



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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*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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Murrieta Valley Historical Society

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The former Santa Fe Winery and Distillery, 1975  
Source: The Alice Vose Collection

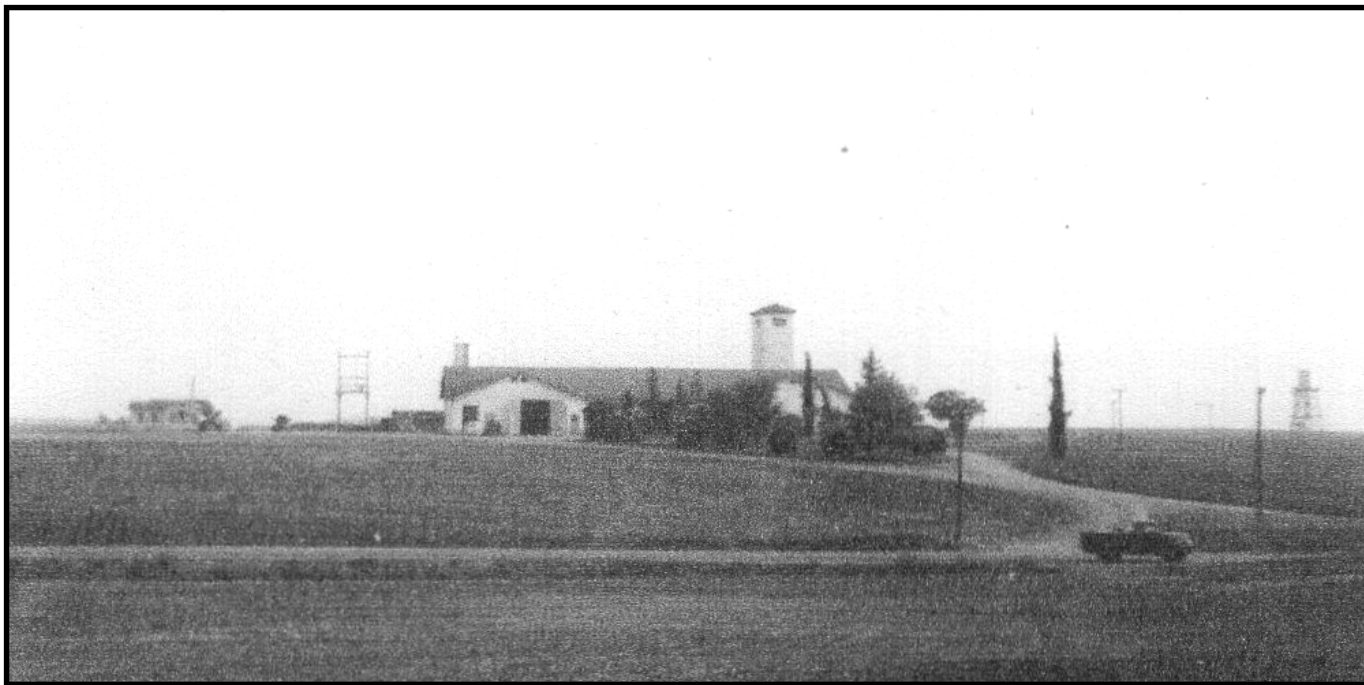
## The Santa Fe Winery and Distillery by Jeffery G. Harmon

The Prohibition Era came to an end on December 5, 1933, with the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment. Entrepreneurs quickly began to look for opportunities to quench the consumers thirst for spirits and wines. The Santa Fe Winery and Distillery was established in Murrieta in 1934 and appeared to be a lucrative opportunity. However, the promising business venture may have failed due to politics and financial troubles.

Investors in the proposed Mission Hot Springs Resort in Murrieta were at a loss when the

company vice president, Marcus Jacobowsky died suddenly in 1928. Without Jacobowsky's investment, the resort could not be developed. Jack Stulman tried to continue to develop the resort, but investors were not persuaded by Stulman's offer.

