

Interview with
Herbert Gabriel

April 2005

by John Daley

for the

Highway 101 Association

Interview with Dr. Herbert Gabriel, April 2005

**Interview with Dr. Herbert Gabriel on April 2005 at his home in Oceanside, California.
Interviewer: John Daley. Transcriber: Kristi Hawthorne.**

John: Give me your full name and current address?

Herbert: Herbert Francis Gabriel, 1023 Leonard Avenue, Oceanside, California, 92054.

John: When and where were you born?

Herbert: I was born in Oceanside on December 14, 1919 on the northeast corner of Tremont Street and First Street, where the Regal Theater building is now. In other words, Tremont Street would dead-end into the property where the house was that my parents owned at that time. It was a two-story building and it was adjacent to the house that has been moved out to Heritage Park.

John: What were your parents' names?

Herbert: Oscar Gabriel and Amanda Lundin Gabriel. Both parents were born in Sweden and they were married here in the United States but they did not know one another in Sweden. They came here independently of one another.

John: How did your family come to Southern California?

Herbert: On the Santa Fe Railway. My dad was transferred from Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1911 to come to Oceanside as roadmaster. My parents had come to Oceanside in 1910 on a vacation. Subsequent to that the roadmaster in Oceanside died and my father was transferred here to take his place. They were married in 1898 in Albuquerque and then they moved to Winslow for a while, back to Albuquerque and then they came to California. In this regard, I have the unique situation that a brother and sister were born in the territory of New Mexico, and a brother and sister who were born in the territory of Arizona. They came to Oceanside in 1911 and both Arizona and New Mexico territories became states in 1911 subsequent to them moving here.

John: What's the definition of roadmaster?

Herbert: He was in charge of the road, the railway track. They had a separate division called Roads, Bridges and Buildings. He didn't have to do any construction for railway stations, platforms or any bridges but he was responsible for the ballast which are the rocks or cinders which they used to support the rails and ties and like the porous materials so the water would drain through that and not accumulate around the ties and cause them to be rotted. They didn't have any tie treatment plant at the south end of National City, the terminus of the Santa Fe Railway. They treated the ties down there with creosote. Also, at that time Oceanside did have service from Temecula, through Fallbrook into Oceanside through the canyons up into 1894 when the track was washed away due to flooding. Subsequent to that they had traffic on the railway only from Oceanside to Fallbrook. The train would go over there in the morning and come back to Oceanside and resupply with cargo to be taken over to Escondido and it would go over to Escondido in the afternoon. We called that the "Escondido Dinky". They had a freight

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train and they had one car, half of which was for passengers and half was for mail and railway express.

John: Your dad was in charge of all those rails?

Herbert: Yes, all the tracks.

John: What period of time did you live on or near the 101?

Herbert: Well, I was born in 1919 and when I was about 18 months old, so that would be about 1920-21, my parents moved to 202 South Hill Street, which is the southeast corner of Topeka and Hill Streets. They had a two-story house there. This was our residence until I graduated from high school in 1937 and went away to college. While I was gone in 1940 my father sold the house there and part of the house was moved to 224 South Ditmar Street and Mr. Tenney, the school principal, bought the front part of the house, the two-story part, and moved it down here on South Nevada Street, I think it is, near the intersection of Oceanside Boulevard, which at that time was Short Street. The front part of the house is still there.

John: I'm sorry; the back part of the house went where?

Herbert: The back part of the house, the single story, was moved up to 224 South Ditmar Street. There was a little street called Georgia Street that was just about a half block long, or maybe one block, I don't know, between Ditmar and Nevada. It wasn't a full street, as we know it. Most of the streets going east and west in Oceanside in this part of town are "avenues", like Michigan Avenue. Most of the rest of the town are streets.

John: Can you tell me what outstanding event occurred that was meaningful to you as related to the 101?

