



—Journal photo by Alice Roberts

VETERAN SMITH—Al Neis, blacksmith for half-a-century in Highland Park, can be found at his forge at the Village Smithy every day. Neis celebrated his 50th year in Highland Park last Saturday. He came here August 1, 1898.

Al Neis fetes 50 years here

Blacksmith first started forge in 1898

Al Neis marked another anniversary in business here last Saturday....his 50th. August 1, 1948, was the Golden Anniversary for the Village Smithy, and Blacksmith Neis took time out from his forge and bellows to accept congratulations from many local people, eat a bit of cake, and reminisce with cronies about Los Angeles and Highland Park as they were before the turn of the century.

It was back in '98 when Al Neis first set up shop at his present location on North Figueroa street. There were lots of horses that needed shoeing then, especially after navigating the dusty and muddy road, depending on the seasons, that is now Figueroa street.

In an agricultural community a blacksmith shop does pretty well, and Neis did all right in a Highland Park that was made up of ranches, farms, and six businesses (three of which were feed stores).

COMPETITION

He had competition, too. Another smith had set up his forge in the community when Neis arrived, but in the words of Al, "I guess the pace got too fast for him."

In reviewing his first half-century as a businessman in this area, Neis recalled the times when barley hay grew on the hill above the Arroyo Seco branch library where such streets as Mount Angelus and Outlook now wind.

"A stream used to run down York boulevard," Neis said, "and Figueroa looked more like a snake trail than a road."

The stream down York was the cause of a bit of trouble between local cattlemen and real estate developers in the early days, the smith remembered.

It seems that the cattlemen used the stream to water their stock while real estate promoters wanted to pipe the stream down to the Garvanza district to increase property value in that section.

Neis had a personal interest in the dispute, for his father-in-law was one of the cattlemen fighting the piping idea, and as Neis recalls, a court finally decided in favor of the cattlemen.

BORN IN IOWA

Born in Iowa, Neiss came to Los Angeles when he was eight years old. After living with his family in various sections of the city, he married a girl who lived in the Highland Park area and started his business here. Only in those days it wasn't the Highland Park area. Local territory was then known as Garvanza, and the hub of the community life was the Garvanza district.

History is the hobby of Highland Park's oldest businessman, and he can reel off dates and data in such fashion as to put to shame many students of California history.

For instance, he points out that Hope, Grand, and Flower streets in Los Angeles were called Hope, Faith, and Charity streets when he first came here. "But," Neis re-

marks, "residents soon came to object to saying that they lived on Charity, and so the new names were substituted."

Neis and his wife live at 6137 Piedmont Avenue, their residence for the past 35 years.

As he took time from his work last Monday to look back at the progress Los Angeles has made since he first came here he stated that he looks for the city to continue to grow if it can overcome the problem of water. "We've got the greatest climate in the world here," Neis said, "People are coming here in increasing numbers. We must have more water in order to provide for the new settlers."

As to retiring—"What would I do?" he asks. "I don't have many 'customers', most of the people who come in with work for me are friends. I can stop my work and talk with them as long as I like. I couldn't do anything if I retired."

