

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



Wolf Store

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**Our mission is identifying,
preserving and promoting the his-
toric legacy of the Temecula valley.**

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Rain & Floods in Temecula

By Bonnie Martland

After years of drought, the amount of rainfall we have received in southern California in the past couple of months may seem excessive and has certainly led to property damage and inconvenience in conducting our daily routines. It may be of some solace to know that such damage and inconveniences, though they may be exacerbated by global warming, are not just a product of our time. Here are some excerpts from a couple of articles I wrote a few years back, illustrating that our forbearers in the Temecula area had their frustrations with mother nature as well!

Inclement weather could be very frustrating for the area's early stagecoach drivers. One O.T. (On Time) Hackett is a case in point. In 1879 Samuel Warren Hackett, one of Temecula's most popular drivers, bought the mail route from San Diego to Temecula. The Temecula post office was at the Wolf Store Adobe where Louis Wolf served as postmaster.

It was said citizens could set their watches by Hackett's punctuality and thus earned him his O.T. moniker. Hackett would deliver the mail 72 miles from San Diego to Temecula three days a week. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday he would spend the night in Temecula and then head back to San Diego the following morning with the San Diego mail. Sundays were his days of rest. Hackett stayed in one of the ten rooms "hotel rooms" attached to the Wolf Store adobe for the use of travelers. A room would cost 50 cents a night. Dinner was 50 cents as well, and if you had a horse to stable, another 50 cents would be due.

Hackett left home in Massachusetts at 16, arriving in San Diego in 1856 and signing on as a crew member on a whaling ship plying the Pacific coast. He would rise to captain and ship owner. After a lucrative otter hunting trip off the coast of Siberia he set to in San Francisco with over 440 pelts, worth a fortune. Selling his sailing interests, he moved to San Diego and raised cattle before again selling his interests and buying the contract for the San Diego to Temecula mail line. Lines the size of his often carried a second driver, but Hackett successfully petitioned to run the route on his own. A stop was made to water and change horses about every twenty miles.

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Hackett would leave San Diego, ford the San Diego River, travel through Poway, Vista, what would become Escondido and Bear Valley (later Valley Center). He forded the San Luis River to Pala, took the steep grade to Temecula and then crossed the Temecula River to the Wolf Store. During the summer months most trips went well. However, spring and winter were another matter as county officials saw little need for bridges! Often, rain-flooded rivers were too deep to cross and stages sent out in the morning would, of necessity, return by evening. There were a number of bad years where Mr. Hackett would be stuck in San Diego or Temecula for weeks or days before the route became passible. When the rain abated, it gave way to mud causing additional problems. 1884 was particularly bad with relentless rains from February through May. (Hopefully we won't encounter the same fate!) Still, the citizens of Temecula appreciated the persistence and hardships O.T. endured to bring the mail and provide reliable mail service. To make up for lost revenue, Mr. Hackett ordered a brand-new passenger wagon and began to offer both passenger and mail service to Temecula. In 1886 he would sell his line and eventually retire to San Diego where he is buried.

For those of us caught in the dreadful traffic jams between San Diego and Temecula and points inland, thoughts of a commuter rail system from San Diego to the inland empire may seem a pipe dream. However, few Temeculans may realize that, though no traces of it exist today, such a system, indeed, did once exist. In fact, it is the primary reason that Temecula, as we know her, exists at all.

In 1880 Temecula was a small village of about 230 citizens living in the area what is now Margarita and Temecula Parkway near the Wolf Store Adobe where O.T. Hackett delivered his mail. Temecula was a part of San Diego County. Citizens petitioned for a rail link to the coast and for a connection from the terminus of the Southern Pacific railroad in Colton to San Diego; the added benefit to both the citizens of Temecula and San Diego, a north county link to the county seat and an increase in trade and prosperity. Consequently, on October 12, 1880, the California

Southern Railroad Company was incorporated. Fred T. Perris, for whom the city of Perris is named, conducted the survey of the route and later laid out the town of Temecula about two and a half miles from the Temecula village site.

The railroad was laid out along the north side of Murrieta Creek and ran from National City, near San Diego, through Oceanside, Fallbrook, Temecula, Murrieta, Elsinore and points inland. Unfortunately, Mr. Perris and his Eastern bosses failed to heed the advice of local residents and ran the tracks through Temecula Canyon. In this gorge, the high-water mark is about two-thirds up the canyon walls. However, Mr. Perris determined the high-water point to be about ten feet above the canyon floor and proceeded to build the railroad at that elevation. The dangerous work of laying and grading the track was done primarily by Chinese workers. September 13, 1883, marked the first scheduled run for the new rail line between San Diego and San Bernardino.

