

Taft, California
Greetings from Pete Gianopulos
The Taft Newsletter

Boom Town Taft, California
By

Edward F. "Eddie" Coffee
(Tenth in the series)

The series will continue of some of the writings of Eddie Coffee. Eddie came to Taft in 1920 and died several years ago. He was a great source of knowledge about Taft and the area. . . These articles are from an unpublished typewritten account of his memories as one who grew up and was educated in the Taft schools and lived here as an adult until his death.

Old Timers (Continued)

Elmer Houchin -- Everybody has heard of the Houchin brothers, Elmer and Lester Houchin. When I first met Elmer Houchin owned a tiny butcher shop in the Smith Building on Center Street (Smith Bros. Clothiers, 429 Center Street, clothiers "From Lad to Dad," and owned by A. B. Smith (Abner), phone 319 J.) He used to cover those black shoes he used to wear with tallow and grease and then he'd walk across the street to my shine stand and ask me for a shine. Well, I did best I could. All you could do was blacken them up. Shoes with grease on them won't shine too well you know!

In later years he and his brother became big farmers and also owned and operated the Pioneer Chevrolet on Main Street (408 Main Street).

My old friend Clarence Williams. Clarence came to Taft in 1910 and went off to fight World War I. He came back and married Nellie Lierly. She was from the family that owned Lierly's Plunge (located about 7 miles north of Taft and about two miles east of highway 119).

(NOTE: Nellie Lierly was one of two first graduates of the local high school in 1915. Because the school in Taft was under the direction of Bakersfield's Kern Union High School, the two girls had to go to Bakersfield to get their diplomas. The following year the school became a Taft high school.)

I was a friend of Clarence Williams all through the years. When he was president of the Rotary Club, I was the secretary. He and Nellie and Jeanie and I traveled together and had lots of fun. They were just fine people.

J. Dykes Johnson, a big baseball star at Taft High School. I think he was a third baseman, but I am not sure about that. He's Dr. Dykes Johnson (Joseph Dykes Johnson, M. D. and his wife was Louella. He died at 86 year of age. He and his wife are buried in a crypt at the West Side District Cemetery.)

I know I mentioned Red Faulkner before, but I just mention that he was a big football star at Taft High. That was in the days when they didn't have light of heavy weights. If you were tough enough to get out there and play you played football.

President Harding -- In 1922 or 23, I'm not sure when President Harding died, but we didn't have radios or televisions of course, and I sold newspaper extras on Center Street and then I went to South Taft. No street lights, and I yelled, "Extra, extra, President Harding is dead!"

Betty Henderson -- She came from the same town in Indiana that I did, Evansville. Her mother and my father were sister and brother. Betty came to Taft in about 1922 and lived in a little framed house on Naylor and Wood Streets. She went to Conley School, we called it the White School.

In 1932 she was married to a man named Robert Young, better known to the TV fans as Marcus Welby. They are still married and very happy together. I was at their home back in the early years in Beverly Hills on Elm Street. After Aunt Mead, Betty's mother died, we haven't seen her.

Stumbaugh family -- Wayne Stumbaugh, a great wrestler. He weighed 170 pounds and was the State of California champion in that weight division. I happened to up in Seattle in 1933 visiting a brother, and Wayne was one of the wrestling cards up there. He was fine guy and super athlete. Of course his brother Harry did a little wrestling also. Harry worked for and was

a California Highway Patrolman. And, you all remember Harley, he used to be the Chief of Police in Taft and was the Under Sheriff of Kern County. He served under Roy Gallion, Charlie Dodge and Al Loustelot. He retired about the same time I did in 1977. They had a fine sister, Erma Spence, who just passed away a short time ago. She lived on the corner of 4th and Warren Streets. She played the piano for many occasions and when I was attempting to vocalize at different functions she was my accompanist and would help me out. All the Stumbaughs are gone now, the only ones left are their children and grandchildren.

Reader's Responses and **Other Information**

From Homer Curtis Dryer, Class of 1968

I am of the class of 1968 from Taft High School and 1970 from Taft JC and have not heard from any class mate in 40 years!!! Have no idea who to contact for the What, When, and Where. If you hear of anyone or have contact information let me know as I would not mind attending. Regards, Homer Curtis Dryer, Class of 68

Class of 1968 40th Class Reunion

The 40th TUHS reunion has been scheduled for October 24,25, 26, 2008. According to that classes website in the TUHS www.Taft.k12.ca.us webb site you can contact that class at gense1950@yahoo.com

From Michael Enault, Class of 1963 from Yuma, Arizona

Pete, my dad used to go to a Chinese guy who had a grocery store and a back room with lots of Chinese medicine stuff in the back. I can't remember where it was, but I'm thinking somewhere around Kern Street?? Any ideas? Thanks and thanks for the news letter from Taft. You bring back lots of memories.

Michael Enault

TUHS class of '63

(NOTE: The little Chinese store was located at 418 Kern Street and was called K. S. Sue Herbs where you could buy all sorts of herb mediation for any medical problem. He had two daughters who attended and graduated from Taft Union High School, but I don't remember their names or what class they were in. The building was recently remodeled and is now a small grocery store.)

Linda Talbert, Class of 1957, from Princeville, Kunai, Hawaii

I am so happy to receive all the news! I am in Denia and hiking every day in the mountains since I left Barcelona! These mountains are spectacular and have a maze of hiking trails throughout so I take a different route every day and go for three to six miles often running into tiny villages and then I talk with the people and improve my Spanish! I am having a great time!! I leave tomorrow for Geres, Portugal, a week there, then home! Love, Linda

From Bill Wood, Class of 1964, from Bellevue, Nebraska

Hi Pete:

This is Bill Wood I had written asking if you could put me in touch with anyone who still lived in Taft from 1950. As luck would have it someone who reads your news letter saw the one that I was asking for this information told my cousin about it while she was in Taft for a funeral of a good friend. So my cousin and I found each other because of your news letter. You have talked about the Masonic Temple (521 North Street)in the last couple of letters I remember it as a kid, it was next door to Lair's ice cream store (523 North Street) and across the street from Dykes Johnson's medical clinic (520 North Street). I'm a Blue Lodge, Scottish Rite Mason also a Shriner and Shrine Clown.

Bill Wood

From Charles Welby, Class of 1944, from Raleigh, North Carolina

Good Evening, Pete,

Thought I would try again an e- mail to you. Sent one to you from FEZ, MOROCCO, back in the first week in February. Its main purpose was to congratulate you on the TUHS Hall of Fame election, although I did put in a few other miscellaneous items. Anyway, congratulations again (even if belated).

Your latest Taft Newsletter and its section on Milton Ross brought up some facts and memories. When on those rare occasions that I am in Taft, driving past the Milton Ross Auditorium at the Taft Primary School invokes some of those memories. In short, like you, I had Mr. Ross for a manual training teacher in 6th through 8th grades at Lincoln School, graduating a

couple of years after you did. I have in our kitchen the bread board that I made in one of the manual training/woodworking classes, and in our living room the bookcase that I made as the 8th grade project. Among my recollections of Mr. Ross is the fact that he had a nice bass voice and sang in the choir at the Presbyterian Church and sometimes soloed. I suspect that there were other places and occasions where he contributed vocally to a program.

Cheers, Charles Welby