

# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 2. Issue 2.

February 2017

*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.*

## 2017 Officers

President Jeffery G. Harmon

Vice President Annette Jennings

Secretary Carol Sierra

Treasurer Jenny Mayoral

## Directors

Connie McConnell

Al Vollbrecht

## Committee Chairs

Research & Preservation

Public Relations

Connie McConnell

Membership

Annette Jennings

Program Speakers

Projects

Events/Education

Newsletter Editor

Jeffery G. Harmon

A publication of the

Murrieta Valley Historical Society

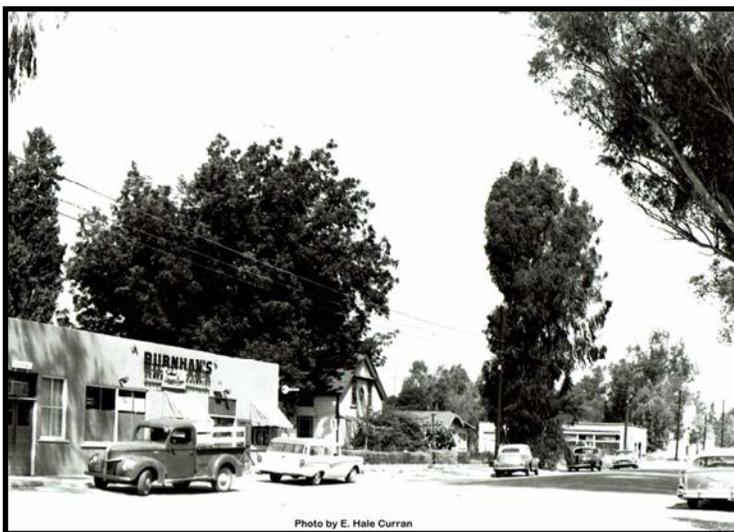
P.O. Box 1341

Murrieta, CA 92564

951-387-4862

Email:

[murrietahistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:murrietahistoricalsociety@gmail.com)



The Burnham Store on the corner of Washington Avenue and Juniper Street. (Photo by E. Hale Curran, from the Jennings Collection)

## An Account of Life in Murrieta By David Johnson

Murrieta, California...my hometown...where sixty-five - seventy years ago ... all the men wore bib overalls, most women were slightly overweight, and all the children went barefoot.

Last year I told a few stories about Murrieta and some of its more colorful citizens. Today, I'd like to describe a little of what it was like for me growing up, living, working and playing in that small rural community called Murrieta, as it was...sixty-five - seventy years ago.

Although the town is now a modern, bustling city with a population

in excess of 105,000.... at the time I was growing up, in the mid-1930s, early 40's - the population was no more than five or six hundred people. As I have said, sixty-five - seventy years ago, land around the town was home to small farms and ranches. At that time the distance between Murrieta and Temecula to the south was 7 miles - with nothing but open space between the two towns. Now, urban sprawl, improved roads and vehicles has reduced those 7 miles to zero.

Some events I will be sharing with you today may revive a few gray-

ing memories for those of you who lived and grew up in a small rural community. As a kid in Murrieta, spending money was hard to come by.....especially, if you had the misfortune of being born poor. I often told my mother that it was difficult to forgive her for marrying a poor man. There was a time when my dad's family had money; however, the Great Depression, alcohol and a few other misfortunes took care of that before I came along. Shoes were optional - most of the year we went bare-foot.

And, yes - - - we did have to walk to school - - however, - - seldom in the snow. I suppose weekly allowances did exist for some kids, but not in our household. Therefore, the acquisition of money depended entirely on our own imagination and creativity.

Sixty-five - seventy years ago, we didn't have television, I-pads, I-pods, smart phones or other electronic devices to occupy and entertain us. One thing I did have was an active and creative imagination. My first entrepreneurial effort at age 7 or 8 was selling used magazines. I would travel the backstreets, side roads and alleys of Murrieta - - pulling my wagon - filled with books, magazines and papers of all description. My asking price was three cents for those magazines without covers and a nickel for those with. And, of course, everything was negotiable. The little old ladies in town didn't get out much so they welcomed the opportunity for something

new to read. Additionally, they would cleverly extract the tidbits of news and gossip I gathered along the way as I traveled from house to house. I was sort of an early version of the weekly local news.

On other occasions I would display the reading material next to my lemonade stand in front of Frank Burnham's General Store. Frank was very supportive - he provided the space, paper cups, and ice free of charge. A typical summer day could net me as much as \$1.50. I think I was about ten years old when Les Erwin, a local farmer, gave me my first regular job with pay. Les grew watermelons on a ten acre patch east of town. He paid me \$1.00 a day to pick the weeds that grew around the plants. I soon discovered that pulling weeds was not the only part of my job.

Actually, Les had lost or broken the four foot metal rod he used to turn the irrigation system on and off - - and he was too cheap to buy a new one. Being the frugal man that he was, Les saw in me a two-for-one opportunity... part time weed picker - part time valve operator. I was just a little over four feet tall, kind of skinny.

