

Historic Highway 395

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Mission Statement

The preservation and the promotion of Historic Route 395 from San Diego to the Cajon Pass.



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Telling the story, one mile at a time

Murrieta

by Jeffery G. Harmon

Our journey begins at the intersection of Winchester Road and Jefferson Avenue. We travel north on Jefferson Avenue, crossing over the Santa Gertrudis Creek. The alignment between Jefferson Avenue and Cherry Street is a new alignment. The original highway route turned northeast, bypassing a ranch. The route then turned west, connecting with Jefferson Avenue.

Driving further north, Jefferson Avenue intersects with Murrieta Hot Springs Road. Two and half miles east on this intersection you will find the historic Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. In 1902, Fritz Guenther developed the acreage around the hot springs, creating a world class resort. Today, the resort is home of the Calvary Chapel Bible College and Conference Center.

Continuing north on Jefferson Avenue we come to Ivy Street. Here Highway 395 turned west. On the northwest corner of this intersection

you will find a single story blue building. This location was a service station and restaurant for many years. In the 1920s and 1930s it was known as Ma and Pa Bates restaurant. Later it was known as King's Café.

At the intersection of Ivy Street and Washington Avenue, Highway 395 turns north into the Historic Downtown Murrieta District. There are several historic businesses and residence along Washington Avenue. For example, the small white church on the east side of the road was built in 1929 by the Trinity Episcopal Mission Church. Recently renovated, the small sanctuary has served different denominations over the years.

Across the street is the Garrison House and Machine Shop. Victor Garrison acquired the home in 1938. The Machine Shop, built in 1935, has been in continual operation since the days of Highway 395. Today the shop services many local

residents and ranchers in the area.

On the corner of Washington Avenue and C Street is the old Murrieta Post Office. Built in 1940 by Jack Hamilton, the 700 square foot post office was in use until a new post office was constructed in the mid 1980s. Across the street is the Hamilton House, a 1925 Dutch Colonial home also built by Jack Hamilton. If you drive east on C Street to Plum Avenue and turn south, you'll find the Tarwater House built in 1888. B.W. Tarwater ran a general store in Murrieta from 1888 to 1936.

Returning to Washington Avenue, we continue north to the intersection of Juniper Street. Satisfy your sweet tooth at the Vista Donut Shop. Housed in the historic A.K. Small Store (1908), the donut shop is always a favorite gathering place for locals. A.K. Small sold the store to Frank Burnham in 1922. The Burnham store operated from 1922

The Driver's Seat

This year we have met many people who have shared with us their memories of U.S. Highway 395. Their stories are priceless treasures that bring the history of the highway to life. Part of the Association's mission is to preserve this historic route. By recording these personal stories we help preserve the highway's legacy.

Earlier this year I met Gene Calman at a speaking engagement in San Diego. He is a retired highway engineer who worked on U.S. Highway 395 in San Diego County during the early 1960s. He loaned to the Association his collection of *California Highways and Public Works* magazines that were published by CalTrans. We gleaned many articles from these magazines for our archives.

In June I met Don Portis at the Annual Membership meeting at the Escondido History Center. His

father, Laurin Portis, was a CalTrans rock mason, who worked on the realignment of U.S. Highway 395 between Escondido and Riverside County line during the 1940s. He presented twenty-eight photographs to the Association to scan and record.

Finally, Jack Story, President of the Fallbrook Historical Society, sent me an email with memories of his family dairy that resided next to the Ostrich Creek Bridge. Jack has also planned for me to meet his uncle, Dode Martin, a National Hot Rod Association legend. Martin has many fond memories of the old highway that he will be sharing with us.

These are a few individuals that I have met this year. We are always eager to meet more. If your family had a business along the highway, or if you worked on the highway, or maybe you drove the highway during your lifetime, then

you too have a highway story to share. Please send us your stories today and we will publish them in our monthly newsletter!

So remember, pull off the interstate, slow down, and "Take a Drive on Route 395!"

Jeffery G. Harmon

Editor

We are now on

Facebook!

Search: Historic Route
395 Association

Please "Like" us!

