

Recalling the Long Beach Earthquake of 1933

Juanita Lovret, Orange County Register, 3-9-11

Seventy-eight years ago this week, on March 10, 1933, an earthquake which would become known as the Long Beach Earthquake struck Tustin just before 7 pm.

Like many other Tustin families, we were still at the supper table when a giant roar shook the house. We tried to stand as a thunderous pounding threatened to break through the ceiling, but with the table rocking back and forth, it was impossible.

"Earthquake!" my father cried. "Stay where you are."

After a few minutes when the house ceased rocking and rolling, we managed to scramble to the back door and force the screen open. The steps and porch were littered with bricks. The giant old walnut tree was still dipping down, brushing the dirt with its branches. We quickly surveyed the damage and discovered the chimney had collapsed, cascading bricks down the slope of the roof onto the area outside the back door. We suddenly realized that if we had been able to get up, we'd probably have been buried by the avalanche.

When all seemed calm, my mother ventured back into the house and started telephoning to see if the rest of the family had survived. Amazingly, she was able to get through and learn that relatives in Santa Ana and Orange were scared and shaken, but safe.

Eventually we learned that the quake had centered on the Newport/Inglewood fault offshore 31.2 miles from Newport with a magnitude of 6.3.

Santa Ana had extensive damage with three deaths. Although the American Legion immediately mobilized, Tustin experienced slight damage and no deaths. Forty houses lost their chimneys.

The Tustin News reported on March 17, "The Knights of Pythias building was damaged to the extent of \$200, it was estimated, when bricks were thrown from the front and north walls and cracks developed in the south wall. The First National Bank building, the oldest structure in town, was slightly damaged. The Tustin Drug Store suffered considerable loss when bottles were thrown to the floor and broken."

Grocery store shelves were cleared, but the only house reporting extensive damage was Los Alisos, a 16-room home on West Main Street. Originally built by Roy Ozmun in the late 1800s, it had been occupied by Madame Modjeska at one time and was home to the A.J. Cruickshank family at the time of the disaster.

Tustin Grammar School required a great deal of repair including removing the second level of the auditorium. Classes were held in empty store buildings as well as the Sunday School rooms at the Tustin Presbyterian Church until work was completed in December 1934.

Aftershocks continued until May 16, reaching 79. Helen Gulick Huntley recorded in her diary that they were felt all day March 11, dropped to 15 on March 12, then became fewer.

Damage in Tustin was minimal, but the ruins I saw when we drove into Santa Ana a few days later were frightening. I'll never forget the Rossmore Hotel with its outside wall missing, exposing the rooms and their furnishings.