The president of the failed Mission Hot Springs resort project, Rudolph Rosenberg, continued to search for a new business opportunity. When the winery and distillery was proposed, investors were hopeful. In 1934, the Santa Fe Winery and Distillery was established. Jack Stulman was re-



The former Santa Fe Winery & Distillery during the Yoder Era. Note the electrical transformers to the left of the building. A large amount of electricity was used during the plant's operation.

Photo courtesy of the Yoder Family

moved from the investment group either because of his own resort development or his multiple court proceedings and financial difficulties.

One investor was Meyer Katz, of Mexico City. He was a Russian Jewish immigrant, who settled in St. Louis, Missouri. He bought a defunct Missouri railroad and sold it for scrap. He invested the money he made in river barges and secured a city contract to haul away the trash. As his fortune grew, he acquired vast oil and mining interests in Mexico City. He then invested \$180,000 to launch the Santa Fe Winery and Distillery Company.

Two other investors were Sam Baumgarten and Albert Mandel. Sam Baumgarten was a Los Angeles lawyer who

served as Katz's agent in the United States. Albert Mandel was a Beverly Hills speculator who had made millions in the movie industry. Katz, Baumgarten and Mandel had raised enough capital to begin building the manufacturing plant in Murrieta.

The half million dollar construction project began in June 1934. A total of thirty-nine wooden tanks, sixteen fermentation tanks, sixteen storage tanks, two 8,000 gallon fortifying tanks, three mash tanks and two giant presses were installed. Other equipment included a copper vat providing 600 gallons of brandy storage and a 1200 gallon vat to store alcohol. Additional electrical power was needed to operate the plant. The Southern Sierras Power Company had to

install new lines to carry the extra load.

About twenty men were hired from Elsinore, Murrieta and Temecula to work at the plant. Fields adjoining the winery were planted with grapevines. An expert horticulturalist was hired to cultivate and irrigate the vineyard. Meanwhile, contracts were drafted in order to purchase grapes for the plant.

Sam Baumgarten recruited Homer A. Wark to be the general manager in April 1935. Homer worked at the Hiram Walker Imperial Distilleries and was known as a successful chemist. Sam offered Homer a modest stockholding in the company, a salary of \$200 a week, plus free housing in a big Spanish-style residence on the distill-

ery grounds. This was during the time of the Great Depression and the average U.S. worker in 1935 was earning between \$20 and \$40 a week. Homer accepted the generous offer and moved his wife and four children to Murrieta.

Soon Homer Wark announced in the local papers that the plant was in the market for grapes, apricots, pears, plums, peaches and blackberries of the cull type. He explained that once the plant was in full operation, they would have a daily capacity of 1200 gallons of brandy, which is distilled wine.

Over \$20,000 was spent within ten weeks to make extensive alterations and additions to the plant for the manufacturing and distillation of brandy. There was a large bonded warehouse on the premises for storage and aging of the finished brandies. Operations were to begin on June 1, 1935, pending a final government inspection.

Meanwhile, in Mexico City, political changes began that disrupted the cash flow to the Murrieta company. A year earlier, Lazaro Cardenas, a socialist, became president of Mexico. His early reforms were empowering peasants with land and leagues for collective management of the farms. In 1935, Cardenas began nationalizing industries, including petroleum and mining. Meyer Katz's assets were frozen and it was possible he could lose his fortune.

Katz had been sending periodic checks to cover salaries,

overhead, and operating and development costs. His money now had to remain in Mexico, and the winery lost its funding. Homer suggested smuggling cash funds out of Mexico posing as a camera crew that was documenting the president's social reforms.

The plan was that Baumgarten's law firm would provide forged documents from a fictitious film studio and Mandel would advance the funds to finance the expedition. When Homer's wife heard the plan she said no. Furthermore, Mandel refused to back Homer's plan because if the film crew was discovered, they would have been executed by firing squad.

Homer then approached Baumgarten and Mandel and offered to purchase the winery for \$200,000. Baumgarten stated that to lease the property to another distiller would be acceptable, provided that Homer remained as general manager. Unfortunately, Homer was unable to raise the funds. On February 12, 1936, he was out of work. In March 1936, Homer took charge of the Pacific Distilleries at Culver City.