By Les dangling me upside down into the main irrigation standpipe - - and with my head usually under two or three feet of water - - I could reach and rotate the valve by hand. The procedure often took several attempts to get the job done, requiring me to hold my breath for

extended periods of time. I was required to provide this service twice a day. However, - - it was all worth it - - when on Friday, Les gave me five - one dollar bills. Which, to my mother's dismay, I usually spent at Burnham's store on my way home. Somehow, I don't think paying a ten year old \$1.00 for an eight hour work day, five days a week - - to pick weeds and double as a underwater valve operator, would conform to modern day "Child Protective Services" regulations.

I think my Mom worried too much about money - - after all, I could always pick up an extra fifty cents pushing my grandmother's 75 year old companion, Mr. Bateson, to the store and post office in his wheelchair. Mr. Bateson suffered from advanced rheumatoid arthritis and it was difficult for him to walk any distance. His wheelchair was a creation of Ira Rail, a local farmer, handyman, landlord and all around good guy. Ira salvaged the rear wheels from a retired vintage shopping cart - - and the front wheels came off an old soapbox derby racer. At high speeds, the rear wheels wobbled violently.

Since Mr. Bateson could not maneuver the chair himself, someone had to push it. He was willing to pay fifty cents for a round trip to the store and post office, a distance of about ten blocks.

Although arthritis crippled his body, Mr. Bateson's mind was extremely sharp - with one exception. He always seemed to

forget the terror he felt during his last wheelchair ride with me. Each outing commenced the same - - launching the chair down a short wooden ramp off the south end of his front porch.

By the time we hit the bottom, the rear wheels were wobbling so violently that he could barely keep his seat. "David...David" he would shout, "slow this chair down immediately!" Of course, his demanding admonishment fell on deaf ears. And once on the open road, I would push as fast as possible, - - then jump on the back and ride for awhile. The extra weight seemed to have a calming effect on the rear

wheels, - - which in turn calmed Mr. Bateson - temporarily.

At the ride's end I received the promised compensation, along with Mr. Bateson's animated vow that he would never, never allow me to push his wheelchair again.

Other jobs I tried my hand at included - - milking cows, branding calves, janitorial work, collecting trash, painting signs and waiting tables. Collecting trash was probably the most fun because it gave me the opportunity to exercise my independence... Additionally, I always found good stuff.

Independence came in the form of a team of mules - Tom and Jerry - hitched to a flat bed farm wagon. It was almost like having your own car. I could go anywhere and stay as long as I liked - providing the boys (Tom and Jerry) were back in their corral and unharnessed by 5:00 p.m.

The time was set by the mules...not my parents. After 5:00 they became so ill tempered that no one could handle them. They would just turn around and head home regardless of any attempt to prolong the work day. I guess it was their way of saying - "enough is enough".

## President's Message by Jeffery Harmon

A friend of mine, Malcolm Barnett, passed away on January 19, 2017. I am reminded of an old African proverb that states, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground." Malcolm was a great story teller and he had a passion for our area's history. He enjoyed sharing stories with young and old alike. He grew up in the Temecula/Murrieta area and told of the people he knew and the experiences he had.

Malcolm Barnett was born in 1934. His father worked at the Guenther's Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. At age 12, Malcolm was a towel boy at the resort. Later he worked as a mud cutter for the mud baths, a lifeguard, a gas station attendant and a busboy.

Malcolm married Loretta Erdel in the Murrieta Methodist Church. They moved to San Diego where Malcolm joined the fire department. After he retired, Malcolm and Loretta returned to Temecula. Malcolm was a docent for the Temecula Valley Museum.

I remember the last time I visited the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort with Malcolm. He looked out over an empty parking lot and talked about the names of the different areas where the workers once lived. Though some buildings remain, others are long gone. Malcolm's memory was sharp and vivid. His memorial service was appropriately held at the resort.

With his passing, a library stuffed full of life's stories and local history, has passed as well. Fortunately, I recorded Malcolm's oral history in his kitchen one day many years ago. We are reminded how important it is to record the personal histories of those that are in our community so that we can have a lasting legacy for generations to come.

We may not have a museum in Murrieta yet, but we have many walking "libraries" amongst us. If you know people who would be good candidates to share their personal history, please let us know. The more we record, the more "libraries" we save from being lost forever. Thank you Malcolm for preserving your history, God Bless.

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

Phone: 951-387-4862  
E-mail:  
murrietahistoricalsociety@gmail.com

**Next Monthly Board Meeting:**

Monday, March 6, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. at  
Honeycutt Farms Family Restaurant  
40477 Murrieta Hot Springs Road, D2  
(In the Alta Murrieta Shopping Center)  
All members welcome to attend



MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY HOSTS:  
**MURRIETA HOT SPRINGS  
& TONY GUENTHER**



MONDAY, MARCH 13TH | 6 PM  
HUNT HOUSE, 41810 JUNIPER ST MURRIETA

[murrietahistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:murrietahistoricalsociety@gmail.com) | [murrietahistoricalsociety.wordpress.com](http://murrietahistoricalsociety.wordpress.com) | (951) 387-4862 | P.O. Box 1341 Murrieta, Ca 92564

## Membership Application

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Checks payable to:  
Murrieta Valley Historical Society

Mail to: P.O. Box 1341  
Murrieta, CA 92564