Send us your photos and
your memories!

Murrieta Continued....

through 1956. North of the store is the Small House. This beautiful red Victorian Farmhouse was built by Henry Clay Thompson about 1900.

Directly across the street we see Ray's Café. Built in the early 1900s, Ernest Lakeman operated the Lakeman Restaurant from 1912 through 1923. The portico was built by Jack Hamilton in 1918. Mr. Zihler owned the restaurant from 1923 through 1947. In 1950 the store was purchased by Ray Bezanson and renamed Ray's Café.

We travel east on B Street to New Clay Road and then turn north. Towering over the historic district is the Murrieta Valley Grain Elevator. Built in 1919, the Elevator serviced the regional farms for many years.

Returning to Washington

Avenue we travel north once again. Our journey comes to an end at the intersection of Washington Ave and Nutmeg Road. Join us next time as

we travel Highway 395 through the city of Wildomar. So remember, slow down and "Take a Drive on Route 395".



Washington Avenue , Murrieta, CA

Spotlight: Perris Valley Museum



In June 2011, The City of Perris installed a Historic Route 395 sign next to the Perris Train Depot

The Perris Valley Museum is housed in the Perris Train Depot, which was built in 1892. U.S. Highway 395 traveled over the train tracks next to the depot from the 1930s through the early 1950s. This historical landmark is a great destination when traveling the old highway route.

When you first enter the museum's exhibit hall you are greeted by a mannequin sitting on a spring wagon. This is Frederick T. Perris, who the city was named after. Mr. Perris surveyed the rail lines from San Bernardino to San Diego. The museum has a large exhibit with many of the Perris family's treasured keepsakes.

My favorite piece from the Perris Family Collection is the photo of Fred T. Perris with Wyatt Earp and the Earp clan posing with shotguns in front of a train in San Bernardino. The photo was taken after the "Battle of Colton", a battle that was almost fought over competing train companies fighting over a train

crossing. The Earps were hired by one of the train companies to provide security and firepower if needed.

There are many more exhibits waiting to be discovered. There is a fascinating Native American exhibit with multiple artifacts and two mannequins dressed in native costume. Next you can watch a short video about the history of the Good Hope Mine. Learn about the humorous legend of how a gold vein was discovered with a mule kick and case of dynamite.

The area gold rush led to the establishment of the town of Pinacate in 1878. The town only lasted five years. Continuous land disputes caused the town to be relocated several miles north in 1885 and renamed Perris. The Pinacate Train Depot and town are now preserved at the Orange Empire Railway Museum.

With the newly established town, came new business prospects. For example, the

Southern Hotel, built in 1886 by the Bernasconi Family, was used as a stage stop between Perris and Hemet. Today the beautifully preserved hotel can be found on D Street.

Other exhibits tell the rich business history of Hook Bros. & Oak and the Mapes Store. Artifacts and photos tell the history of the Perris Train Depot and the first Perris Post Office. There were three important schools in Perris: the Perris Grammar School, the Perris Union High School and the Perris Indian School. Each museum exhibit brings Perris' early history to life for visitors.

After viewing the exhibits, Deborah Bowman, 1st Vice President of the Perris Valley Museum & Historical Society, gave me a guided tour of the depot and the surrounding grounds. The first stop was the bathroom. She proudly showed me the rust stain in the bathroom sink. She stated that they had to leave the rust in the sink as part of the depot's historical designation status.

Next, I was given a tour of the ticket room with its beautiful stain glass windows. Deborah discussed the telegraph machine and stated that adult male visitors enjoy tapping out S.O.S. on the machine. We then entered the depot's lobby. On one wall sat the original cast iron potbelly stove that used to keep waiting passengers warm. On the opposite wall there is a vintage train bench that was placed below a large painting of Pasadena's Mt. Lowe Hotel. "Notice the people's clothing in the painting." Deb-

Continued on Page 7

Moosa Canyon Prison Labor Camp #38

Don Portis Interview conducted on July 19, 2011

By Jeffery G. Harmon



Prison Labor Camp #38, Summer 1942

Source: The Portis Family Collection

Historian's Note: The Moosa Canyon Prison Labor Camp #38 was established around 1941 at the north end of the canyon near the present day Old Highway 395 exit. The camp was assigned to construct the realignment of U.S. Highway 395 from Escondido to the Riverside County line.

