A Berry Tale: From Berries to Historical Theme Park, 1920 to 1982

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With the introduction of the automobile in the early 1900s, Americans were on the move unlike ever before and Southern California with its Mediterranean climate proved to be a desired destination. Southern California grew rapidly, bringing new jobs, industries and technology to a mostly agricultural landscape, with oranges as the anchor crop. Two major events in Southern California sped up this growth: The completion of the Owens Valley Aqueduct in 1913 brought much needed water to the agricultural landscape and growing population. Southern California also saw an increase in oil production, to satisfy the new demand for gasoline and asphalt. Although Southern California grew rapidly, the land surrounding major cities consisted mainly of agricultural lands and cattle ranches. Farmers and ranchers were vital to the survival of the residents of Southern California. A very young self-taught Walter Knott happened to be one of those farmers.

Walter Knott, a child of California pioneers, born December 11, 1889 in San Bernardino, California, and his beloved wife Cordelia (Hornaday) Knott, born January 23, 1890 in Bushton, Coles County, Illinois, truly achieved the American dream, digging and cooking their way out of poverty to not only riches, but their own place in American history. Utilizing the pioneering spirit, mixed with their holistic American values and faith in God, Walter and Cordelia transformed a berry farm into a famous chicken dinner restaurant with an educational and historically significant theme park attached, focused on American, Western, and California history and using realism and replication.

Rev. Elgin Charles Knott, Walter's father passed away on March 31, 1896 when Walter was only six years old, so his mother Margaret (Dougherty) Knott moved the family from San

Bernardino to Pomona, California.[1] With his father gone Walter decided he had to step up and be the man of the house, so he raised vegetables in the back lot of their home to supplement his mother's income. Walter gained permission from city officials to start planting on vacant lots nearby. His vacant lot farming and newspaper route for the *Pomona Progress* gave Walter self-confidence, a strong work ethic, and a sense of responsibility, to the extent that when he finished his sophomore year at Pomona High School, he felt that was all the schooling he needed. Walter gained experience outside Pomona, picking cantaloupes in Imperial Valley and renting land where he planted peas. Walter would clear five hundred dollars when other area farmers were going broke, because he grew good quality peas that produced longer than the other more experienced farmers. Walter's secret was in irrigation, his ability to bargain with wholesalers, and using the local Indian Reservation as a resource for pickers, whom he had to pay each day in coins. This is where the love to plant, harvest, and stay close to the soil formed the beginnings of an entrepreneurial enterprise that was the foundation that became Walter Knott the berry man.[2]

Walter bought a lot and built a house in Pomona just before he married his high school sweet heart Cordelia L. Hornaday on June 3, 1911.[3] After a couple of years of living the domestic life, Walter longed to get back to the soil and own his own farm. In 1914 he talked Cordelia into homesteading a hundred and sixty acres of land through the Homesteading Act, ran by the United States Land Office. The property was located in the Mojave Desert in an area called Newberry which today is close to Highway 18, twenty-five miles east of Barstow.[4]

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[1] Barbara LeClaire, "Rev. Elgin Charles Knott," Find A Grave Memorial no. 45630110, Dec 12 2009, Find a Grave https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/45630110

[2] Willie Mae Caldwell, *The Genealogy of the Knott Family 1617-1989: Founders of Knott's Farm, Buena Park California,* (La Habra, CA: Willie Mae Caldwell, 1989), 179.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Norman E. Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer: The Story of the Man Behind Knott's Berry Farm Internationally-known Tourist Attraction,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 49.

Walter went out to the desert ahead of Cordelia to prepare the one room adobe home left by the last owner who failed to remain on the property for the required three years. It took Walter a week to reach the site by wagon, shadowing his ancestor's footsteps who came west from Texas in 1868. Although Cordelia agreed to follow her husband out to the desert, once she saw the small adobe and vast emptiness she cried.[5] The Knotts sold their home in Pomona to pay for Walter's new farming adventure, bringing only home furnishings, a buckboard, two horses, a cow, some chickens, feed, and farm implements.[6] For a money crop Walter decided to plant grapes near the house, while hoping to turn it into forty acres over time and then plant other crops once the grapes were established. He chose grapes because the soil and climate were suitable and grape vines sent roots down to find their own water source, but found he had to water each plant by hand until the vines took root. The grapevines had just come into leaf and showed promise of producing, when a strong storm pulled all the plants out of the ground and piled them into heaps.[7]

Wells ended up being the biggest blow to the Knott family farming adventure. The 300 foot well that Walter had paid a San Bernardino well driller to sink, had clogged with sand due to improper installation by the drilling firm, but the Knotts needed water to survive. Walter's only option was to dig a thirty foot well by hand and install a windmill and casing. It only gave them enough water for the house, which had to be brought in by hand. Walter rented equipment to de-sand the well, but within hours the pipe was clogged again. The clogging remained an issue, but

[5] Huell Howser, "California Gold: Knott's Berry Farm," You Tube Video, 15:31, July 2 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sY5nXl6VpS4&t=28s
[6] Helen Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame*, (Fullerton, Ca: Plycon Press, 1973), 32.
[7] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer*, 54.

the word "quit" was not in Walter's vocabulary.[8] If they could stick it out for the full three years they would own a hundred and sixty acres.