Herbert: Well, living there for one thing. It was a two way street and I had friends in the neighborhood there and we could cross at will. We didn't have to go over crosswalks. I remember Bobby Martin who lived across the street had been over to my house late one afternoon or early evening and he was hit by a car and broke his leg. That was a significant event.

John: What year do you think that might have been?

Herbert: Oh, around 1926 or 1927, thereabouts. The holiday parades were on Hill Street. I remember an Armistice Day Parade, which is now Veterans' Day, and Harold Davis was dressed in his World War I uniform. There were other people there but I can't remember who they were.

John: What part of Hill Street would the parade be on?

Herbert: It was on the South end, maybe Wisconsin, and it'd go north.

John: So they were having parades from Wisconsin even back then?

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Herbert: Oh, yes. There were more horses in the parades back then.

John: You don't see horses anymore.

Herbert: Well, they had to have a work detail to follow up! One significant thing I do remember, as 1939 or 1940 approached the traffic became heavier on the street with more trucks, probably due to the increased Navy activity in San Diego. Camp Pendleton didn't become a reality until 1942 but the traffic had increased by that time on Highway 101 or Hill Street.

John: Let me go back, I'm sorry. Was your house on Hill Street right across from Weseloh's?

Herbert: Well, Weseloh's wasn't there. It was a vacant lot.

John: But it would be across from Weseloh's now?

Herbert: Yes, it was.

John: So what's there now is actually an old service station which is a Mexican food restaurant. It was a Texaco station.

Herbert: Well, that came after my father sold the property.

John: That's now Pancho's Taco Shop.

Herbert: That's right. On the northeast corner of Topeka and Hill was a vacant lot.

John: Weseloh didn't build that building until 1946?

Herbert: That's correct. After the war, I believe. They would have revival meetings while it was still a vacant lot and it was nice to go up and see the tents being erected. That was impressive.

John: Do you remember the traffic increasing during Prohibition?

Herbert: No, I wasn't aware of that.

John: The chamber of commerce declared they wanted to change the name of Hill Street to the "Tijuana Highway" because there was so much traffic during Prohibition from Los Angeles to Mexico.

Herbert: I was not aware of that. I was young then.

John: Do remember seeing police patrolling the 101?

Herbert: Sure. They started the black and white cars, the Fords. Harold Davis drove one for quite some time. Guy Woodward became police chief. He lived right across the alley behind us.

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Next to him on the other side was Dr. Carrillo, who was a brother of Leo Carrillo. He was a dentist and I think he was instrumental in my acquaintance with him.

John: What is your earliest recollection of Harold Davis? What year do think that might have been?

Herbert: Around 1926 or 1927. I had brothers who were contemporaries of his. Harold was a very gregarious person. He was a friendly policeman. He did his job but he was always in charge, too.

John: Do you remember the first time you rode on the 101 and where you were going?

Herbert: I don't remember the first time. My brother and I had a Model T Ford. My father never owned a car because he had a pass to ride on the railway and even if we went to San Diego we went on the train. My brother Oscar graduated from USC dental school in 1929 and he bought a Ford Model A Roadster. These were the first automobiles in our family.

John: He bought a new one in 1929?

Herbert: Yes.

John: He was a USC graduate?

Herbert: That's correct.

John: Do you remember anything else about riding on the 101?

Herbert: Well, we would go to San Diego with friends and they were open vehicles and we would have to put curtains up if the weather was cold. I remember one morning we had been in San Diego and La Jolla and we were coming home early in the morning. There were no side curtains in the car and we came from La Jolla up to Rose Canyon. There was an intersection there where it joined 101 and it was pretty chilly. There were a lot of eucalyptus trees in that area where the Torrey Pines area is and where the golf courses are now. There was an Associated Gasoline Station there at sort of an intersection. If you continued to go south from that point then you entered Rose Canyon which was the entrance into San Diego.

John: Do you know what year that might have been?