Laurin Portis was born November 22, 1905 in El Centro, California. He was born into a large farming family. In order to survive, he became a "Jack-of-all-trades", working a variety jobs to make ends meet. While driving a truck, he met his wife at her family owned truck stop. The young couple wed and had one son, Donald Portis.

In the early 1930s, Laurin received a phone call from his sister Mary, who was a Highway Patrol Dispatcher. Mary pro-

claimed to him, "There is a highway job for a rock cutter. Go fill out an application. You are now a rock cutter!"

It was the Depression Era and people took jobs wherever they could. Laurin was hired as a rock cutter and learned the skills of the trade while on the job. His first assignment was constructing a road in the San Bernardino Mountains. He moved his family to Crestline and settled into his new line of work. Around 1940, Laurin was transferred to Escondido to begin work on the realignment of U.S. Highway 395 through Moosa Canyon.

Prison Labor Camp #38 began operations in 1941. Convicts from San Quentin were transported to the minimum security prison and assigned work detail on the new highway project. If a convict didn't want to work, he was sent back to the prison.

With a choice of either bars or open sky, the convicts decided to work hard in constructing the road through the canyon.

Don Portis was in middle school and played baseball for the Elks League. On Sunday afternoons, Don's team, the Eagles, would drive north to the prison camp and play a practice game with the convicts. The baseball field was an open field west of the main camp. There was no direct conversation between the convicts and Don's team, but they enjoyed playing a friendly game of baseball. There was no competition and who won the game between the Eagles and the Convicts may never be known. "The guards were more in danger of shooting their foot than having any trouble with the inmates." Don Portis remarked.

In 1943, Laurin joined the service. Because of his trade

skill, he was assigned to the Navy Seabees. He was stationed in England in preparation for D-Day. On the first day of action, he was on a tug boat pushing barges onto the beaches of Normandy.

Laurin was transferred to Okinawa in 1945, a few days after the invasion. His final mission was the last amphibious assault of World War II on a small Japanese island. There was little to no resistance, because the war was coming to a conclusion. Laurin was discharged October 25, 1945 as Chief Carpenter's Mate.

His family had been living in Colton next door to Don's maternal grandparents. The family moved back to Escondido, and Laurin resumed his work with the prison labor camp. The camp had closed briefly in 1943 due to supply shortages. Because of the importance of the realignment to national defense, the camp was reopened and the project continued.

On February 28, 1948, the Cabrillo Freeway opened in San Diego. Pressure was put on the prison labor camp to complete the realignment. The final segment in Rainbow was laid quickly and the Escondido to Riverside County line highway opened on April 17, 1948.

"When we drove to Colton to visit my grandparents, my dad would avoid the new section in Rainbow." Don explained. "He knew that the roads were not surfaced correctly and were dangerous when it rained. He would drive the original highway route around Rainbow to avoid an accident. His prediction was correct because there were several accidents in the Rainbow area."

After the completion of the realigned U.S. Highway 395, Laurin was transferred to Lakeside, California to work on Highway 8. "At that time, Lakeside

was the armpit of the world." Don expressed. "We missed Escondido and wanted to return."

Laurin asked if there were any jobs available in Escondido. There was one job for a sign man working for the Escondido highway maintenance yard. He took the position and the family returned to the city they loved. "He worked alone, replacing or installing signs along the highway. He was happy and enjoyed the work." Don stated with a smile.

In 1968, Laurin retired. "At the time of his retirement there was only two rock masons listed working for CalTrans." Don remarked.

Laurin passed away on October 16, 1983. "He didn't talk about his work very much," Don commented, "He was more interested in the sports that I played or following the San Diego Padres."

"He dreamed of building a

rock house one day and living in it." Don continued. "He never did build it though." However, next to Escondido High School there is a beautiful rock bridge that the northbound Centre City Parkway crosses over. It is date stamped, 1947. "My father built that bridge!" Don proudly exclaimed.

