. The profits were used to buy candy and gifts for the children, which were presented at the yearly Christmas Party in the community center, located within the Old Phelan School House.

Chamber of Commerce created in 1961

In 1961 the Phelan Chamber of Commerce was created. And for a good many years Ruth was active within the organization.

Today Ruth lives with her husband in the local community of Hesperia.

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