



Andrew McNally House, 1887

Altadena Historical Society

From our Files

1909 Rubio Pavilion Flood

May 9, 2013

Below: Interview in the *Pasadena Independent Star News*, Sunday Feb. 8, 1959: The three surviving Drew family members, Dorothy Drew Schaefer, George G. Drew and Helen Gregory (photo lower right) recall the dramatic events the night boulders crashed through the Rubio Pavilion, "dropping it in a tangled mass of wreckage into a roaring torrent of water 100 feet below."



The Day

By C. F. Shoop

RUN, ALL OF YOU . . . take the side door . . . There come the boulders . . . run, run for your lives . . .

"It was mother's warning of great danger. And run we did," says Mrs. Dorothy Drew Schaefer, describing the disaster at Rubio Pavilion Feb. 12, 1909—exactly 50 years ago Thursday.

"In our haste to get out of that building, our baby brother, George, was left in his highchair . . . Father and mother both started back to get him but, it was too late. The huge boulders came crashing down on the Pavilion, dropping it in a tangled mass of wreckage into a roaring torrent of water 100 feet below. George, the baby, was eventually found and recovered but our brother Thayer, 10, lost his life."

In a terrible rain storm at noon of the fateful day, lightning struck giant boulders above Rubio Canyon Pavilion at the base of the Mount Lowe Incline Railway, killing one and injuring three so badly they had to be in a hospital for months, and writing fits to a famed excursion spot.

THE FATHER was Fred T. Drew, manager of Rubio Canyon Junction on the Mount Lowe line, train dispatcher who lived in The Pavilion where there was a dance hall and refreshments were served, and refreshments of his wife Eva Gidley Drew, and four children, Dorothy, then 10, Helen, 8½, Thayer 6½, and George, 4½.

The Drews resided at the Pavilion from May, 1905, to February, 1909. They realized the danger of their precarious location, but took the chance, anyway.

"My mother became so alarmed by the winter rains and floods," says Mrs. Schaefer, that Father let her rent a small house at 25 Mary Street, Pasadena. There we stayed almost every winter at the base of the Incline. She had a premonition that some would come crashing down on our "White Castle" as we then called the Pavilion. She was husband and the safety of her children.

"In February of that fateful year 1909 we had just moved back from Pasadena a few days before, thinking that the worst of the rainy season was over. We were so happy to be united as one big family again, but calamity was soon to strike.

"FEBRUARY 12 was a dark, cold day and the clouds hung heavy in the sky. I remember we were all seated about the dinner table that noon (we call it luncheon now, but then the noon-day meal was called 'dinner'). We had just started eating about 12 o'clock when there was a terrible rumble of thunder following a brilliant flash of lightning, and I heard my mother scream out 'Everybody run for your lives.'

"Helen and I escaped without injury. By this time it was pouring rain . . . there was no shelter any place. We were scared and bewildered . . . We didn't know what to do. Father and Mother had disappeared. We decided that Helen would get into the Incline car . . . and that I would try to start it, with a wand-like affair that I had seen my father use on so many occasions.

"Finally, the car started and Helen was on her way to summon help from Echo Mountain at the top of the Incline. Help came quicker than I had thought. F. C. Crocker, another employe who had been high up in Rubio Canyon repairing steps and bridges, heard the crash and rushed down to help. He found father pinned down by boulders and to keep him from drowning took off his overcoat and made a pillow for him. Crocker also managed to get to George, the baby, and brought him up and placed him in my arms. Maybe you know how glad I was to get my hands on him and my arm around him, for he was 'my baby,' as I had taken care of him a lot. His little hip was broken and he had a bad head injury. In a short time, Helen and help came from Echo Mountain, and before long doctors came from Pasadena to help in the rescue—and there were newspaper reporters, too, for The Star and The News were on hand to cover the tragedy.