Laurin Portis also built a ribbon of highway today known as Old Highway 395 that runs parallel to Interstate 15 in the North San Diego County region.

The Historic Route 395 Association would like to thank Don Portis and his family for sharing their photos and their legacy with us. We are reminded that the freedoms we enjoy today have been paid by the blood, sweat, and tears of the men and women who have proudly served and continue to serve our country.



camp #38, health break air & rehabilitation

Prison Labor Camp #38 baseball field, Summer 1944

Source: The Portis Family Collection

Life along Highway 395

By Jack Story

In your newsletter you asked for stories related to old Highway 395. I would like to offer this one taken from my memory bank. It relates to the little Ostrich Creek Bridge.

I was born in Fallbrook in 1934 and I have lived in the community all my life. My family operated a dairy farm called "Story's Dairy" from 1935 till 1947. It was located on South Mission Road, about a mile beyond the high school and Olive Hill Road.

Both the Ostrich Creek and Highway 395 ran north and south, connecting Fallbrook and Bonsall. In the old days the creek ran the year round. The bridge crossed over the creek directly in front of our dairy, causing an S shape in the road. It was like the road near the old San Luis Rey River Bridge. During the time that the bridge was in use I can recall several incidences that took place on or around it.

Automobiles would misjudge the curve and smash into the bridge or miss it completely. Sometimes car would drive off the road and into the creek, especially at night. When I was a small child, my dad didn't own a tractor, only draft horses. He would use the horses to help travelers get their vehicles back on the road. Later on he bought a Massey Harris farm tractor, which worked better. I remember one time a car owner came to the house and said, "I missed the bridge and my car went down the bank. I don't have time to mess with it. If you want to pull it out you can have it."

On another occasion, a large truck made the turn too fast and slammed into the side of the bridge spilling several sacks of number one Idaho potatoes. He stopped a little ways down the road to secure his load but didn't come back to pick up the spillage. We and our neighbors had plenty of potatoes to eat for a long time.

The other kids in the neighborhood and I used to play under the bridge. My favorite activity was shooting down dozens of swallow nests with a sling shot. Cattails grew abundantly. We used to take "roll your own" cigarette paper and fill them with dry cattails and try to smoke them. They would burn ok but they didn't taste good. I guess that is why I never took up smoking.

There was lots of evidence of Indians, who once lived all around the area. At one time I had a mason jar full of arrowheads. I wish I knew what happened to them.

Finally, the little bridge was bypassed when the road was straightened and a new bridge was built over Ostrich Creek. I remember sitting on the dirt bank that had been created on the dairy side and watching the road building equipment as they carved out and paved the new road. I thought that that was what I wanted to do when I got big. One of the equipment operators was named Ollie Staude. Years later Ollie hired me to work with the road department for a period of time.

Dode Martin, my uncle, said that after the new road and crossing was finished and the old bridge was abandoned, my Dad discovered that he owned a little triangular piece of property west of the little bridge. It had something to do with "reverting back". A beer company offered him ten dollars a month if they could put up an advertisement on this little piece of dirt. That amount of money was nothing to sneeze at back in those times. My Dad, who was a teetotaler, didn't like the idea of making money off a beer company. However, he gave them permission to advertise. He sent their monthly check to the Fallbrook Methodist Church. I guess he felt that that made it alright.

So that is my story about a little section of 395. The dairy was sold to Arlin Tomlinson around 1947 and he retained the Story trade name. The property has changed hands several times since. Years ago there was a business there called "The Last Straw." Today, Hawthorne Feed Store is located where the Story Dairy once operated.

Historian's Note: Jack Story was born the year U.S. Highway 395 was designated a federal highway from Mexico to Canada. Highway 395 ran between Fallbrook and Bonsall between 1934 through 1948, almost the same time frame as the Story Dairy! How's that for a "Story!"

Perris continued...

orah exclaimed, "Rooms cost \$200 a night. That was a lot of money back then!"

