



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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September 2020

It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Murrieta Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.

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Email:

info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org



Walt Cooper's Life (Part 1)

May 18, 2001

I was born October 28, 1911 in West Riverside, California. My parents lived on a farm where they raised about 10 acres of alfalfa and garden stuff on the rest that wasn't taken by the house, barn, etc. The Riverside Cement plant was about one and a half miles from us and they poured that cement dust over everything within two or three miles. My father made part of the living by working in orange groves with a team but the cement dust was on the trees and that soon gave him asthma and he had to quit that kind of work. The alfalfa was irrigated from a canal about one quarter of a

mile west of us. My father lowered a water wheel into the canal with a windlass and the buckets on the wheel picked up water and dumped it into the flume that led to our place.

I would like to go back to 1916 when it rained so much that the Rubidoux Bridge washed out. We couldn't ford the river; we never got to town for a month. During the stormy night, someone stole one of our horses and we then had two.

In the winter of 17-18 we decided to sell and we finally sold to a man named Newkirk for \$5,500



Bill Harvey owned this building in the 1920s. The Cooper family first lived here when they moved to Murrieta. This was once Dr. Lawrence's Drug Store on 3rd Avenue. It was built in 1886. Source: E. Hale Curran Collection

and had a hard time to get that. We moved to Huntington Beach and it was full of vacant houses; so we rented 10 acres and an old hour for \$5 a month. We could have bought a house on three acres for five hundred dollars, but my parents weren't sure we would stay there, so we kept on with the low rent. Well in 1920 the Bolsa Chica oil well blew oil all over the derrick and the boom was on.

The man we rented from first in Huntington Beach was named Henry Davenport and he was very poor. All he owned was that ten acres and an old house. When the Bolsa Chica came in, he sold to some big oil company for enough money to live in luxury the rest of his life, but he thought the way to make money was to drill for oil. So, he went to San Marcos and put

up an oil derrick. It could be seen west of town for years after but someone tore it down for the lumber. Last we heard of the Davenports was that the whole family was picking cotton in Imperial Valley.

So we moved to Murrieta in 1921. Before that, in Huntington Beach, we met Dave and Inez Hunt, who bought 160 acres of land NW of the Vail's Santa Rosa Mountain. Dave started to move up there and my dad and I spent all summer on Dave's ranch to guard his stuff while he moved. He had made a truck out of his Model T touring car by bolting a frame outside of the T-frame and putting sprockets where the car wheels were and chains to the solid tire wheels.

We drove to Murrieta from Huntington Beach in three

days with our team and part of Hunt's property. To show the speed of the old truck, Dave told us to stay about 50 feet behind him, because if he broke down, he would cramp it into the bank. The Tenaja Grade is about two and a half miles of steep road.

I enjoyed that summer very much, but we had no company except two Santa Rosa cowboys named Ara Freeman and Rube Duncan. We were short of food as Dave was over a week getting to us. The two cowboys told us of an old road to Wildomar that was no longer used, so on Sunday we drove the buggy down there. One side of the hill was DG and so narrow that two wheels hung over and I got out and walked behind. In Wildomar there was no store. The post office had bread for sale and we bought some and went back up the grade.

We arrived in Murrieta in 1921, the last of March. I entered the grammar school the next Monday in the 5th grade. A teacher name Mrs. Harrison taught the four upper grades. Next year it was F. A. White, who came from Cottonwood where my cousins, Irving, Merrill, and Glen had been taught by him.

Dave Hunt made a living by selling oak wood to at least four schools, Wildomar, Murrieta, Temecula, and Alamos. He usually picked up my dad and me to help unload it. He got \$8 a cord (the last wood I bought was \$160 a cord!). His old Model T truck was the first I

ever steered and it would scare my dad when Dave would have me steer it, but the top speed was about 12 mph.

We rented the back two rooms of the old drug store on 3rd Avenue from Bill Harvey, who lived in the front part and the upstairs. He was a bee man and kept three or four hives in the backend of the lot. It took two or three more trips to Huntington Beach to get totally moved.

My dad was looking to buy a place and found two 50 by 100 foot lots on the corner of 2nd Avenue and Juniper Street with an old two-story house for \$300. The house was built like so many others about 1885. The house had five or six rooms, two or three upstairs and the same downstairs with old square nails

that would rather break than bend.

It took Dad and I all summer to tear the house down and it rained quite a bit that winter, so no building was done. Then he hired Frank Shupe to build our new house and it is still standing. Our neighbors SE of us on 2nd were the Austin Freeman family. Later we bought their house and orchard that was on the rest of the block except two lots that belonged to Joe Olivera. The Freeman's had six children who I grew up with.