The cost was six dollars one way or nine dollars for a round trip ticket. With the prosperity brought on by the railroad, the new town of Temecula grew and the village site diminished in importance. Hotels, a livery stable, mercantile establishments, saloons, and other businesses prospered. The boom was short-lived, however, because in February 1884, the same storm system that caused havoc with O.T. Hackett's mail service washed out the tracks through Temecula Canyon. The rains continued incessantly through the following spring. Train cars were washed off the tracks forcing stranded passengers to walk out of the canyon and debris was found washed all the way into the Pacific Ocean. The company floundered and transferred company control to the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe which began rebuilding the railroad through the canyon.

According to one contemporary newspaper account the railroad had one thousand men, or so, at work at the site. Ten and a half months after the wash-out, the trains were again running to San Diego. In the 1880s the local cattle industry flourished, and railroad rate wars brought many Easterners to California. Temecula, like most of southern California, enjoyed a period of prosperity.

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However, much of it was based on speculation. The bust came in 1888 with a collapse of the economy in general; then competition of a new rail line along the coast exacerbated problems for the California Southern. The line, already struggling to survive, was dealt a final blow from mother nature when in 1891 there occurred another washout of the tracks through the canyon.

The road was never rebuilt. Consequently, we sit in traffic dreaming of a future with something from the past, and wondering if the situation would be so if only mother nature had treated us a little more kindly.



Membership News

Thanks to Renewing Members:

David & Louise Beesley

Toni Benson

William & Dara Woods Jordan

Richard & Mahlon Wilkinson Lawton

Ken Leach

James & Lisa Stewart

Whitney Vail Wilkinson

EVENTS CALENDAR

Friday, February 9 — 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Cupid's Carnival at the HQ

Saturday, February 10 — 12 to 5 p.m.
Nomad's & Neighbors Love Local Makers Market

Friday, February 23 — 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Starlight Bazaar, local maker's market, live music, and family entertainment. Antique store open & train rides.

Saturday, February 24 — 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Nomad's & Neighbors Small Business Market

Sunday, February 25 — 12 to 5 p.m.
Misfit Made Market Vendor Market

SPECIAL NOTE:

If you would like to volunteer to be on one or more of our committees, we would welcome your assistance. Please send an email to: info@temeculahistory.org.

100 Years Ago in Temecula

Selected items from Lake Elsinore Valley Press, Temecula Gossip Column — January 1924

February 1, 1924

The county has under construction three bridges on the main highway to Warner Hot Springs. This is indeed a much needed improvement for it has been necessary to ford the river during the winter months and at times the roads being impassable.

February 8, 1924

The The Southern Sierra Power Company has recently installed a new sub-station on the Vail Brothers Pauba Ranch, three miles south of Temecula, capable of developing 300 horse-powers, which will be used for domestic purposes and in the operation of the 5 pumping plants on the ranch. The largest well flows 225 inches of water.

In addition to the many beef cattle now ranging on the 95,000 acre Pauba ranch, 120 heard of fine dairy cows are kept, the milk being shipped by truck to Los Angeles for retail trade. The herd is cared for by strictly up-to-date methods, and is subjected to the monthly tests made by Mark Butterfield for the Riverside County Testing association.

Mahlon Vail, one of the owners and manager, states that E.D. McSweeney, who holds a lease on 1200 acres of the irrigated lands within the ranch boundaries, is fast establishing a reputation as a grower of seed potatoes, a crop of over 40,000 sacks of the White Rose variety being harvested last year, most of which was sold as certified seed under the Shamrock brand. .

V.B. Sands, Santa Fe agent here has accepted the position as car distributor for his company in San Bernardino and left Wednesday evening. A.M. Pfeifer is acting relief agent until

the regular man is assigned to the position just vacated by Mr. Sands.

Researcher's Note: With Mr. Sands accepting a job transfer, his family would have moved with him to San Bernardino. If this is true, then Mrs. V.B. Sands from this date forward was no longer the author of the Temecula Gossip Column.

However, it appears that Mrs. Sands stopped writing the column before January 1924. There are two clues to the January change in authorship.

Clue #1: The term "fore part" is used in several entries. Mrs. V.B. Sands never used this term in her writing.

Clue #2: The name Edward instead of Eddie is used in an entry. Eddie is a familiar name and Edward is more formal. This may show that the author is not related to the Sands family.

With the changes in the newspaper layout and with Mrs. V.B. Sands moving to San Bernardino, there were no further February entries for the Temecula Gossip Column. It will be interesting to see what other changes were made in 1924.