SHORTLY, my father was

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brought up from the swirling waters on a stretcher. He was still conscious. I remember he asked if the rest of us were all right. When I told him we were okay, he said, "Thank God, I now have something to live for!" Then, he and George were placed on a stretcher and rushed to Pasadena Hospital. Father was in a critical condition and had to stay in the hospital for almost a year.

"As night began to close in Helen and I were desperate and lonely. Our eyes were so swollen with tears we could hardly see. Mother and Thayer were still missing.

"Big floodlights were brought in from somewhere. It was now 12 long hours since the landslide and we feared mother and Thayer had both been killed. However, as the floodlights were being thrown in every direction one of the men noticed something hanging on a broken water pipe that ran parallel with the floor of the Pavilion, about 100 feet above the canyon. On closer observation they found it was my mother; her clothes caught on this pipe as the Pavilion collapsed. She had hung there all that time with a cold stream of water running over her body.

"Ladders were brought in and a net stretched beneath her, just in case her clothes might fear loose or the force of the water cause her to fall. By the time they managed to get her onto a stretcher it was well after midnight. She was

unconscious and I remember hearing Dr. McCoy say 'My goodness, this silver under her chin goes clear through her mouth and has come out on the side of her nose.' She, too, was rushed to Pasadena Hospital where she remained unconscious for almost 12 weeks. It was nearly a year before she could leave the hospital.

"A Mr. Turner who was helping with the rescue, finally happened to notice Helen and me and coming over where we were, he said he would take us down to his house in Pasadena. His wife welcomed us. She was a wonderful woman. She helped us take a nice warm bath, gave us food and some nice hot milk and soon we were fast asleep.

PASADENA and Los Angeles newspapers the next day carried big stories of the fatal rock-slide and details of the death of my brother, Thayer. His little body had been washed clear of the wreckage and was found near the reservoir.

"Now, day, my mother's sister, our Aunt Onie, came and took Helen and me to her home in Los Angeles and there we stayed until our parents were well enough to leave the hospital. George came home in about 3 months, and we three children were very happy to get together . . . but there was always the thought of that empty chair . . . it took a long time to get over it. But we were so glad that there were not more persons killed

or injured. Feb. 12 was a holiday (the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln) and if the weather had been good in all probability there would have been hundreds of people in and around the Pavilion.

"When my parents were finally released from the hospital, we rented an upstairs apartment at 245 N. Fair Oaks, but everything seemed so different . . . it took a lot of time and patience for neither of our parents was ever well again. My father passed away in 1934, but Mother lived until July, 1946."

The three surviving members of the Drew family still live in Pasadena and get together frequently for family reunions. Mrs. Schaefer, historian of the group, resides at 1830 Corson Street, the sister is Mrs. Helen Gregory and the brother, George G. Drew, well known local businessman. Mrs. Schaefer prizes highly her collection of photographs of the Rubio area. She owns many of the negatives from the collection of pictures taken by the late Charles Lawrence, official photographer for Mt. Lowe Railway who became Chief Astronomer at Echo Mountain Observatory after the death of Prof. Edgar Lan-kin. Pictures which accompany this article are from her valuable collection. She even considers writing a history of Mount Lowe and Rubio some day.

In a reminiscent mood the other day Mrs. Schaefer said "How often we have wished— and still do, that someone with money would reopen a resort in Rubio Canyon or that some individual or syndicate would subdivide Rubio Ranch and sell lots. You can bet that I, for one, would put my order in for the first lot to be sold."

"Everyone that ever made this scenic Mount Lowe Railway trip and stayed a few days at Alpine Tavern or one of the other, Lowe hotels knows that he got a million-dollar ride for only \$5 round trip. Let's rebuild this beautiful mountain resort, for it is truly a great recreational Paradise that could be—and should be—enjoyed by people of all ages."

Rubio Pavilion was never rebuilt.



The Drew family survivors today, left to right, Mrs. Dorothy Drew Schaefer, George G. Drew and Mrs. Helen Gregory, all of Pasadena.

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