Money began to run out and Walter had to get a wage paying job. He began with making adobe bricks for two dollars a day and repairing homes in the area for newcomers to the desert. This work was not daily or consistent and made it difficult to feed his family. So, in 1915 he went to the Calico Silver Mine that just reopened because the price of silver had gone up due to the beginning of World War I. Knott was hired as a carpenter foreman for two dollars and sixty-five cents a day. This also ended up being short lived as well, because Walter realized that the promoters of Calico were preparing a false front in order to sell stock, and actually no mining was going to be done. This kind of shady enterprise was against Walters Christian values, morals, and ethics, but he also missed his wife and children, so he quit.[9]

Walter had a personal tie to Calico as well; his beloved uncle John C. King, once sheriff of San Bernardino County, had discovered one of the mines in Calico called The Silver King. It produced ten thousand dollars in sliver.[10] In the evenings Walter would walk the streets of Calico and climb up to his uncle's old mine while admiring and exploring the old ruins around him. He wasn't sure what buildings were used for which purpose but he knew the former saloons because of the piles of bottles that adorned the rear of the buildings. He looked for a church and could not figure out among the ruins which one it could be if there was one at all, but a cemetery did exist, overgrown with weeds, on a hill just outside of town.[11] Calico and its ruins had to be

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer, 55.*
Calico originally established in 1880 when silver sold at $1.31 an ounce, pulling almost one hundred thousand dollars of silver from the mine, but in 1896 with a population of thirty-five hundred people, the price of silver sank to sixty-three cents making it no longer profitable to work.

[10] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 38.

[11] Ibid, 57.

one of his inspirations when it came to creating his own Ghost Town twenty-five years later. After Calico, Walter finally starting making good money, one hundred twenty dollars a month for himself and his team while working on county roads in the desert.[12]

The Knotts survived severe poverty, desert storms, and clogged wells in the Mojave Desert for three years and finally had one hundred and sixty acres to show for it. It remained in the family for decades after, but with three kids and another one on the way they had to do something different. Walter, when asked about his desert years, said, "Those desert years were some of the best years of our life. They taught us much we would need to know in the future. The hardships we endured made us tough. After what we went through there, nothing could faze us."[13] The hardships the Knotts suffered through the desert year formed a solid foundation for the heartwarming, hardworking, kind, giving but firm souls they became.

The opportunity to leave the desert arose in 1917, with a move to Shandon in San Luis Obispo County, California, where he got into the sharecropping business growing vegetables for a 47,000-acre cattle ranch. With Cordelia in tears once again, the Knotts loaded up their three children in the wagon and with three hundred dollars in their pocket, headed to a new adventure off what is now Hwy 41. During their time in the desert the automobile age had begun in Southern California, so the horses who were old and over worked had never seen nor walked on pavement found it difficult to travel any length of distance each day. The other problem was having to share the road with new automobile traffic.

The rancher told Walter, "Pick out any spot you want, I don't know anything about farming but I understand that you do. So find yourself as many acres as you need and we can

[12] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer,* 60.
[13] Ibid, 31.

talk it over. Better choose a place off to one side though, or my stock will trample down everything you plant."[14] Walter did just that by picking seven and a half acres near the San Juan River, close to the ranch house and close to town so he could market the surplus of vegetables. The seven and a half acres he chose was full of tall and sturdy weeds, and he proclaimed, "If weeds grew as luxuriantly as this, certainly vegetables would also."[15] The deal he made with the rancher for the use of seven and one-half acres was that he would supply the vegetables for the manager, hands, and personal use, and he could sell the surplus. After the deal was made, it was time to get to work, so Walter rented a house for eight dollars a month and got to work.

Before Walter could plant anything, he needed water and had to remove the weeds. With a series of springs running through the acreage, Walter diverted them all into one irrigation ditch that supplied plenty of water to irrigate the acreage. The weeds were mostly bull nettles and he removed all seven and a half acres of them with a hoe and by hand. He did not have a tractor or heavy tools. Walter was smart though; after clearing a section he would plant seeds and get something growing as he continued clearing weeds.[16] The rancher saw how hard Walter worked his land and gave Walter odd job ranch work until the crops started coming in.

All of Walter's experience in his youth and in the desert finally paid off. His crops produced, and produced big, so big the retail markets did not know what to do with them. One shop owner stated, "I have never seen cabbages like that before! I had to cut them up and sell parts of them. Send me some more . . ."[17] Not only cabbage, but corn, bell peppers, tomatoes, beans and other vegetables, started making Walter some well deserved money.