Herbert: Well, when I first became aware of it was probably 1926 or 1927. I know that intersection was there until after World War II and I do recall having heard about one or two ammunition trucks going south that caught on fire. They got into Rose Canyon south of this intersection I'm describing, and the drivers had to leave them because they were carrying explosives and they got away to warn people and they blew up. When I came home from World War II in 1946 there were trees that were still scarred by that explosion. I don't know what damage it did to the highway; it wasn't the freeway in those days. The evidence on the terrain and vegetation was quite apparent.

John: Do you remember taking the 101 up the Torrey Pines Grade through the park?

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Herbert: I do remember when that new highway was put in and they had to do quite a bit of cutting on the ascent of the existing 101. My sister Mabel married Harvey Love and he described to me how they sandpapered the sides of the bluff, it was just perfectly smooth. Then as it was exposed to weather, the rain would rush down then erosion began and it didn't have that smooth appearance anymore. It was an impressive thing to see. I think that bridge that was over Sorrento Flats was built to accommodate that new stretch of highway.

John: In 1931. There were two bridges and they just took one down. Before 1931 the road went up through the park.

Herbert: That's right. That's the one that was so cold coming down.

John: That same area, do you remember the military base right along the 101?

Herbert: Do you mean Camp Callan? That was up there where the two golf courses are. It went over to that intersection that I described farther south of there.

John: Do you remember that they took all of the buildings down and had road races there for a number of years?

Herbert: Oh yes. I had a 1953 MG and I didn't race there but I was well aware of those races because driving an MG, if you saw another driver in an MG you always had to wave to him because he would always wave to you. They had quite a racecourse through there.

John: I think it might have shut down in the late 1950's.

Herbert: That sounds about right.

John: Was there another camp along the 101?

Herbert: Camp Elliott was farther east of there. Out around the 805 or 15.

John: Was there another base besides Camp Callan?

Herbert: I don't think so. I was on the base when it was active because I graduated from Dental School in February of 1943 and I went to Los Angeles to sign up for the Army Air Force and they sent me to Camp Callan for my physical examination. My brother was practicing dentistry in Encinitas at that time. Some of the dentists at Camp Callan would come there to see him in the evenings. He had different working hours. He began his office practice at 10:00 a.m. and worked until 7:00 at night because there were people who couldn't come in during the daytime, they had to come in on their off time. These dentists whom I had met in his office were there in a dental clinic at Camp Callan when I came through to take my physical and dental examination.

John: You were in the Army Air Corps?

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Herbert: Army Air Force. I reported for duty in Salt Lake City, Utah and I was assigned to Clovis, New Mexico. I was there for a while and then I was assigned to the 507th Fire Group and joined up with them in Nebraska and we were there for a period of time. I thought I'd seen the last of the southwest desert and we went down to the panhandle of Texas to Dalhart, Texas. From there we completed our training in aircraft and got all the teeth fixed for everybody. They had about 1100 people and then we went on two troop trains to go to Seattle, Washington for ? debarkation. One train went up north of Cajon Pass and went to Denver and Fort Collins and just before we got to Camp Warren turned left and we went west up through Montana and Idaho up into Spokane and down the Columbia River. The other train went across Arizona and New Mexico, through the Imperial Valley and the Salton Sea and up through the Central Valley of California and to Oregon.

John: Do you remember the first time you drove yourself on the 101?

Herbert: Yes. My brother had a Model T pickup. It didn't have a top on it and had a wooden back to it. My brother-in-law, Dorsey Merrill, had a service station and garage down on the corner of Fourth and Hill Street. He got that car from my brother and he said if I sanded it he would paint it for me. So I sanded it and he was very meticulously inclined so he and Charlie did it well. He sprayed painted it dark green. That was probably the car I drove on Hill Street. I promptly saw and was encountered by Harold Davis sometime, but that was when I was in high school.

John: Did Harold run you down?

