

Down Memory Lane
Mary Etta Broadwell

W.Q. Custer

Like so many of the pioneers who came to this valley before the turn of the century, William Quinter Custer, who in 1890, arrived in Covina with his wife and infant son, purchased vacant land in the community and planted it to citrus trees. The family came from the state of Washington where Mr. Custer taught school.

His grave was located on Puente Street, and due to his faith in the citrus industry and the faith of men like him, the Covina valley was built up a citrus industry second to none in the southland.

Sometime in the middle '90's he expanded his interests by establishing the "Covina Furniture Company" located on the present site of the Covina theatre.

At that time, the post office was in the same block and when it was moved to Badillo Street, Mr. Custer took over the entire building. Within a space of time and in conjunction with the furniture store, he conducted an undertaking business. One of the few funeral directors in the valley, he was known as a pioneer in that field. His new enterprise met with marked success.

Soon after 1900 he bought the Oakdale cemetery on Grand Avenue from a Mr. Dawson of Azusa. Only a small part of the cemetery was developed at that time, and he is credited with planning and laying out a larger area.

Although conducting two flourishing businesses and looking after his citrus interests, Mr. Custer devoted much of his time and effort to the newly organized Covina Baptist Church. He was a charter member when the church was founded in 1896 and served as a trustee and church clerk for several years.

His loyalty to the denomination served as an example over four decades. In his later years when he was almost wholly deaf and could not hear the sermon, he would still regularly attend services and would faithfully take part in the singing of the hymns--worshipping in his own quiet way. At the time of his death, he was a life deacon of the church.

About 1912 he built a spacious home on the northeast corner of Citrus Avenue and Center Street. For many years, the Custer home became the gathering place for various organizations in which Mr. and Mrs. Custer were interested.

At the same time, he had erected the old building on the present site of the Custer-Christiansen funeral home. Approximately four years later the present building was built, and residents of that time will recall the sign over the door of which he was immensely proud, "W. Q. Custer, Funeral Director".

In 1921 he sold his interest to Gene Christiansen who retained the name of Custer as a badge of integrity. Gradually retiring from active business, Mr. Custer sold his interest in the Oakdale cemetery association. This was around 1930.

During the latter years of his life, he devoted his time to real estate investments. Several pieces of Los Angeles and Hollywood property were included in his estate at the time of his death in 1936.

An octogenarian, Mr. Custer suddenly passed away while he was visiting friends and relatives in Indiana. His body was shipped to California, and he was laid to rest in Oakdale cemetery.

He was the father of three sons, Mark, who passed away in 1926, Paul Custer, mechanical engineer, who resides with his wife and daughter on Adams Park Drive, and Clyde Custer, owner of the Covina Book and Art Store.