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[14] Ibid, 62.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 48.
[17] Ibid, 50.

With Walter working the farm, Cordelia become bored since she did not have to haul water in from a well, there was no longer desert sand to clean up, and life had become a little easier. Sugar was hard to come by because of World War I and food allotments, but Cordelia managed to procure a small amount. With the sugar Cordelia experimentad in making gourmet homemade candy. She took those candies to a local store in Shandon in hopes to sell them there, which the storeowner agreed to do, and they were a hit. Since she created a successful candy business, she now qualified for extra allotments of sugar. Cordelia made so much extra money selling candy she took her earnings and the Knotts purchased their first automobile, a secondhand 1917 Ford Model T.[18] Cordelia's success in the candy business gave her the self-confidence and courage to later produce the Knott's Berry Farm jellies, jams, preserves, syrups, baked goods, and most importantly her world-famous chicken dinner.

After three years in Shandon the Knotts became home sick for Southern California. Their kids were growing, and Walter realized he could never be able to expand his farm or own the land he worked on so hard. Walter still chased the dream of owning his own farm someday, and that someday arrived in 1920 when his cousin Jim Preston, who lived in Buena Park raising berries, ask him to come to Buena Park and go into business with him. Walter said yes to Preston, and unknowingly cementing his legacy in Buena Park. The Knotts took their two thousand five-hundred-dollar profit from the farm and candy, packed up the family for the last time, and headed to Buena Park. When they arrived, Walter and Preston leased twenty acres for one thousand dollars a year, from William H. Coughran, who agreed with a hand shake to a five-year lease. With the farm land secure, the family found a house to rent for eight dollars a month

[18] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer,* 66.

with no plumbing, just a few blocks from the farm.[19] Walter once again put almost all he saved into equipment and root stock for the new farm, but he also planted a garden of vegetables to live off of while he waited for his first harvest of berries. Sadly, once again tragedy stuck the Knott family when a rare freeze hit Southern California that winter and the Knotts barely survived, but survive they did.[20] In 1923 Orange County records indicate farmers cultivated three hundred acres of berries, the following year it dropped to forty acres, Walter and Preston growing half of that.[21] In 1923 Walter and Preston expanded the farm to thirty-five acres and Walter with his experience in Shandon realized he needed to cut out the middle man in selling the berries and opened a road side berry stand on Grand Avenue which is named Beach Blvd or Hwy 39 today (see Photo 1). Grand Avenue was the main highway to Newport and Huntington Beach where the wealthy of Pasadena stored their boats in the marinas and Walter knew to capitalize on this. Walter also marketed in the local towns of Buena Park, Anaheim, and Fullerton using his children as salesmen. They also hauled berries to the Los Angeles markets.[22] The Knott children were now old enough to help out on the farm and become involved in the family decisions. This original berry stand stood in Knott's Berry Farm until very recently, as a historic relic of the farm.

To outdo the competitors, Walter chose to package the berries in fresh, clean boxes, wrapped them in clean wrapping paper not old newspapers as the competitors did, and utilized rubber bands not twine.[23] Walter believed if you sell a superior product, you must present it in a

[19] Ibid, 68.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Christopher Merritt and Eric J. Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered: From Boysenberry to Theme Park, The History of Knott's Berry Farm,* (Los Angeles, CA: Christopher Merritt, 2010), 4.
[22] Ibid, 4.
[23] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer,* 69.

superior way to out sell everyone else. With this belief, Walter searched for a new berry to offer Southern Californians and bring in more variety than just the blackberry. Walter found such a berry called a youngberry in Citronelle, Alabama. He ordered enough plants to fill half an acre, but Preston did not agree with his risky venture. After the plants were planted and harvested, Walter grossed over two thousand dollars in berries and nursery stock, proving his cousin wrong.[24]

Tragedy stuck yet again for the Knotts family in 1927, when an oil boom drove property values sky rocketing. Preston and Knott's lease ended and Coughran's son Sam Coughran, the new owner, wanted to sell, but the berry growers could not afford the fifteen hundred dollars an acre that Coughran wanted. Preston chose to leave and move to Los Angeles and suggested Walter do the same, but Walter saw what they had built and could not throw it all away. Walter had saved up ten thousand dollars at that point and offered it to the Coughran as a down payment,

> "Well, if I buy the land, can I pay you ten thousand dollars down. He said, 'the truth of the matter is that I don't need the money. I would rather have the interest. That suited me even better, because I'd needed to put some buildings on the land. It had absolutely nothing on it except the berries that we'd been raising."[25]

At seven per cent interest, Walter paid one hundred and five dollars per acre per year on the unpaid balance, so to make this happen Walter gave up ten acres.[26] To help make ends meet and with the looming interest payments, in 1928 Walter used the ten thousand dollars to build a home on the property and attached an eighty-foot-long building in front of Grand Avenue. The nursery was located on the south end where they sold berry plants, and next to the nursery was

