

# Manzanar: A Life Story

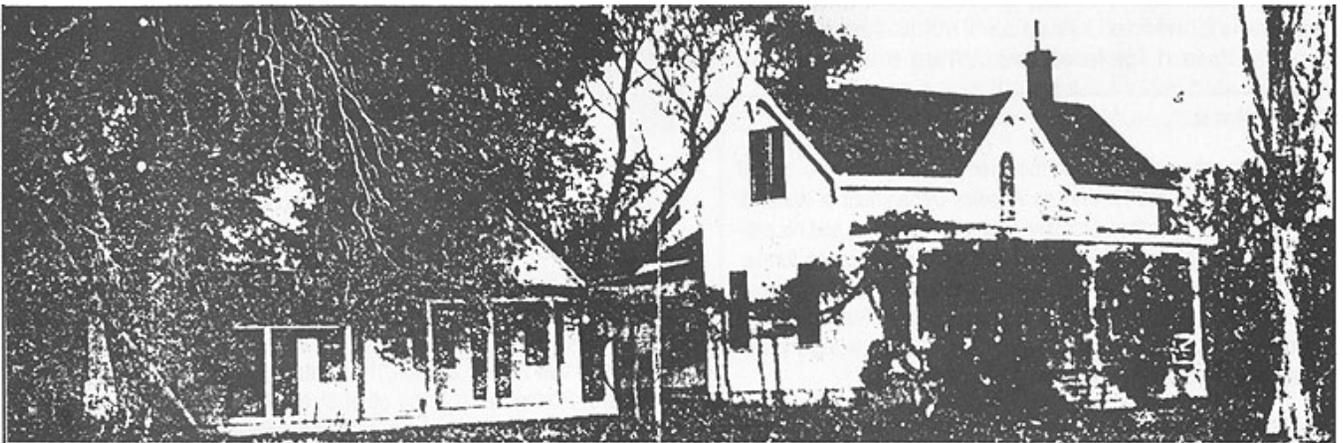
By Lucille DeBoer

Lena had more problems with her asthma, so they had to relocate again. Joe talked to a man, Art Williams, who told him about his home town of Manzanar. Joe decided to look for a farm there and later he and brother Charlie decided on Manzanar. They tore down the house in the oil field and bought all of the things needed for a farm: horses, cows, machinery, tools of all kinds, and lumber, including the material from the old house. Charlie and his wife, Veronica, did the same, and they all headed north to the Owens Valley, first on the broadgauge railroad arriving at Owenyo Station with all their possessions. These were transferred from the broadgauge to the narrow gauge cars, then on to Manzanar Station where everything was transferred to wagons which they assembled at the station. Horses were hitched to the wagons and the cows were tied to the rear as Joe, Lena, Charlie, Veronica, and the children took off for their new farms in Manzanar.

They all lived in a small house on Art Williams' place and did the best they could until the first home was built, then lived together on Charlie's property until the second home was completed on Joe's farm. This farm had 45 acres and the land contained so much water, it was hard to plow, let alone plant, but plant they did.

The brothers built barns on both places and worked on the houses to make them more livable. Fences had to be built to keep the stock in; ditches about ten feet deep were dug to drain the water from the fields. These ditches were so deep that many a time the horses would fall in and the only way to get them out was to build a ramp of planks with cleats for a foothold, have the horses get on it, and let them climb out. The water was very cold and if this wasn't done quickly, the horses would die or tire and lose their strength to climb out.

Most of the farms were beautiful meadows and later were planted with orchards of pears, grapes, peaches, apples, and of course there were potatoes, corn, and large vegetable and flower gardens. There was so much water during those early years, that when a horse pulled a buggy, the water frequently came up to the horse's knees. When this happened, the children took off their shoes and socks to walk home.



Gracious homes and huge trees once graced the town of Manzanar.

Children attended a two-room elementary school, and then were driven to high school in Independence in a bus converted from a truck and driven by a Mr. Shelly who owned a garage in Manzanar. The garage was across the street from a general store owned by the Hatfield families; it was sold to the Bandhauers.

On the west side of the highway was a large building called the town hall with a library, offices, and a large assembly room. Dances and other entertainment were held in this room and people came from all over the area to attend the functions. During apple harvest in late summer and early fall, a packing company set up a temporary facility to pack apples for shipment in this big room, hiring local people, including our mother. By winter, the big room was available for dancing again, and young and old came from miles around to enjoy dancing. Upstairs in a large room tables were set for a midnight meal, allowing the musicians a rest for an hour or so. There was always a crowd at these affairs.

Next door to the town hall was a cannery where fruit and other produce was canned and pressure cooked. Joe Metzger ran the pressure cooker.

Manzanar, known as the Land of the Big Red Apples, was five miles south of Independence, county seat of Inyo County, and ten miles north of Lone Pine. The main automobile road through the Owens Valley was unpaved at this time; much later it was paved from Mojave to Nevada and made an official State Highway (US 395), one of the arteries of the State of California.

In the early 1900s the City of Los Angeles started to purchase ranches in the Owens Valley for the sole purpose of supplying water to the people in Los Angeles. People started to sell their land to the City; the City put in wells to drain the water out of the ground; the trees began to die; and the land finally turned to vacant dirt. This ended the Land of the Big Red Apples.