Herbert: No, he was pretty decent. I had a little light I put on the middle of the steering wheel and he said, "it's a little bit too bright, I think you better take it off." It was actually threaded to fit on a gearshift of a car but I found out that if I took that nut off the steering wheel, the center of it, the threads matched up so I put it on there.

John: What do you recall about some of the businesses on the Highway?

Herbert: Hilton Cleaners was located on North Hill Street. Mrs. Kolb had a flower and pottery shop there on that same block.

John: What block was that?

Herbert: The 100 block of North Hill. There was a Standard Station across the street from them and then across the street, on the southeast corner of Hill Street was a Shell Station and I remember Bob Schaffer working there after he graduated from high school. South of there was a medical office. Dr. Marchon had a dental office in there and Dr. Irving Stone and Dr. Kelly, I think, I'm not sure about that. Then Mrs. Hilton had the Lamar Beauty Salon in there. Farther south the Keisker Hotel was opened in 1927 and now it's the Dolphin Hotel. I knew the Keisker's, they lived right across the street and the hotel was right across the street from where my parents' house was. All the kids in the neighborhood wanted to get a job there being the bellhop, but it didn't work out. I think there was an automotive shop, Harlow and Phillips in part of that building. Tom Ramos had a grocery store in the center suite of the Hotel. Then there was a vacant lot and then Dr. Markey had his office in there. Then Herb Johnson, his dad was killed

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on a tractor in San Luis Rey, I forget his first name but his mother was Sybil. I don't remember his aunt's name, but they lived in that house.

John: The Victorian house that was there?

Herbert: Yes.

John: Do you recall when they build that addition in front of it?

Herbert: After the war, I think. There was a period of time when I wasn't here. I was away at college and then I went into the service.

John: Do you know what business was started in that when you came back?

Herbert: I don't know. The Lindsley's had a grocery store on the north end of that block near where that Coronet Bookstore used to be. I think Milo McCallum, his dad was a railroad foreman, and he had a grocery store in there someplace. There was the El Ray Café and the San Luis Rey Café. Farther up there was the Oceanic Café. Where the King's Men is, was the First National Bank on the corner and across the street was the Bank of America. Where the Fullerton Mortgage Company is was the J.E. Jones Hardware Store and up above they had a dance hall. They had an annual dance up there every year. Up Mission Avenue there was the Odd Fellow's Lodge and the post office was located there and then J.C. Penney. Then Exton & Nichols Drug Store.

John: Were they on Hill Street?

Herbert: They were on the corner of Freeman and Mission Avenue. On Hill Street there was the Squirrel Inn.

John: Do you remember that?

Herbert: Yes. Then the Oceanside Garage and then there was a miniature golf course up near Third Street. Then there was a big Victorian house across the street from there. It was a huge place, on the north side of Third Street.

John: So the northeast corner of Hill and Third.

Herbert: Yes.

John: That was the Andrew Jackson Myers house.

Herbert: They had a sign for a 99-year lease and that sign was up there for years. It was a big, two-story house. Then on the other side of the Palomar Theater there was a restaurant in there. I don't remember the name of that. I know that was there after World War II. Across the street was the Ford Garage. Charlie Laverty had that for awhile. I think it was built first by the Merrill family, Charles Merrill. It was the Merrill Garage. The Ford dealership was on the north side of that. Dorsey built the original station he had there. That was a pretty good-sized affair. They had nearly the whole block. Then there was Ed Wolmer's Music Store on the corner of Hill and

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Third Street.

John: Do you remember the early car dealerships?

Herbert: On the northwest corner of Michigan and Hill Street there was a Buick Agency there.

John: Did you ever buy a car on Coast Highway?

Herbert: Yes, later on, after the war. I bought a Plymouth on the corner of Short Street and Hill Street.

John: From Gene Geil?

Herbert: No, Gene was on Wisconsin. This was on Short Street. It was Plymouth and Desoto. Gene had the Chrysler and Dodge.