[24] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 5.
[25] Ibid, 5.
[26] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer,* 70-71.

the Berry Market (see Photo 2) and a five table Tea Room on the north end where Cordelia sold sandwiches, rolls, jam, and fresh berry pies.[27] The berry farm now had an official name, "Knott's Berry Place."[28] This is the first time Walter suggest to his wife that she open a restaurant and Cordelia flat out refused and stated they were never going into the restaurant business.[29] Business started to pick up and all the Knott family helped out on the farm, picking, packaging, jarring, and serving at the Tea Room, but they still could not get ahead. Walter had a hard time making the interest payments, so much so he could not make any payments on the principal.

The market crash of 1929 brought on the worst depression the country had ever seen. Unemployment rose at an all-time high, starvation and poverty increased, and oil prices plummeted, as did land values. Land worth fifteen hundred dollars an acre in 1927 dropped to only three hundred and thirty dollars an acre in 1929.[30] Many friends and family advised Knott to give up the farm, let the owner foreclose on the property, and start fresh just down the road. Walter did not give up the farm but claimed, "It's a matter of principle, I wouldn't expect the owner to up the price on me if land became dear. And I don't intend to back down on my contract with him."[31] Not only did Walter not give up his overpriced land, he ended up buying back the ten acres he lost, but at the depression price.

To be able to survive the Great Depression, the four Knott children, plus two homeless children taken in by the Knotts, sold immense stalks of rhubarb for ten cents, which they used to flag down passing motorists along the major roads in the nearby cities.[32] It was not just the

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[27] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 6.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer,* 71.
[30] Ibid, 72
[31] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 68.
[32] Ibid, 70-71

berries, vegetables, pies, baked goods, jams, and jellies that brought people in, because folks did not have extra money for frills let alone gas to get to the farm, but what brought them was Cordelia and Walter's homely kindness and true love for fellow man.

As the family struggled once again to survive during the Great Depression, a single by-chance event turned Walter Knott and his family's lives down a path of uncontrollable events that led them to fame and fortune. In 1932 George M. Darrow, head of the Bureau of Plant Industry with the U. S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Maryland, traveled to Southern California in search of a new enormous sized berry, that he heard rumors of years before. Darrow was looking for a new crop for farmers to produce across the county to help feed people during the depression. A Rudolph Boysen of Orange County had invented the new berry that was a cross between a loganberry, blackberry, and a raspberry, and produced a larger juicier berry. The problem was that Mr. Boysen could not be located, so Darrow came to Knott for advice and assistance, because Knott had gained the honorable reputation as the "Berry Man" of Orange County and he thought Knott might know Boysen.[33] Knott did not, but suggested they look in the phone directory for him, in which they did find a Rudolph Boysen in Anaheim who was the City Park Supervisor for Anaheim. Excited now, the two men went to see Boysen, but he created the plant so long ago he did not have any more of it. When asked if he had planted anywhere else, Boysen did say he planted six plants in an old ditch on his orange grove which he had sold. Knott asked if they could go see if they were still there, and Boysen had no problem with it but they had to ask the new owner. The new owner of the grove had no objection to the search and told the three men if they could find any berry vines there, they were welcome to

[33] Ibid, 73-74.

them.[34] The six plants were there but they were half dead and covered in weeds. With Boysen's blessing, Knott took the vines back to the farm, and fertilized and babied the six plants for three years before getting enough berries and plants to sell to consumers.

Once in production Knott discovered the berries were so large that only twenty-five berries would fit in a half pound basket. This new berry that Knott called a Boysenberry in honor of Rudolph Boysen grossed $1737.50 per acre the first year of full production. Knott then sold the root-stock to nurseries, berry men, and backyard farmers. By 1940 boysenberries became a staple on the national market. Walter Knott could have kept the boysenberry as an exclusive Knott product, instead he shared plant stock with other growers, big and small, which helped some growers get their start.[35] Today every boysenberry plant can be linked back to those six original plants at Knott's Berry Place.

While the Knott family waited for the boysenberries to produce, Cordelia unknowingly created the foundation that became "Knott's Berry Farm" and "Ghost Town." Cordelia came up with a short-term idea to make ends meet and draw people in. Walter stated, "it had become evident that just pie, coffee, hot rolls, berry jam, and sandwiches were not enough to draw people out from town."[36] In June 1934 Cordelia fried some local chickens and served eight chicken dinners on her wedding china for sixth five cents a person. The meal consisted of fried chicken, salad with rhubarb sauce, hot biscuits, vegetables, mashed potatoes, gravy, and berry pie with ice cream for dessert. This same meal is still served today exactly the same as that first meal in 1934. Cordelia once again proclaimed to Walter, "I am not going into the restaurant business."[37]

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[34] Nygaard, *Walter Knott Twentieth Century Pioneer,* 73-74.
[35] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 21.
[36] Ibid. 24.
[37] Ibid. 25.