Homer believed that Mandel had sabotaged his efforts to get financial backing for the purchase of the distillery business. He believed that Mandel was trying to take over the company. However, Homer still requested and received a letter of

**CAN USE**

# Dried Apricots and Peaches

**Also fresh culled apricots  
and peaches**

**Distillery will start operations  
June 1**

**Phone or write**

## SANTA FE WINERY & DISTILLERIES, INC.

**Murrieta, Calif.**

Advertisement, Source: May 17, 1935, Hemet News



The former Santa Fe Winery & Distillery was used by the Yoder Family for their farming operations.  
Photo Courtesy of the Yoder Family

recommendation from Mandel. He later used the letter to secure a job in Louisville, Kentucky with a bourbon whiskey distiller.

Mr. and Mrs. Dave Buchanan and their son, Jimmy, moved into the company house after the Wark family left. Dave, a Murrieta native, had been employed at the distillery for a couple of months.

In July 1936, it was announced that the Santa Fe Winery and Distillery was in operation. An article claimed that the plant had been idle since its construction. It was reported that apricot growers were finding a market for their product at the winery. A representative declared that the plant would be able to turn out an excellent quality of wines, whiskeys and brandies.

On February 1937, Dave Buchanan suffered an accident while cleaning a tank one morning. The ladder he was standing on, slipped and threw him back into the tank. He fractured his hip and bruised his back. He was confined to bed rest for some time. By May, the Buchanan family moved back to their own home.

Later, Max Thompson was hired as a night watchman in September 1937. Five months later, the Thompson family moved into the company home at the distillery.

It is unknown when the winery and distillery discontinued operations. Lewis Jacobs, of Hollywood, purchased the Santa Fe Winery and Distillery and surrounding property in April 1942. A month later he

leased the former plant to the State Forestry as a fire station. Then a few years later, the property was sold to the Yoder family.

Meyer Katz made and lost several fortunes in Mexican oil transactions. By 1938, he moved to Hollywood, California. He died on October 5, 1941 and was laid to rest in St. Louis, Missouri. Homer Wark continued to work in the distillery industry in many parts of the country. He died in Sioux City, Iowa on June 18, 1962. His son, Thomas E. Wark, wrote a book about his father's adventurous life titled, *Homer, My Father's Odyssey*. Today, no evidence of the former winery remains. The property is now occupied by Sam's Club and other Murrieta retailers.

# Museum Update

Greetings,

The museum has been busy preparing for the 3rd grade tours for the upcoming school year. We host school tours by appointments at [info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org).

We are at the Murrieta Market Nights on the 1st & 3rd Thursdays of every month, where we have an information booth to answer questions on Murrieta's History and the area.

On Saturday, September 14th at 10am, President, Jeffery Harmon will be presenting, Juan Murrieta, His Life and Legacy, at the Murrieta Museum.

Pat Jennings and Jeffery Harmon provided information to the President of the Old Riverside Foundation about the construction of the Annex Hotel at the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. Dave Stolte was doing research on Architect Peter J. Weber for the G. Stanley Wilson Company. We also provided historical information on the Murrieta

Hot Springs Resort to SFGate, an online travel website.

The Museum is located at 41810 Juniper Street and the Museum is open on Thursday from 1-4 pm or by appointment at

[info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org)

or 951-677-7758.

Thank you,

Annette Jennings,

Murrieta Museum Director



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**The General  
Monthly Board Meeting  
is held on the second  
Monday at 5:30 p.m.  
Please join us at  
the Murrieta Museum**



**MUSEUM Hours**  
**THURSDAYS  
1 - 4 PM**  
*For groups and tours call (951) 677-7758*

The poster features a large clock face in the background. In the bottom right corner, there is a small logo for the Murrieta Valley Historical Society.

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

## BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

CIRCLE ONE

INDIVIDUAL

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**\$150/LIFE**

FAMILY

**\$35/ANNUAL**

**\$250/LIFE**

SENIOR/STUDENT

**\$15/ANNUAL**

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**\$200/ANNUAL**

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- Business website linked to our resource page
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