Mr. White graduated me from the eighth grad in 1923. My mother thought that eleven was too young to go to high school, so I took a postgraduate course with Mrs. Thayer. She taught me more than anyone. I walked only two blocks to

school and came home for lunch. I went barefooted till I entered high school in September 1924. There were three in the 1924 graduating class, Mary Sykes, Sadie Freeman and me.

I entered Elsinore High School in September 1924 and the subjects I liked best were Spanish, and free hand drawing. I could see no use for English and Algebra. The main subject I learned in high school was how to smoke cigarettes. After three years, in September 1927, I quit high school after a fight with a new principal named Henselmyer, who was German. I then went to work for my uncle, Mark Robertson, on his 400 cattle ranch, four miles NW of Sage, California.



Museum Update

The museum has been closed since March 2020 due to the pandemic, but work continues behind the scenes.

Museum Director Annette Jennings has prepared a new exhibit on the Sykes family. She has been adding new items and rearranging the current displays. She has continued to accept historical donations and

has been scanning many photos from the archives. A volunteer has been working with her in archiving all the items in the exhibits, digitizing the archives, and inputting them into a computer database.

President Jeffery Harmon continues to research the Lake Elsinore newspaper archive collection. He is collecting hun-

dreds of articles related to Murrieta's history. He has also accepted historical donations for the museum. Currently he is conducting the Murrieta Valley Historic Tree Survey. Images from his research can be found on the Murrieta Museum's Facebook page. For more information please visit our website: murrietahistoricalsociety.org

President and Vice President's Message

Greetings Society members, friends, and supporters,

This year has been a challenging year for all of us. We have all had to adjust our daily lives and find new ways to move forward in each passing day. We are sending this letter out to you in order to check on

you and your family's wellness and to find out if you are in need of any assistance.

Please send us an email, a letter, or a phone call and let us know how you and your family are doing during this global crisis.

Our thoughts and prayers are with each of you and we look

forward to the day when these trying days are behind us.

Thank you.

Jeffery Harmon
President
Annette Jennings
Vice President



The Murrieta Valley Historic Trees Survey Project

The Gettysburg National Military Park protects and interprets the landscape of the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War. Amongst the park are "witness trees", trees that stood and watched as the battle raged and soldiers' blood was spilled. These trees stand as a testimony of the sacrifices that were made on the historic battlefield.

When Murrieta's post office was established on July 28, 1885 in Dr. Lashlee's Drug Store, there were very few trees growing in the Murrieta Valley. There were ancient oaks in the canyons and the plateau, and there were a few cottonwoods in the creek.

In the past 135 years, thousands of trees have been planted in the valley. These trees have witnessed the people and events that have transpired through the years. Many of these trees survive to this day, and yet others have fallen to development or neglect.

The Murrieta Valley Historic Trees Survey Project is an opportunity to photograph, document, and share the stories the trees have to tell us. Many of these trees are passed by everyday. Some are hidden, tucked away in a grove or a neighborhood. However, each tree has a story to share, but only if we

stop and listen.

Currently, the project is available on the Society's Facebook page. Each day a new album is posted sharing the history of the Murrieta trees, the people, and the land they called home.

We encourage you to like our page, and follow along as we journey under the shade of an ancient oak, or stroll along a dirt path through a hundred year old eucalyptus grove. These "witness trees" have a story to share with all of us.

If you have any questions, please contact us. We hope you enjoy this project.

Walk/Run For History

hosted by the Murrieta Historical Society

August 22 - November 30

Distance: 5k (3.1 miles)

Price: \$25 (includes bib and medal shown)

Register: bit.ly/walkmurrieta

The Murrieta Valley Historical Society and The Murrieta Museum are Non-Profit organizations are working to preserving and promoting the Murrieta legacy of the Murrieta Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance. The Murrieta Museum offers educational programs for the local schools and in the future hope to offer scholarships for students to pursue Museum Studies.



show off your medal
#murrietahistory



Murrieta Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 1341
Murrieta, CA 92564

Phone: 951-387-4862
E-mail:
info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org

Next General Board Meeting

TBA

At the Murrieta Museum

41810 Juniper Street

(At Hunt Memorial Park)

All members welcome to attend



The Murrieta Museum,
41810 Juniper Street
at Hunt Memorial Park.

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

JOIN ONLINE!
MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

INDIVIDUAL <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 / ANNUAL <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 / LIFE	FAMILY <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 / ANNUAL <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 / LIFE	SENIOR / STUDENT <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 / ANNUAL BUSINESS <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 / ANNUAL
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- Name on our website
- Business website linked to our resource page
- Business logo on all major event press information

\$300 / ANNUAL

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