

*(This paper shares stories told to Innes McElrath by her family as she was growing up in Oakland, California. This was written her in about 1940 for an English assignment. It was retyped by her son from the original copy in the family's private collection.)*

After the death of Mrs. Ralph Kirkham, wife of General Kirkham, in Oakland, CA, James Alexander Smilie, originally from Canada, bought the Kirkham residence at 58-Eighth St., Oakland, in 1898. In this home he lived with his wife, Isobel Lawrence McDonald Smilie, and children Charles McDonald Smilie, Euphemia Innes Smilie, Elizabeth Cameron Smilie and Mary Isobel Smilie. It became one of the show places of Oakland.

Mr. Smilie was a prominent contractor in his day and built many buildings in different parts of California. There was Oakland's Hall of Records and the Central Bank Building, the Fresno Court House (probably when he bought the Del Rio Rey Ranch in Del Rey, near Fresno) and a building in Pomona, CA, where my mother, Mary Isobel, was born.

The home on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, before 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Fallon Street were cut through the property, had spacious grounds covering the land East to what is now First Avenue, and West to the present Oak Street. The grounds were covered with rolling green lawns, and beautiful trees were cultivated about the land. The house itself was a beautiful twenty-one room red one, a three-story structure with a tower on top and a solarium on the side. From the tower it was possible to see all over Oakland on a clear day. Later the house was turned around to face Fallon Street, and the solarium was removed at the move. Its address was 825 Fallon Street.

The Smilie home was the scene of two beautiful weddings, plus an added number of attractive parties at which the young members of the Smilie family were hosts. The first wedding in the "Red House", as it was fondly called, was on December 4, 1912, of Mary Isobel to Alden McElrath, scion of another prominent East Bay family. In a lovely candlelight ceremony, on the arm of her father, she and her four attendants walked down a long, circular staircase, through the spacious hallway, up to the alter placed before windows in the drawing room. Likewise, on June 17, 1917, her older sister, Elizabeth Cameron, became the bride of Claude Charles Brown, of Berkeley, just two weeks before the United States declared war on Germany. Shortly afterwards he was called to duty in San Diego, where she lived with him until he journeyed to Washington for Officer's Training School. He was then informed, after receiving his Lieutenant's commission, that he was to go on active duty. He left for his wife's home in Oakland to say goodbye, and enroute he was taken ill with influenza. It was only the second case

of flu to strike Oakland so, ignorant of its evil powers, Elizabeth stayed with him, although she was pregnant at the time, until he was better, when she herself caught the rapidly spreading disease. Ten days later, on October 15, 1918, she died of the dreaded disease, and on October 18<sup>th</sup> the funeral services were held in the drawing room where, a little over a year before, she had been married to the one she loved.

The Smilie's son, Charles, called Charlie, manager of the Del Rio Ray Ranch, came North to the funeral and, upon returning South to Del Rey, he, too, contracted the devastating germ, influenza, and fifteen days after his sister's death he too lay dead amid the wildly cheering and intoxicating excitement of Armistice, and he also had his funeral services said for him in the once happy drawing room.

Shortly after, Mrs. Smilie and her daughter Euphemia (called Effie) left for a trip to Europe and the Orient, and on the return voyage across the Pacific Miss Smilie met her future husband, Philip Lindsay Huffman, who was returning home on leave from his place of business in Korea to visit his family in Indiana. A year later Euphemia journeyed back to Korea to marry him, and settled there for two years, after which they returned to the old Oakland residence where the two families, the Huffmans and the McElraths and their children, lived with their mother, Mrs. Smilie, until 1925. The house was then leased to tenants for five years – the Huffmans moving to the Del Rio Rey Ranch, and the McElraths and Mrs. Smilie moved to 27<sup>th</sup> Street, in Oakland. Then in 1930 the Alden McElraths returned to the old family home after Mrs. Smilie's death in 1930 where, once more, it was the scene of many happy occasions until the moved to 560-Oakland Ave. in 1936.

Then in 1936 the house was sold to the Presbyterian Ming Quong Home. The Red House was torn down, but there yet remains the beautiful marble mantles, mahogany doors and the “dog” newel post of the magnificent circular stairway, the furnishings and above all, many fond memories of the happy and exciting days spent in the home of early Oaklanders, my grandparents.