The next day a few more guests arrived for dinner, and in few weeks the Knotts were swamped. Cordelia served her dinners in a 20-by-20-foot tea room containing five tables, that sat twenty people in total. Lines formed outside waiting for this magical chicken dinner.[38] In 1936 additional rooms were included that accommodate 70 guests, but the lines grew even long outside, "By 1937 the waiting lines for the restaurant were so long at times that Walter could stand at the front door and look north up Grand Avenue and not be able to see the end of the line."[39] In 1937 the Knotts expanded the tea room to seat 330 people and built a large kitchen with funds from the sells of berries and berry plants, because Walter could not get a loan from the bank. On Thanksgiving Day in 1937 the Knotts served 1,774 dinners, 355 pies, and 8,890 biscuits.[40] Only a year later in 1938 the Knotts had to expand once again to 600 seats.[41] Today the restaurant can service almost 2,000 people (see Photo 3). Even though the restaurant continued to grow so did the line waiting to get in. World War II had begun and there were some days people had to be turned away because of food rations, but they understood and never spoke a bad word about the Knotts.

Waiting in line outside the chicken dinner restaurant could take up to three hours or more, and Walter hated to see people wait that long with nothing to do. To entertain the guest, Walter begun to create attractions meant to draw impressions of a time gone by. In 1938 Walter ordered fifteen tons of volcanic rock from Death Valley to create a rock garden in a lath house on the west side of the berry market. Walter surrounded the rock garden with artfully arranged ferns and colored lights; hidden within the foliage was a waterfall powered by an old pump from a tractor.

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[38] Roger Holmes and Paul Bailey, *Fabulous Farm: The Story of Walter Knott and His Berry Farm,* (Los Angeles, CA: Westernlore Publishing, 1956), 107.
[39] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 81.
[40] Ibid, 95.
[41] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 43.

In a year Walter added a millstone vignette complete with a sign encouraging guests to sing "Down by the Old Mill Stream." To complete this room Walter re-created George Washington's fireplace at Mount Vernon, because he was impressed with it when he saw it in person.[42] This fireplace was only the first attraction to express his patriotist spirt.

At the same time just north of the restaurant, Walter added another restful habitat, but on a larger scale. On an alkali bed of an old dairy farm and community dump for tin cans and unburnable objects, Walter dug a massive hole in the center and filled it in with the trash and covered it over, which made an island surrounded by a lake. On the island Walter placed a small stone lighthouse surrounded by volcanic rock, and around the edge Walter planted trees and created walking paths, but the island itself was inaccessible.[43]

With the expansion of the restaurant in 1939, there came a small issue. While guests ate and looked out the window of the new addition, they looked right at a twelve-foot-high cement pipe, a requited and immovable part of the farm's irrigation system. Walter decided to hide the ugly pipe by building a 12 foot volcano around it with the volcanic rock he had left over. At the top, a small, automatically controlled boiler was hidden to add steam effects and at its base stood a little stone house where a small carved-wood devil named "Old Nick" turned a crank that occasionally activated the volcano to blow with an erupting sound effect and neon lights within the cone to simulate fire at night (see Photo 4).[44]

Other attractions around the farm included a fifteen-million-year-old petrified log, a giant redwood slab, and Russel Knott's collection of fluorescent rocks in a fourteen by fourteen-foot

[42] Ibid, 44.
[43] Ibid, 45.
[44] Ibid, 45.

backroom. Walter also purchased an eighty-year-old stagecoach rumored to have been robbed by outlaw Black Bart.[45]

With the success of the Chicken dinner restaurant and berry sells the Knotts paid off their land and were able to purchase even more land. While at the same time finally turning a profit and making a good living. The Knotts, both now 50 years old, revalued their lives and looked back from where they came. With thoughts of the past Walter wanted to pay tribute to the pioneering spirit. So, in 1940 Walter started building his most impressive and famous attraction, his own Ghost Town, created with buildings from real ghost towns around the western states and reproductions where the real building could not be found or were unavailable. The first building Walter placed on the farm was the Old Junction Hotel (built in 1868), later renamed the Old Trails Hotel by Walter. He purchased the hotel in the old west town of Prescott, Arizona. Inside the hotel Walter placed a three-minute show to honor his grandmother Rosamond Daugherty and his mother of three years old crossing the desert from Texas to California in a covered wagon. The show was titled "The Covered Wagon Show" and consisted of a big cyclorama (a cyclorama is a painting with built-in foregrounds) of a wagon train complete with colored lights and a recorded sound track telling the story of the heroic wagon train pioneers. The last part of the recording was a haunting little girl's voice saying, "Mommy, I want a drink of water!" Rumor is these were the words uttered by his mother at three years old on the wagon train to California. In 1915 Cordelia and Walter took the train to the World's Fair in San Francisco where they saw a cyclorama and it impressed Walter so much it had to be the first attraction in his ghost town.[46] Walter commissioned two artists to paint the cyclorama. The first was Fritz Zillig, who after a

