



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 1.

January 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.*

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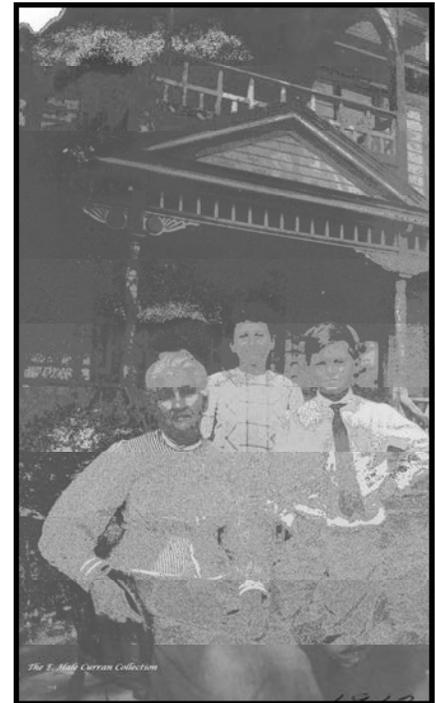


## Mrs. Katie E. Sleeper By Jeffery G. Harmon

Mrs. Katie E. Sleeper was the proprietor of the Fountain House, a hotel built to the west of the Murrieta Train Depot. The hotel was built to accommodate railroad travelers as an overnight and meal stop. Katie operated the hotel from 1907 until her death in 1921. She was a strong, independent woman, who raised her niece, E. Hale Sykes, as her own child. As challenges and changes arose in the Murrieta Valley, Mrs. Katie E. Sleeper was ready to serve her community and her guests.

She was born June 13, 1861 in Corinth, Orange County, Vermont. She was the daughter of George W. Hale and Emma Jane Moulton. She had an older brother, Van A. H. Hale, and a younger sister, Ethel Louise J. Hale. On July 4, 1879, Katie married George W. Chamberlin, a young medical student. Once George received his medical degree, he set up his practice in Hanover, Grafton County, New Hampshire.

It is unknown why Katie's first marriage dissolved. Her second husband was C. L. Sleeper, who may have died in 1889.



Mrs. Katie E. Sleeper, her niece, E. Hale Sykes, and her nephew, George Hale, in front of the Fountain House in 1912

Source:  
The E. Hale Curran Collection

Afterwards, Katie never remarried and never had any children of her own.

On January 5, 1881, Katie's father died. Her mother, never remarried, but remained close to her three children. Mrs.

Emma Hale moved to Nebraska in 1886 and then to Murrieta, California in 1894. Mrs. Katie Sleeper and her two siblings followed their mother to California.

Van Hale had married in 1888, but a year later his wife, Mrs. Lucida J. Hale, abandoned him and refused to live with him. Van Hale filed for divorce in 1898 and it was granted. He ran a grocery store in Murrieta for a short time. He then married Mrs. Hattie Hurd Maydole in July 1900. They had one son, George S. Hale.

Ethel L. J. Hale was a young single woman when her mother settled in Murrieta. In June 1897, she was the bridesmaid for Miss Grace Sykes who married Charles North in the Murrieta Methodist Church. Charles' groomsman was Harvey Sykes, brother of the bride. Over a year later, on October 20, 1898 at 7 p.m., Harvey Sykes and Ethel Hale were married in Mrs. Emma Hale's home. Harvey's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Sykes were the only invited guests.

On April 11, 1900, Ethel gave birth to Emma Hale Sykes at home in Murrieta. A week later, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, Ethel contracted blood poisoning and died. She was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery in Murrieta. Widowed and with a week old baby girl, Harvey Sykes did not have many choices. Mrs. Emma Hale and Katie Sleeper immediately took charge of Harvey's child as he grieved over the loss of his wife.

Meanwhile, Harvey's father, who had been running the Fountain House for a number of years, had decided to retire. His twelve children had grown up and had families of their own, many of whom had moved to Santa Cruz County, California. Henry began searching for someone to rent and operate the hotel.

In 1907, the announcement was made that the Fountain House had a new landlady.