Owens Valley was once a fine place to hunt and fish. Wild geese and ducks stopped on their way south for the winter at the many ponds and water places. Quail, doves, pheasants, and rabbits, and deer who came down from the mountains during bad weather were plentiful. Sometimes, late at night in the winter, from our home we could hear deer thundering down a nearby road to get away from the deep snow in the Sierras and across the valley to the milder Inyo Mountains on the east side where it was warmer and drier.

Our dad (Joe) used to take a wagon and horses up into the mountains to get firewood for our stoves. Our oldest brother, Herbert, usually went with him, mainly for company, and sometimes our mother would go along. It was a hard trip, and Dad became acquainted

*with local miners in the mountains. They would swap stories around the campfire; one of his friends, (I believe his name to be Joe Emmick) had a mine in the Inyo Mountains above Kearsarge Station.*

*Off and on in the winter when there wasn't too much work on the ranch, Dad would let us drive the horse and buggy to school. We would put the horse in a barn at school until we went home. We could never enjoy this luxury in the spring because the horses were all needed for farm work, so the rest of the time we walked. It was a long walk, so Dad and the neighbors built a bridge across Shepherd's Creek, which shortened the trip to school by a lot. In the summer, we would go swimming in this creek many times, but in winter it sometimes snowed so deep we would fall into snow-covered sage brush and down we would go! Then we would have to crawl out and keep on moving.*

*We rode horseback a lot during the summer, and had our chores to do on the ranch. My sister Minnie and I did the milking, hoed weeds, and helped with the laundry on Saturdays. Being the oldest daughter, I helped my dad a lot. I would be on top of the hay load on the wagon, spreading the hay as it was thrown up to the wagon. One time, he threw up a pitchfork of hay with a snake in it, and I slid off of that wagon in a hurry. He couldn't get me back on top of the hay wagon for the rest of the day, so I walked home from the fields that day.*

*We had a brother and sister, Leona and Richard, added to our family while in Manzanar, and a cousin Eva, Charles's child. Eva's mother died, so Charles sold his place to move back south; his sister raised Eva in Ohio,*

*We had three teachers in the school during the time we attended: Miss Nordyke, Miss Merkle and Miss Lacy, all of whom since married. Miss Merkle married John Rotharmel, who worked for Mr. Paget, owner of property later to become part of the World War II Manzanar Relocation Camp next to Baire Creek. Mr. Paget also owned one hundred acres on the east side of the highway where a small landing field was located for emergency use.*

*Our parents did their own butchering. Neighbors got together to help each other butcher, hanging the dressed meat on tall racks to cool until the next day, when it would be cut into hams, roasts, racks of ribs, and other cuts. Some was cooked and placed in large containers, covered with lard to preserve it, and stored in cellars until needed. They also made sausage preserved with lard for later use. When the meat was trimmed, the scraps were boiled in a large kettle and the lard rendered out and saved.*

#### OTHER MEMORIES

*Influenza hit the valley one year and many people died. Dr. Wooden, who lived in Independence, had to cover the territory from Keeler to Big Pine. He got very little sleep, so he finally hired Leroy Roeper to drive him about so he could nap between patients. He would reach into his coat pocket, pull out a hand full of pills, ask a few questions, give instructions on how to take the pills and be off to the next patient. He told our mother to fill a coffee can half full of water, add two tablespoons of turpentine and keep the contents simmering on the stove day and night; we didn't get the 'flu.*

"Doc" Wooden lived next door to Mac and Nettie Fausel. Nettie was Independence postmistress, in the same building where Max operated the local barber shop. I believe Max cut hair in the same shop for over sixty years. They kept a coyote chained to a flatiron; he ran around in their yard behind the post office and didn't seem to be afraid of people at all.

During our high school years, we sisters played basketball on the O.V.H.S. team in Independence, traveling to Lone Pine and Big Pine to play against those teams. Since there were dances afterwards, we always looked forward to these events.

Manzanar had a farm CO-OP (Farm Bureau) and in fall, people gathered to compare farm products to see who grew the best produce and who was the best cook. Occasionally we had picnics at Keough's Hot Springs and after lunch from long tables full of food, the younger group would go to the pool, rent a bathing suit, and swim or play until time to go home. Other times we danced on the outdoor dance floor.

In 1924 Dad and Mom sold the ranch to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, as did so many others who owned water rights. Dad moved the family back to Whittier and on to Chino, California, where they bought another ranch and went into the poultry business. Dad lived sixteen more years; mother kept the place for several years more and finally sold it to her son, Richard, and his wife. She moved to Ontario where she died years later.

*Editor's Note:*

In her high school days, Lucille met Fred Weaver, brother of one of her friends, who worked for the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power. He had three sisters, Dorothy, May and Katherine, and his parents owned a small -cafe in Independence on the site of the former "Polks Drugs.' In time, this Cafe & Candy (plus lunch counter) became very well known, so his father left his job at Kearsarge Station to work in the cafe. May Weaver, Lucille, and her sister Minnie worked in the store and waited on tables in the cafe.

Lucille and Fred became close friends, dated often, and in 1925 they married and lived in Independence. During World War II Fred enlisted and served five years in the Navy, then returned to his job with the DWP in Independence. His work was well regarded and many of the DWP truck drivers requested his work on their vehicles

Fred died five years after his return from the Navy and Lucille moved to Southern California where she worked for the government, for a doctor, and in the garment industry. She married again, to Ralph E. DeBoer and they traveled a lot, but after Ralph died, Lucille says, "I decided that I'd had enough." Her sister Minnie Bare, also a widow, lives in Porterville, and the other three children still living, Herbert Metzger, Margie Young, and Leona Kampling, live in Southern California.

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