John: What block was it on?

Herbert: It was where that Goodyear Tire Store is now. The name escapes me. I bought a 1947 Plymouth from him.

John: Was that the first new car you ever bought?

Herbert: Yes, it was.

John: Did you like it?

Herbert: It served its purpose. It was a good car.

John: Do you remember any unusual landmarks or structures on the Highway?

Herbert: Oh sure. You know in Oceanside they had that pylon right in the middle of the intersection of Hill Street and Mission Avenue. They had that tall flag pole there, too. I was in the Boy Scouts and we would go down there in the morning at 6:00 in the summertime and other holidays and raise the flag.

John: Where was the flagpole?

Herbert: It was on the corner where the drugstore was, on the northwest corner of Mission.

John: And do you remember the pylon in the middle?

Herbert: Yes, it had a big light on it.

John: Did it flash?

Herbert: I don't remember that. I don't think so.

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John: Did it have signs on it?

Herbert: Well, it had a directional sign but there was no advertising or anything like that.

John: Did it say "Oceanside"?

Herbert: Well, I think there's a picture of that down at the Jolly Roger.

John: Do you remember where it came from?

Herbert: No, I don't.

John: Do you remember why it left?

Herbert: No. They widened the streets, I suppose.

John: It came from Los Angeles and they got rid of it about 1931 because too many people ran into it. I suspect they moved it from Los Angeles because too many people ran into it!

Herbert: You think it was battle-scarred when they brought it down here.

John: Any other landmarks?

Herbert: Going up north of town where Camp Pendleton is now, the highway went on the west side of the railway. There was an all dirt golf course out there, just on the south side of the San Luis Rey river, out where those flats are a little mesa up there.

John: About where Camp Del Mar is?

Herbert: Yes, it was up high; it wasn't down towards the beach. Then you went about two miles and there was a right angle turn to cross the railway and the highway then continued north on the east side of the tracks. Part of the time it was along the base of the mountains. I think it was the summer of 1936 I worked up in the bean fields in what is now Camp Pendleton. It was farmed by Fred Carter and he hired the boys and would pick us up at Hill Street and Mission Avenue on a flat bed truck and then take us out there to hoe weeds. They didn't have a weed killer in those days and it was mostly morning glories. The Santa Fe Railway, about ten miles from town, put into two spurs of tracks at 45 degree angles or maybe 40 degrees from the railroad track facing to the south. They had two --- rifles mounted --- and they would fire these fourteen inch shells out on the ocean. They would raise the barrel of the gun about 45 degrees. I was out there working a couple of times when they were firing and you could stand behind that railway car and you could follow the projectory of the shell going out there quite a distance. They said it could go about 23 or 26 miles before it landed in the water.

John: Do you recall any of the buildings or landmarks down south?

Herbert: Sure, the Red Apple Inn, the Carlsbad Hotel. For a while the Highway 101 went

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through State Street in Carlsbad and there was a hotel there. The Twin Inns, of course. One time, before I went in the service, I was working for my brother's office for a period of time until I was brought up to active duty and I was driving south along the bluff there around Ponto, as it was called, Terramar now. And there was a Navy Plane, a single engine fighter aircraft, with just a pilot, and he put his flaps down and slowed his speed and I speeded up and we were maintaining pace there pretty much. I waved to him and he waved to me and saluted and that was a very unique experience I thought for that time. Before the war or maybe during the war, they planted guayule in that Terramar area and that was a substitute for rubber. I think there's some interest in it again. I think they had an oil well in that area. There was the Del Mar Hotel, that was always a big attraction for people visiting Southern California. The area through Leucadia was just a single road, it wasn't a divided road as it is now. It was just a two lane road.

John: Do you remember the restaurant coming into Leucadia?

Herbert: Noah's Ark? Yes, I remember that.

John: Did you ever eat there?

Herbert: I never did. I could never find out how you got up there. That was on the south end of the Batiquitos Lagoon.

