



ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK

F. DALE PYLE, JR., A RAILROAD MAN

By Katherine Hon

F. Dale Pyle, Jr. (Dale) has been a North Park resident since the 1930's, and has lived on 28th Street since 1960. He is the eldest son of a hydraulic engineer, and was born in Wyoming. The 1910 Federal Census found 1½- year-old Fred Dale, Jr. with his father and mother in Castle Bluff, Nebraska, where his father was the Chief Engineer for the County's U.S. Reclamation District irrigation system. By 1920, the small family had moved to Montrose, Colorado, and had grown to include two daughters and two more sons. In 1930, Dale's father was a Civil Engineer with the City of San Diego Water Department, and the family was living at 4577 Rhode Island Street near the old ostrich farm at Mission Cliff Gardens (now University Heights). Dale was 20 years old and recently married. His first job with the City of San Diego was as a starter in the Golf Department, and then he joined the City Playground and Recreation Department (later the Park and Recreation Department). He liked the work of maintaining the City's recreational facilities "just fine" and made a career of it.

In an interview with members of the History Committee, Dale recalled coming to California from Washington in the 1920's on the S.S. Senator, a passenger steamship. The family stayed overnight in San Diego, then rode a train to El Centro, where Dale's father had taken a job as a project manager for the Imperial Irrigation District. Dale remembered the train crossing over the Carrizo Gorge as a "big thrill." Dale's train trip over the gorge was prophetic, because he became an early member of the San Diego Model Railroad Club, which was chartered in 1938 and

incorporated in 1963. Dale joined the club in the early 1940's. This club of model railroad enthusiasts maintains the 2,700-square-foot Cabrillo and Southwestern O-scale Exhibit and the 4,500-square-foot San Diego and Arizona Eastern HO-Exhibit in the San Diego Model Railroad Museum in Balboa Park, exhibits that Dale helped build.

According to their fascinating web site (www.sdmrrc.org), the HO Club moved into the House of Charm in Balboa Park with the Balboa Park O-scale Club in 1948. Dale remembers it was after WWII, because they could not be in the park during the war. During that time they built their tracks and ran their hand-made model trains in a 25-foot by 40-foot chicken coop in Bostonia east of El Cajon. The clubs merged in 1963 and remained in the House of Charm until 1978. The San Diego club moved into the current 27,000-square-foot museum space in the basement of Casa de Balboa in 1982. Dale was instrumental in procuring this space because of his position with the City Park and Recreation Department. The museum is reported to house one of the largest indoor model railroad displays in the world.

Thank you, Dale, for sharing stories from your life with us!

PHOTO CAPTION

Dale (far left) and his friends when the San Diego Model Railroad Club was in the Graves Chicken House in Bostonia, 1942.

Left to right: Dale Pyle, Art "Barney" Whittaker, Jack Graves, Jack Wynn, Al Lawrence, Art Hockett, Bill Burke.