[45] Ibid, 46.
[46] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 101.

year could not do the job, and second was the well-known European artist, Paul von Klieben, who in just a couple of weeks completed the project.[47]

Klieben worked hand and hand with Walter, traveling around the country looking for buildings and artifacts to add to Ghost Town. They were known to travel to the desert and grab whatever they could find, as in ore carts, wagon wheels, borax wagon, buggies, or what ever they could find to decorate Ghost Town with.[48] Some other buildings they hauled back to Buena Park were an old school house from Kansas, that still had the teachers lesson for the day on the chalk board, multiple buildings from the Mother Lode gold country, a log cabin from a mid-western state, the blacksmith shop, and the saloon (see Photo 5). What was not original they recreated as close as they could with old wood they had squired over the years. One example of this was Judge Roy Bean's Lily Saloon in Texas, which was religiously copied in every detail. The replication was done so well, a man and his wife approached Walter and stated, "I don't see how they got that building out here so fast. We just came through Texas. We went through that same building."[49] Another replica building that made a huge impact was that of the Post Office, so much so that the U.S. Postal Service designated Ghost Town as an official town.

A lot of the buildings in Ghost Town were peek-ins, where you peeked into the building from a window and you saw a wooden statute or two posed in the activity of the building's business. A great example is that of the horse thief Sad Eye Joe in the jail (see Photo 6). Guests walk down an ally way, pass Goldie's Place, the Ghost Town brothel, and end up at the jail cell of Sad Eye Joe. When you peek in Sad Eye is seated on his bed looking slightly depressed, but

[47] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 52.
[48] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 103.
[49] Ibid, 128.

he will have a live conversation with you. The wooden statues were created by artist Andy Anderson and were an inspiration for Walt Disney to create his famous animatronics.[50]

Other attractions in Ghost Town consist of Boot Hill Cemetery where if you step on a certain grave you may feel a heartbeat. Most all the headstones in the cemetery are real headstones from around the West, but there are some replications, but even those were casted from real headstones. Walter and Klieben asked cemeteries if they could buy old headstones and in return Knott replaced them with new ones. Walter also created a gold mine, in which guests could pan for real gold. "Walter personally sees that $10,000 worth of actual gold dust per year is salted in the sands for his visitors to pan out and take home."[51] In 1947 Walter purchased a Butterfield Stage Coach which carries guest for short ride around the park (see Photo 7).

After Klieben completed the Covered Wagon Show cyclorama he went right to work on a new idea to present to Walter. In 1941 Klieben created "The Transfiguration of Christ," were he painted a picture of Christ with special lighting, doors open to the picture of Christ and when the lights go down in the church Jesus's eyes open (see Photo 8 and 9). Walter built an adobe chapel that held 50 people by the lake to house the painting (see Photo 10). Walter proclaimed, "Lighting effects, and a transcribed narration of "The Christ" make this spot on the Farm the most reverent place of all,"[52] and "No visitor to the Little Chapel can ever forget seeing this visual interpretation of the transfiguration of the Christ."[53] The adobe chapel was not the only chapel on the farm. In 1955 Walter bought a chapel in a local town up the road named Downey, that was built in 1876, but was to damaged to move the entire building to the farm, but Walter

[50] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 55.
[51] Holmes and Bailey, *Fabulous Farmer,* 134.
[52] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 108.
[53] Frank R. Norris, *A Live Ghost Town,* (Frank R. Norris, 1950), 80.

was able to save the steeple. So, Walter had the church reconstructed to exact measurement, added the original steeple, and asked the pastor to continue conducting services, but on the farm. Walter placed the church by the Lake of Reflection on the farm and he and the family attended church services every Sunday (see Photo 11).

In 1947 the name of Knott's Berry Place was officially changed to "Knott's Berry Farm". With that came some big changes to Ghost Town and the farm its self. On February 21, 1951 Walter Knott purchased the old silver mine town of Calico, were he once worked as a young man and walked the ruins in the evening.[54] Calico was 75 acres with four or five of the original buildings and ruins of a dozen others, that Walter turned into a whole other Ghost Town like he did in Buena Park, but this Ghost Town he donated to San Bernardino County as an Historical park.[55] With the purchase of Calico there were some changes at the farm as well. The Silver Saloon was changed to the Calico Saloon and Walter created Calico Square which included Ghost Town and the area around Ghost Town. Walter added the Haunted Shack to Calico Square in 1952. The Haunted Shack was an attraction where guest witnessed water flow up hill, a man sits on a chair with one leg, and other optical illusions.