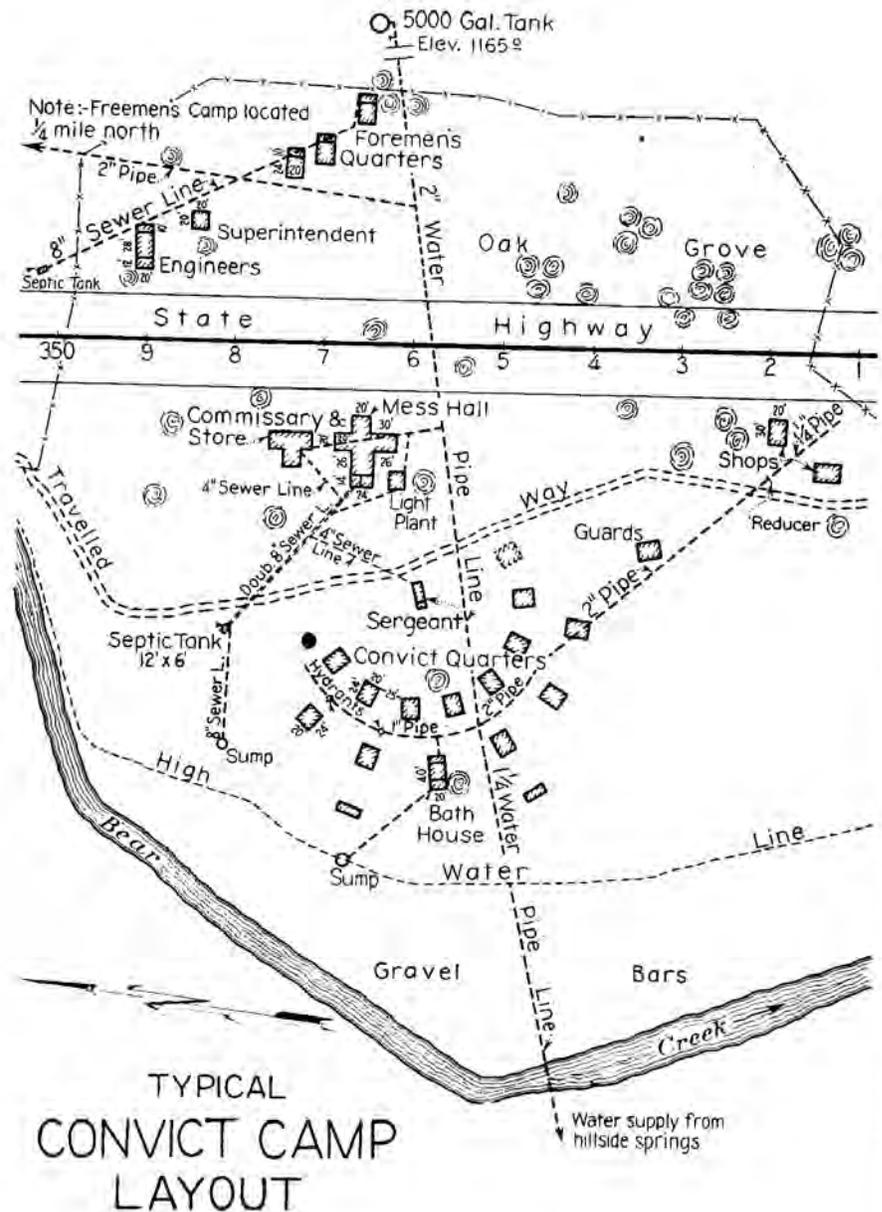
Outside, Deborah pointed out two places where adobe material was used in the construction of the depot. Then in the courtyard she discussed the only known date palm tree in Perris. She then pointed out several other historical landmarks in the city including the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Rock Castle, and the Ice House building.

On the east side of the depot we had a view of the Bank of Perris building. Currently the historic building is home to the City of Perris' historical archives. This is another landmark on the old highway route.

Finally, Deborah slid back a large wood door to show me the luggage room. The room functions as a storeroom for the museum, but also houses a hay wagon and two steamer trunks. Deborah pointed out the original writing on the depot walls and explained that luggage was separated by alphabetical order.

