

DAVIS CAMP

Over the years there were probably thousands of families who lived at Davis Camp. Most were from the states of Oklahoma and Arkansas, but there were families from other states as well. Most came looking for work in the fertile fields of Brentwood during the great depression of 1929-1932, and to escape the dust bowl of Oklahoma after losing their jobs and farms. My grandparents were one of those families. Dewey and Frankie Wilson arrived at Davis Camp with four small children after hearing from other family members about work and a place to live.

I began researching Davis Camp at the Historical Society because of their story, soon realizing it was the story of countless others who arrived in Davis Camp with hope, and a promise of work. I began on the advice of Kathy Leighton by going through page after page of decades of old newspapers stored at the Resource Center. I soon realized I had worked with a Davis descendant, Frank Davis. With the help of Steve Verduzco, and his Our Town Brentwood Ca website I soon connected with Frank. After three days of interviewing Frank and his wife Hiwanah, one those days spent sitting behind the Davis Camp store, listening to, and recording Franks memories of living there, I soon saw a common story develop.

It is the story of Cal Davis, who came to Brentwood from Oklahoma and saw an empty lot full of trash, but he saw more than that, he saw a place people could live while they looked for work. With Brentwood's approval Cal slowly turned that lot into a community. A community where everyone helped one another, sharing food they brought from the fields they worked in, sharing stories of their lives, and helping one another when children were sick. There were dances on Saturday night and foot races on Sunday afternoon. A large table was set up on Thanksgiving Day and hundreds of people shared Thanksgiving dinner. They suffered sickness, and floods, but they suffered together.

Cal Davis would drive a sick person to Stockton for medical treatment and pay for that treatment himself. He soon had tents for people to live in, a grocery store, bathrooms, showers, and laundry rooms. As my grandmother said, "no one was hungry, chickens ran in the yard, and fruit and vegetables the farmers had shared with the workers were brought home to share with the community."

Many of the descendants of the families who lived at Davis Camp still live in the area. Cal Davis saw an empty lot full of trash and imagined it a place for people to stay while they sought work, but he could not have imagined what he had truly started, a community with a long future and a permanent place in Brentwood's History.

I want to thank everyone for contributing to my research, thanks to Shirley McCall for organizing all my bits and pieces of information into the Davis File and to Frank and Hiwanah for telling me their story.

Sharon Wilson Ellingson,
Oral Historian,
ECCHS