The biggest and most exciting change that occurred was the addition of the Calico Railroad in 1952 (see Photo 12). Walter traveled to Colorado and purchased two locomotives, five cars, and a caboose that were scheduled to be junked by the Rio Grande Southern narrow-gauge railroad. When Walter shipped the train and tracks back to the farm, he also brought along the train's engineer to tun the train on its transplanted route. Robert Boucher worked thirty-two years on the Rio Grande Southern along with Ed Randow, who after forty-one years of

[54] Staff Writer, "Sale of Calico Ghost Town and Mine Announced," *Los Angeles Times,* Feb. 22, 1951, 32.
[55] Michele and Tom Grimm, LA Times, 1980.

experience on Colorado's historic narrow-gauge lines as chief engineer, also came to Buena Park.[56] Once the train got going, guests got to experience a train robbery with some believing they were really being robbed.

One of the most important men to enter Walter's life was Bud Hurlbut, a self-taught engineer and ride maker. Walter did not want rides in his park, but Walter's son Russell and Hurlbut talked Walter into putting in a merry-go-round, which Hurlbut happen to have available. Hurlbut recalls, "The merry-go-round had a 50-foot diameter but he didn't use architects or surveyors. He just paced off the distance. Using his toe to mark the ground, Mr. Knott said, 'here's where we'll put the center pole.' He wanted it where none of the trees would be damaged."[57] Walter let Hurlbut design what ever he wanted as long as he went around the trees. Hurlbut wanted to put together a car ride, "I got an idea for a little car ride, and he said that it would be okay if no trees were removed. I had to work the tracks around to miss trees."[58] Two of the most impressive and significant rides Hurlbut designed and built were the Calico Mine ride (see Photo 13) and the Timber Mountain Log ride (see Photo 14). The mine ride opened in 1960 and is an open-air train ride that takes guests through a gold mine to witness the inner workings of hard rock mining for gold. At one point guests see a massive glory hole where hundreds of men are digging and loading up gold ore. Colored lights, steam, real mining artifacts, and sound effects make the experience very realistic. The ride was constructed in a six-story building complete with an underground river, waterfalls, and mine train track on three levels.[59] The log ride, built in 1968 across from the mine ride, is a flume water ride, which takes

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[56] [56] Holmes and Bailey, *Fabulous Farmer,* 134.
[57] Jack Boettner, "Ride Creator Designs Another: He's Been Tied Into Knott's for Years," *Los Angeles Times,* Oct 1, 1980, Sec. OC A8.
[58] Ibid
[59] Kooiman, *Walter Knott: Keeper of the Flame,* 162.

guests in a cut out log down a free-floating flume. Guests witness loggers cutting trees, camping out in the woods, and sending other logs down the flume. The ride does not consist of any tracks what so ever, the incline that take the logs up to the top of the mountain is a rubber mat material and once at the top it is a free-flowing ride down with two big drops (First of its kind for a ride). Construction took over a year and cost more than $2.5 million of Hurlbut's own money. On opening day, actor John Wayne (personal friend of Knott and Hurlbut) and his son John Jr. were the first two riders down the mountain (See Photos 15-17).[60]

Walter, a true lover of history and honoring the past, in 1950 created his own version of the El Camino Real (see Photo 18), complete with an adobe mission like entrance and 21 scale models of all 21 California missions, created by artist Leon Bayard de Volo, along the road. The road later in 1969 lead to Fiesta Village, a Mexican themed part of the park honoring the California Spanish era of the state's history. Fiesta Village was the first part of the farm not created by Walter himself but by his daughter Virginia.

In 1968 the Knott family was forced to enclose the park and start charging admonition of twenty-five cents. Walter was not happy about this; he wanted to keep the park free to guests and only charge for the rides. There are a couple of different stories about why they enclosed the park but per Walter's youngest daughter Virginia, one of the female employees was attacked in 1968 by one of the hippies Walter let stay in the park at night.[61]

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[60] Staff Writer, "Knott's Farm Hollows Out Log Ride," *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 4, 1968, OCIO.
Walter and Cordelia were the second riders, after Cordelia claimed she would never ride it. The ride broke down after the first 15 minutes in operation, with the Knott's inside. The break down was a power outage city wide not a problem with the ride itself.

[61] Orange County Register. "Marion Knott recalls restaurant's early days - 2009-06-05," You Tube Video, 3:23, July 15 2015,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrAa6odrfZg&index=1&list=PLxuC0MmsmzrhMPsWhe71bicqW83P3uhkC&t=2s.