My tour soon came to an end on that hot Friday afternoon. I thanked Deborah for an informative tour. As I drove my car over the train tracks and down old U.S. Highway 395, I thought about all the "golden history" still waiting to be discovered along the way.

This year the City of Perris is celebrating its Centennial year. We want to wish the City of Perris a Happy and Prosperous Birthday.



This diagram shows a typical highway prison labor camp in 1930. The photo of the Moosa Canyon Prison Labor Camp #38 is similar in design. For example, the photo shows the same half moon layout of the convicts quarters. The baseball field would have been where the oak grove is shown above.

Source: Seventh Biennial Report of the Division of Highways of the Department of Public Works, November 1, 1930, pg.64

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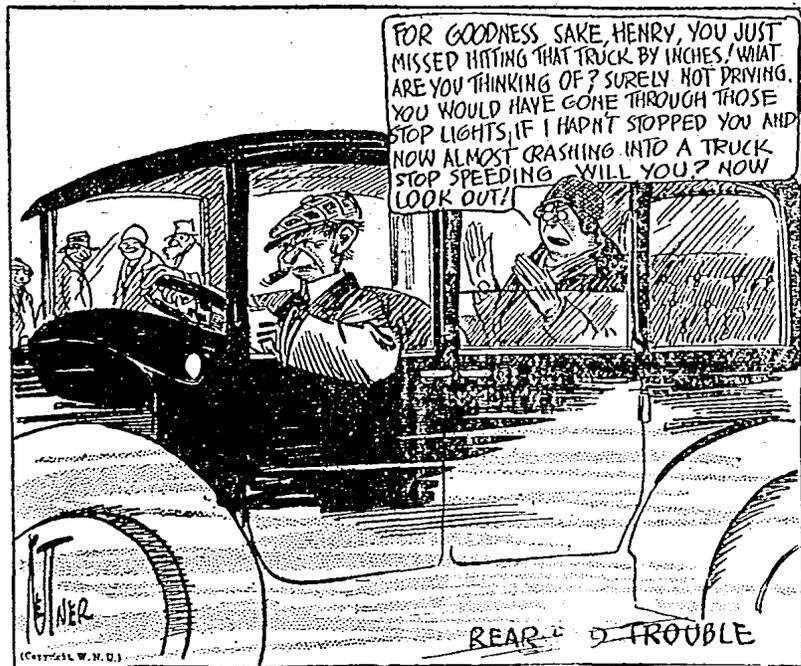
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Announcement:

The August Monthly Meeting
Has been Cancelled

Along the Concrete



Reprint: The Vista Press October 9, 1930

Road Nearly Mile Shorter

Engineers who surveyed the Route through Homeland Acres make report on Paving Route.

Escondido Daily Times Advocate, March 17, 1920

The controversy as to which street, Nutmeg or Juniper, should be used in building the paved highway into Escondido, has taken an important turn in the report of the county highway commission's engineering crew under J.M. Heath that finished Tuesday evening the survey of the Homeland Acres route, north from the Bernardo Bridge. Mr. Heath reported Wednesday morning that the road through Homeland Acres to Nutmeg Street is just 4200 feet shorter than the route of the present road to Juniper Street. The present road has already been surveyed and needed no survey at this time.

In other words, the proposed new route through Homeland Acres is

approximately four-fifths of a mile shorter than the present road. And this, it is said, will be a very strong point in the consideration of the case by the county supervisors and highway commission. Right-of-way costs and building costs may make some difference, also.

Historian's Note: The original Inland Highway traversed over the Bernardo River and followed the west side of Mule Hill. The road then connected to Juniper Street.

After the completion of the Lake Hodges Dam, a permanent crossing was needed. The Bernardo-Station Bridge was built and completed in 1919.

When the highway paving began, a decision had to be made whether to pave the road from the bridge to the original route, or pave a new route.

Because of the saving cost, Nutmeg Street was chosen as the new route. In 1930, Nutmeg Street was renamed Escondido Boulevard.

U.S. Highway 395 traveled north and south on Escondido Boulevard from 1934 through 1949.