"Our new landlady, Mrs. Sleeper, with her mother, Mrs. Hale, has arrived from Ocean Beach and will before long assume the management of the Fountain House, which has so long been run by Mr. Sykes' family. These ladies are both well known in Murrieta, having lived here a number of years ago. We extend a hearty welcome to them, while we do regret the removal of Mrs. Sykes and family from our midst." (February 21, 1907, Riverside Independent Enterprise)

In August, Katie took her niece and nephew on a vacation to San Diego before the new school year began. Her brother ran the hotel during her absence. Van Hale had also been hired to repair and repaint the Murrieta schoolhouse. By October, Van Hale leased a ranch and moved to Elsinore. E. Hale Sykes' father, Harvey, had remarried and settled in Olive, California.

E. Hale Sykes passed her eighth grade examination in June 1915. Then in August, Katie

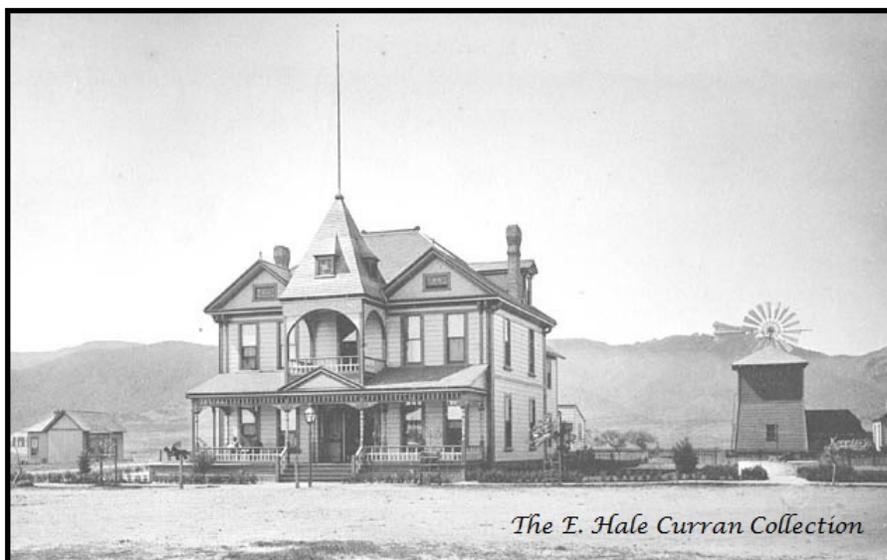
took her niece and nephew on their annual vacation to San Diego. During her absence, Mrs. Miller had charge of the Fountain House.

On April 6, 1917, America declared war on Germany. Forty-two Murrieta men registered for the draft, and soon the town was a hive of activity. In May 1917, the Riverside County Chamber of Commerce held its monthly meeting in Murrieta to discuss county business and the possible labor shortage as America prepared for war. Delegates toured the Murrieta farming community and the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. In the evening, they held their meeting and dinner at the Fountain House.

"A splendid chicken dinner, served by Mrs. Kate Sleeper, capable manager of "The Fountain House," was appreciated by appetites sharpened by the long drive. The hotel dining room was filled to capacity, and a "second table" had to be set for a number who could not be seated at first. The tables were prettily decorated with roses." (May 23, 1917, Riverside Daily Press)

Mrs. Katie Sleeper was always willing to help her family. By December 1917, Van Hale and his family had moved back to Murrieta and lived at the Fountain House. They stayed for several months before they found another house to rent.

A few months later, on April 21, 1918, an estimated 6.8 earthquake struck the region.



*The E. Hale Curran Collection*

The Fountain House, Photo courtesy of the E. Hale Curran Collection

“The earthquake did quite a bit of damage at Murrieta yesterday afternoon, the Fountain House suffering the most from falling plaster and cracked chimneys. Stock in the stores was thrown from the selves, but the buildings escaped with slight or no damage whatever.” (April 22, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

On November 11, 1918, the Armistice was signed and the Great War had come to an end. Murrieta’s doughboys began to return to their homes. The newly completed grain elevator, built just north of the Fountain House, greeted the young men as they arrived at the train depot.