Walter's biggest pride and joy was constructed in 1966 outside the park on the other side of Beach Boulevard where Walter created an exact replica of Independence Hall (see Photo 19) to accompany his lending library. Walter stated, "It will be our reminder of some of the greatest events in all history."[62] Walter created a team of men to travel to the real Independence Hall and take photos and measure every inch of the building so that the recreation like all the others is perfectly exact. Ride designer Hurlbut was give the task to cast the Liberty Bell with the crack and all, and Hurlbut did exactly that, even coming within five pounds of the original bells weight.[63] Independence Hall is a true reminder of what a patriotic, hardworking, humble, giving man Walter Knott was. Governor Ronald Reagan said it best of Walter,

> "Walter Knott "is one of America's great Patriots; one who has successfully climbed to the very top rung of the ladder of success, as few Americans have; yet one who has always been careful to see that he left each rung of that ladder in good repair so those who followed after would have less trouble climbing life's ladder than he, Walter Knott, California's and America's Great Pioneer/Patriot."[64]

Walter and Cordelia Knott, children of California pioneers, survived on love, faith in God, honesty, hard work, commitment and a no quit spirt to fight through one hardship to another, from; the unforgiving Mojave Desert, poverty, failure, the Great Depression, and two World Wars to accidently create an empire. They had no grand plan drawn out, no huge dream to once own a restaurant let alone a historically themed amusement park. The chicken dinner restaurant was just a termitary way to make it through the Great Depression but grew into an unplanned historical, educational theme park. Walter drew on his grandmother's pioneering stories, his experience walking the ruins of Calico, his love for old west history and preservation, and his patriotic spirt to create a very unique one of kind piece of American history, by using

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[62] Merritt and Lynxwiler, *Knott's Presevered*, 102.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Caldwell, T*he Genealogy of the Knott Family*, 182.

reality and replication to transform guests back to 1860 and out of their current reality if only for a moment in time. Walter reminisced about the days of the California pioneers, but Walter and Cordelia Knott are true California pioneers in their own right.

Photo 1: Original berry stand built in 1923.

Jay Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook,* Accessed May 10, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/pg/knottsearlyyears/photos/?ref=page_internal

Photo 2: Berry Place Market, that replace the stand, built in 1928.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 23.

Photo 3: Berry Market and Chicken Dinner Restaurant 1975

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook.*

Photo 4: Working Volcano outside Chicken Dinner Restaurant, built in 1939.

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook.*

Photo 5: Ghost Town, started in 1940.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 70.

Photo 6: Sad Eye Joe just before being put in Jail Indefinitely, with creator Andy Anderson.

Jenning, *Images of American,* 46.

Photo 7: Butterfield Stage Coach, 1947.

Jenning, *Images of American*,45.

Photo 8: Painting of Jesus, who's eyes opened.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 53.

Photo 9: Guest would be given this to take home.

Personal photo

Photo 10: Adobe church that housed "The Transfiguration of Christ"

Jenning, *Images of American*, 53.

Photo 11: Chapel from Downey, built in 1876. Steeple brought to Knott's in 1955 and chapel built around it.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 101.

Photo 12: Colorado Narrow Gauge Railroad at Knott's Berry Farm arrived in 1952.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 88.

Photo 13: Calico Mine ride, built in 1960.

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook*.

Photo 14: Log Ride, built in 1968.

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook.*

Photo 15: Walter Knott and ride designer Bud Hurlbut on the Log Ride.

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook.*

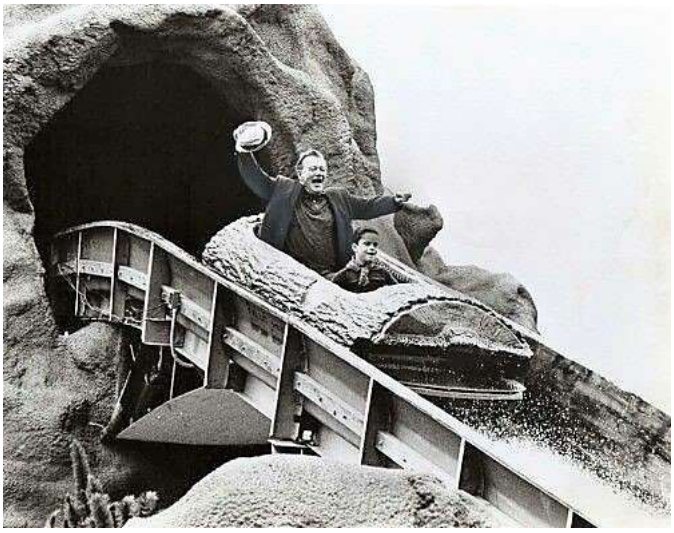

Photo 16: John Wayne and his son John Jr. the first to ride the Log Ride opening day.

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook.*

Photo 17: John Wayne and his son John Jr. hamming it up for a promo shot.

Jennings, "Knott's Berry Farm: The Early Years," *Facebook.*

Photo 18: El Camino Real where the 21 model California Missions were displayed along the road.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 102.

Photo 19: Walter Knott in front of Indolence Hall.

Jenning, *Images of American*, 114.

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