

Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

September 2016

Volume 1 – Issue 6

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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A Publication of the
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Murrieta Creek, February 6, 2016, Photo by Jeffery Harmon

The Murrieta Irrigation District 1890 ~ 1894

By Jeffery Harmon

Murrieta was a dry farming community. It was a non-irrigated method of farming that used calculated planting and limited winter rainfall to grow crops. Farmers depended on springs and wells to water their livestock. Some would construct small reservoirs for crops that needed more water. In the early 1890s, an opportunity arose that could have transformed Murrieta's agricultural landscape through an irrigated water system, but the cost may have been too high.

California's Wright Act of 1887 gave local farming communities the ability to form and bond irrigation districts in order to secure water resources for their land. Many farmers and ranchers joined the effort. However, large landowners fought the legalities of the districts in court, hindering the irrigation developments. When Murrieta farmers formed the Murrieta Irrigation District, two of the area's largest landowners stopped its development.

By 1890, there were several water schemes in the works that might have brought irrigated water to Murrieta. When the town of Perris formed its district, several entrepreneurs had proposed water schemes. Mr. J. H. Banks of Perris bought water rights on the San Jacinto River. He intended on placing a dam in the canyon, diverting water to Elsinore, Menifee, Murrieta, and Temecula. A week later, M.P. Cutler and Maynard L. Mapes of Perris bought the water rights above stream of Banks' claim. This competition stopped any development along the San Jacinto canyon area.

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Calendar Of Events

Next Monthly Meeting

Monday,
September 12th
at 6:00 p.m.
at the historic
Hunt House
41810 Juniper St.
In
Hunt Memorial Park

Local Events

Murrieta Public Library
Community Room
Speaker Showcase
Tuesday, November 1st
6:00 p.m.
John Hunneman
Speaker Presentation:

Mr. Hunneman, a
journalist and columnist
for over a quarter of a
century, covering the
events of Riverside
County, will talk about
his knowledge of
Murrieta, and its changes
through the years.

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Elsinore formed its district in 1889 and it would have benefited from the San Jacinto River reservoir. The directors decided instead to join with Perris and receive their water from the Bear Valley Land and Water Company up in the San Bernardino Mountains. Before Elsinore's district began developing its water system, it was challenged in court by its proposed boundaries and a county recorder mistake. In the end, Elsinore's district failed and disorganized. If Elsinore's district had been successful, they could have sent water south to Murrieta.

When Fallbrook organized in 1891, directors planned on placing a dam in the Santa Margarita Canyon from which they were willing to share water with Temecula and Murrieta. However, Richard O'Neill of Rancho Santa Margarita protested in court and Fallbrook had to search for another site.

The Pauba Land and Water Company proposed to construct a dam on the Temecula Creek, near present day Vail Lake. The water could have been sent to both Fallbrook and to Murrieta. When bond measures were passed in Fallbrook, court cases began against the district. With no money, the Pauba reservoir plan dried up for a few years. With no other outside water prospects, sixty-four Murrieta landowners signed a petition to create their own district.

The Murrieta Irrigation District was formed on September 4, 1890. The Board elected the following: Directors – H. S. Mason, H. B. Lashlee, G.W. Fox, J. R. Colerick, and D. N. Buchanan; Treasurer, C. H. Benton; Assessor, E. H. Mason; Collection, O.W. Miller. The Murrieta district included 15,000 acres and the plan to secure water was to construct a reservoir up on the Santa Rosa ranch.

Once the district was formed, the Murrieta farmers needed to vote on bonds to fund the construction project. After the election there were not enough votes in favor of the bonds. The directors then decided to levy a special tax on the district in order to raise enough revenue. In April 1892, eighty-two certificates of sale were filed in the San Diego county recorder's office for non-payment of the irrigation taxes.

Two of the largest land owners, Juan Murrieta, the town's namesake, and Parker Dear, of the Santa Rosa ranch, filed complaints against the district. In October, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs stating that the special tax imposed by the district was not brought to vote and approved by the Murrieta residents. The tax was abolished and all revenue options for the district disappeared.

As the irrigation district lost support from the people, several directors resigned from the Board. In April 1892, H. S. Mason resigned and was replaced by B. W. Tarwater. In June, H. B. Lashlee resigned and was replaced by John M. Richardson. Finally, D. N. Buchanan resigned in February 1893. The remaining directors began discussions of abolishing the irrigation district. On December 9, 1894, a special election was held. By a vote of 13 to 7, the Board decided to disorganize the irrigation district. In January 1895, Board directors, D.M. Burson, B.W. Tarwater, A. H. Hutchinson, and C.L. Lewis petitioned to disorganize the district.

