

# When California Shook

## Miss Ottie's enrollment at UCLA

by L. Jarod Pearson



UCLA in 1929

Mary Kay Chattin Brown remembers her Aunt Ottie sharing memories of her clever means of exploring the western United States.

Coming from a railroad family, it was never a problem for Ottie to travel across the country. Some years before her incredible trip to Europe, Ottie and a few of her closest friends got the urge to experience the glamor of California while taking in the sights of the Great American West. Getting there by train was easy, but the cost of hotel rooms would limit their time and their cultural experience. Their practical solution was to enroll in classes at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Strange as it may have seemed, it was undoubtedly a good decision. The cost of tuition, room and board wasn't exactly cheap, but certainly less than the cost of two months worth of hotel rooms plus meal expenses. The young group of ladies would attend classes, study, and then spend the weekends sightseeing around Southern California. By the end of the summer, the girls had college credits on a transcript and a California cultural experience to boot.

There was more to their learning adventure than California, however. The train trip out west involved an extended layover in Chicago where Ottie and her friends stayed with a relative in the big city. One particular night the group ventured out downtown to see a picture show at a movie theater. All dressed up, they sat down in front of the silver screen and were shocked to learn that this theater had sound pictures, something they were not familiar with coming from Cowan, Tennessee.

Miss Ottie told her niece that all of them tried to contain their excitement and not to show their enthusiasm. After all, they wanted to fit in with the crowd and hopefully disguise their small town naivete. Evidently it worked.

The trip to California included some other unique adventures, including a side trip to Yellowstone Park.

Unfortunately, Miss Ottie did not leave behind a diary or scrapbook from this particular venture like she did her trip to Europe, but those who remember her can use our imaginations and picture this trip as another chapter in her adventure-filled life.

Ottie returned to Cowan at the end of that particular summer, and Cowan people know that California was never the same after that! Indeed California shook, only this time it wasn't an earthquake!