

BENNETT HOUSE FACT SHEET

The home of Harvey and Frances Bennett was originally located at 2nd Street and Cherry Avenue. The house was built about 1908 by Harvey's father, Charles F. Bennett of Tustin, who had purchased land in El Toro to grow navel oranges. Charles Bennett constructed the house to provide a home place for a live-in caretaker to oversee his El Toro holdings.

In 1910, Charles Bennett contracted pneumonia and his son, Harvey, left high school to become the ranch foreman. This was quite a sacrifice for Harvey who had planned to attend Berkeley. Harvey never left the Bennett Ranch and became a citrus farmer interested in improving strains of oranges and lemons. He served on the Boards of the Tustin Hill Citrus Association and the Olive Heights Lemon Association. He was a member of the Orange County Farm Bureau for over 50 years and worked together with Raymond Prothero, Sr to bring the Metropolitan Water District water to El Toro for orchard irrigation.

Frances McDonnell of Santa Ana, with other high school girls, worked during the summers on the Bennett Ranch pitting apricots. This was how the girls earned money for their school books and clothes. This was a social time. The various apricot camps in El Toro gave regular parties. Frances had known Harvey in high school and they were married in October 1913. Harvey must have been pretty convincing because Frances had already accepted to the nursing program at Good Samaritan Hospital, Los Angeles.

After their marriage, Frances led a busy life raising 6 children, cooking, washing and sewing for the family and ranch hands, and teaching Sunday School at St. George's Episcopal Mission. Frances was active in community work being a member of the Ladies Aide Society which later became the El Toro's Women's Club. She has also been a member of Santa Ana Ebell Club since 1919.

This one and one-half story gray stucco house built about 1909 consisted of living room, dining room, kitchen, 2 bedrooms, and a bathroom where closet is now, and three rooms upstairs. The middle upstairs room was Frances Bennett's sewing room, other 2 rooms were used for storage or ranch hand's bedrooms.

Indoor plumbing was added about 1915 with water piped to the bathroom and kitchen. Bath water was heated on the stove. Children bathed in the wash tub in front of the wood stove in the kitchen. They bathed once or twice a week. Electricity came to El Toro about 1928 when a hot water heater was installed and the wood stove was replaced with an electric stove.

Two back bedrooms were added and the bathroom relocated about 1928. The rear bedrooms were built because the Bennett girls did not like to go upstairs to sleep. They were afraid to go up the narrow stairs with a kerosene lamp into a dark room.

This is the way the original cement porch looked, complete with cobblestone pilasters. Frances Bennett sat a fern on the pilaster with the missing upper column. In later years Mrs. Bennett closed in the porch with glass windows and shelves to display her collection of glassware and souvenirs.

This distinctive sloping roof is called "airplane" roof. This house was constructed about the time airplanes were beginning to be built. The roof was a copy of a new f angled roof Charles Bennett's brother-in-law had seen.

The Bennett Ranch House is the only remaining turn-of-the century wood frame house in the El Toro area.

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Supplement No. 1

The Bennett House guest room has been appropriately refurnished to be representative of the 1920-30 period in rural El Toro. The Saddleback Area Historical Society has graciously donated an 1890's full size brass bed for display. Helen Bennett Harvey vividly remembers a brass bed in the guest room as she and Evelyn spent their dark days in that bed recovering from the measles during their youth. The appliquéd quilt displayed on the bed is the Dolly Varden pattern; the same pattern Mrs. Bennett had in the room many years ago. Also reflective of the furnishings which were once in the room are two framed Goodey prints, which are hanging on the wall opposite the bed. Displayed on the dress form is the original wedding dress worn by Frances Bennett's mother in the 1800's. A framed copy of Harvey and Frances' marriage certificate hangs on the wall alongside the wedding dress.

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