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MEMBERSHIP

Individual

Annual \$25.00
Lifetime \$150.00

Family

Annual \$35.00
Lifetime \$250.00

Senior/Student

Annual \$15.00

Business

Annual \$200.00

Sponsorship

Annual \$300.00

Membership dues are
for one year and will be
up for renewal the
month you joined

Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact: _____

Membership: \$ _____

Checks payable to:
Murrieta Valley
Historical Society
Mail to: P.O. Box 1341
Murrieta, CA 92564

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The irrigation district may have been a great idea, but it wasn't a necessity. Once the dust settled, Murrieta farmers continued dry farming the land. They prospered by digging wells and creating small reservoirs that brought water to the crops and livestock. Another fifty years would pass before another district was organized, and irrigated water would finally flow in Murrieta.

Author's Note:

In 1963, the Murrieta Mutual Water Company and the Murrieta County Water District were formed. In 1981, the two entities merged and continued servicing the western area. In 2005, the company merged with the Western Municipal Water District that currently services Murrieta west of Interstate 15.

100 years ago

The Murrieta Hot Springs people have just finished hauling out a carload of cement. They are raising the walls of the reservoir on the hill five feet and have finished a new cottage for Mr. Guenther's mother, formerly of Los Angeles, who will now live at the springs.

Mrs. Alfred Knott of Temecula and her twins, Vera and Vernon, born on August 5, are spending this week with Mrs. Knott's mother, Mrs. Rail in Murrieta. September 2, 1916 RDP

Irvine Loughead, with his eight horse team and two wagons, went to Santa Rosa yesterday to help E. Holdredge load hay on board cars at Murrieta. September 8, 1916 RIE

A. T. Garringer, east of town, suffered the loss of his barn by fire on Monday night this week, and his son, Clifford, the loss of his harness and the barn full of hay. He was away deer hunting at the time. Cause unknown. September 9, 1916 RDP

Harry Walters of Temecula, who brings the high school pupils from Temecula to Elsinore High, was blinded by the glare of the headlights of a large Cole machine as he rounded a curve near Murrieta and ran into the Cole. Though persons in both cars were bruised, no one was seriously hurt. Both machines were badly damaged. September 27, 1916 RDP

Urban K. Tarwater and Miss Rose Belle Coleman of Murrieta were married in Riverside on Wednesday of this week and a large company of friends turned out in the evening to serenade them and were treated to ice cream and cigars. Mr. and Mrs. Tarwater will live in the Cocking house. September 30, 1916, RDP

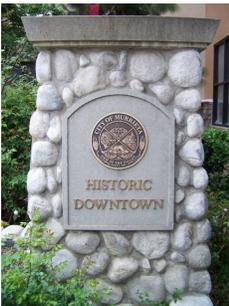
A Brief Overview of the Society's Goals

Immediate Goals

1. Increase our membership
2. Preservation of historical sites (documents, registration and working with owners)
3. Obtain full oral history videos
4. Host historic presentations at city council and city facilities

One to Two year Goals

1. Events for the Historic Downtown
2. Temporary Museum
3. Self-guided Walking Tour Brochures
4. Historical Monuments



President's Message

Jeffery Harmon

On August 3rd, members of the Historical Society were invited to take a tour of the historic Murrieta Stud Farm. This is one of the last thoroughbred properties left in Murrieta. Most have been transformed into neighborhoods and commercial property. The City renamed it the Murrieta Equestrian Center when they purchased the property. City officials are currently studying options to best utilize the property and the facilities. We shared our knowledge of the farm and what historic preservation we envision.

We, as a Society, agreed that preservation of the buildings and the property is imperative. At the same time, we recognize that this property affords the City an opportunity to hold events that would attract people to the area. We look forward to working with the City in preserving the history of the property and developing it into an active venue in the future. We wish to thank Lea Kolek, Parks and Recreation Manager, and Brian Ambrose, Assistant to the City Manager, for the invitation.

On August 8th, the Goals Committee met to draft a vision for our Society. We discussed immediate goals, 1 to 2 year goals, and long term goals. If you have additions or suggestions on how to implement and achieve these goals, please let us know. We need to work together to preserve, promote and to educate our city.

Recently, I attended the memorial for Jimmy Moore, who died on July 14, 2016. He is known as the "Father of the City of Temecula." He led the charge for cityhood and lobbied for the original name for the new city. Moore was also past president of the Temecula Valley Historical Society and served for many years on the board. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Peg, his family and his friends.

Board members attended Murrieta's Downtown Plan Community Workshop #2 on Saturday, August 20th. A 45-minute presentation was given on the results of Workshop #1. We then visited five stations and filled out papers stating whether we were for or against the proposals and whether or not we had any further comments or suggestions. The next meeting will be with the City Council. It is imperative that we stay active and vigilant in order to protect our heritage and promote economic growth in our city.

We are excited to announce that our first large gathering of Society members and those that are interested in local history will be occurring on Monday, September 12th at 6:00 p.m. at the Historic Hunt House on Juniper Street. We will be recognizing several people for their legacy and for their efforts in preserving Murrieta's history. We hope that you will join us on this exciting evening.

Please remember to send in your membership application to help us continue preserving and protecting our historical heritage. Thank you.