John: I've never met anybody who ate there either, but a lot of people recall it. It was even up when I was a kid. Do you remember any people associated with the road?

Herbert: Tom Hurley, he was a Supervisor for the 5th District and he was very instrumental in getting improvements made. He was very good. He was followed by Frank Howell, who lived in Escondido and he would come over here to Oceanside. I remember talking to him many times and he was pretty good about taking care of things. The city had a maintenance yard out in San Luis Rey Valley where Heritage Park is now.

John: Do you have any favorite memories of the road?

Herbert: Well, it didn't have any competition except the railway! You either went on the train or by car if you went to LA.

John: Was that a conundrum for you because it was the road that put your dad's business out of business for the most part?

Herbert: I don't think so. I think it was mostly the airline industry. The freeway system was started by President Eisenhower in 1957, I think.

John: Do you have a favorite trip along the 101? Did you ever drive to Mexico?

Herbert: About 1935 we drove for a one-day trip with my brother down to Ensenada and back again. It was very scenic, very pretty to go along that section of the road. It was always a nice trip to go down to San Diego. We would go down on the train and my cousins would meet us at the depot or else we'd go down on a streetcar down to National City and Chula Vista.

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John: Do you remember any bad accidents along the 101?

Herbert: I remember an aircraft going down and Cedric Brown was killed in that on a Sunday night. Does that qualify?

John: Was it on the road?

Herbert: It was west of highway. I do remember one accident that happened about 12 miles north of town. There was a bad crash and there were multiple deaths in that. It was the late 1950's.

John: Did they refer to that area as Slaughter Alley?

Herbert: I don't recall that. Pat Thomas was a salesman that worked for Weseloh and he was killed up there by San Onofre.

John: My recollection was they called it Slaughter Alley when they put the three lanes in there, which accelerated the bad accidents; a lot of people falling asleep, racing home or drinking, or whatever.

Herbert: I know they first put up a barricade between the North and Southbound lanes around San Onofre when Governor Brown was being driven down there and somebody side-swiped his car and the median barricade went up the next day.

John: He had a little pull.

Herbert: Yes.

John: Do you remember any specific stories about the traffic cops patrolling the 101? Was it the Highway Patrol?

Herbert: The Highway Patrol had Otto Langar who drove a motorcycle. He gave one of my sisters a ride. She got behind him on the motorcycle and she rubbed the calf of her leg up against the exhaust pipe and burned her leg. She wasn't happy about that!

John: Do you remember what the speed limit was when you were a kid?

Herbert: No, I don't know. Most cars couldn't go that fast.

John: Did you ever get a ticket on the 101?

Herbert: No, of course not! I parked the wrong way in front of my house one time!

John: You never got a moving violation in your life?

Herbert: Well, yes, I did. I was coming home, this was in March of 1960, I was coming home from taking my son to Terrabella and Gordon was with me in the back seat and we were coming

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up the grapevine going south and it was drizzling rain. They were constructing another two-lane stretch of the Interstate 5 and there was a truck ahead of me, a flatbed that had one large roll of coiled metal. I learned later it was going to be made into tin cans. I put the brakes on and I was doing fine. I was slowing down and all of sudden I started to slide and I slid right into the back end of him and it ruined my car. The Highway Patrol came along soon after that and asked me how long I had been on there before. Well, it had been about three months at Christmas time. This was Easter. He said, "Well, they're working on the road here and the dump trucks are carrying dirt across this road here and the rain caused it turn into mud." Well, the ticket I got for "failure to pass". I didn't pass the truck, I ran into it. The fine was \$15 for "failure to pass." I came to an abrupt stop.

John: Do you remember any celebrities along the route?

Herbert: I saw President Roosevelt. I was standing on the curb by the Keisker Hotel and I was very impressed. He was enthusiastic and waving. He was happy to see the people who came to see him. He was really, really happy about that.