In August 1920, Mrs. Katie Sleeper and E. Hale Sykes traveled to Santa Cruz, California to attend Mr. and Mrs. Henry Sykes’ 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The Sykes family had twelve children, thirty grandchildren and eight great grandchildren

This was a large family reunion and celebration.

Fire once again threatened the Fountain House in January 1921.

“The Saturday night fire started in a barn owned by George Lambert. It leaped to the stable and out buildings of the hotel owned by Mrs. Sleeper and threatened to destroy the hotel.

Bucket brigades were quickly formed and passed water to the top of the hotel, the roof of which was three times ablaze, but the heroic work of the bucket brigade saved the buildings.

While the men were fighting the fire with buckets, big trucks were brought into action and like an army tank they attacked the outbuildings, including the windmill pump and water tank, and razed them to the ground. This work checked the fire in its path of destruction and

E. Hales Sykes turned 21 in April that year and in June she received a new Ford roadster. In October, Katie Sleeper’s health began to decline. On November 13, 1921, Katie Sleeper died at the age of 60. She was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery near her mother and sister. She left her estate including the Fountain House to her niece.

Mrs. Katie Sleeper left a lasting legacy in her niece, E. Hale Sykes. She had taught her the strength of being an independent hardworking woman in a competitive and challenging world. Katie was a beloved proprietor and hostess to countless residents and travelers who had stayed at the Fountain House. Her dedication to her family and her contribution to the town of Murrieta should always be remembered for generations to come.



## The A.K. Small & Co. Safe

By Jeffery Harmon

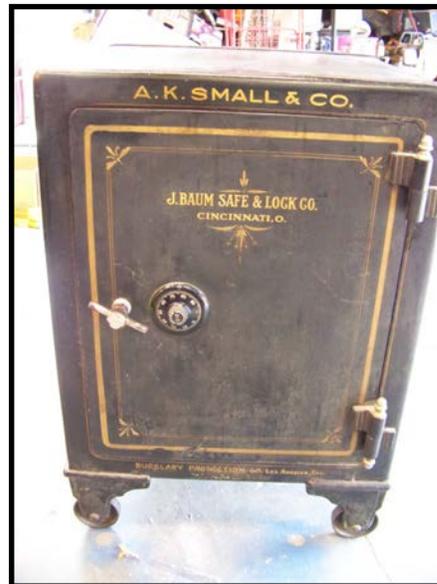


Photo on left: A.K. Small Store,  
E. Hale Curran Collection.

Photo above: The safe in 2016

The A. K. Small & Co. store opened in April 1909 at the corner of Juniper and Washington. An estimated 900 lb safe was rolled into the store, with the company's name painted on the safe's door. Albert "Bert" K. Small operated the store until 1922 when he sold it to George Burnham and his son, Frank.

In 1932, Frank bought out his father's interests in the Murrieta Burnham store and relinquished his interests in the Temecula Burnham store. Then in 1956, Frank sold the store to Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Miller. By the 1960s, the Burnham store was relocated to the former Tarwater store at the corner of B Street and Washington. When the store moved, the safe remained behind in the original store.

In the mid 1970s, the old Small/Burnham store was being renovated.

David Johnson recalls what happened next:

"As I passed the store, I noted the safe sitting in the corner of the storeroom covered with dust. Having an interest in antiques, I inquired what was going to be done with the safe. One of the workmen replied, 'If you can move the 900 pound beast, you can have it.'"

At this time, David's

brother, Ronald, and his wife, Shirley, of Douglas, Arizona, were visiting their mother, Hazel Johnson Small, who lived on the corner of Kalmia and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Ronald was interested in the safe and so David allowed him to take it. A tow truck was required to load the safe into the bed of Ronald's pickup.

When the safe arrived in Arizona, a locksmith was called to determine the code to open the safe. The safe sat in the backroom of Ronald and Shirley's house until they moved to Tucson, Arizona in the 1980s. The couple moved again in the mid-1990s to Oro Valley Arizona. The safe then resided in their garage until 2016.

"Each move required employing a tow truck to move the safe." David Johnson explained.

In September 2016, the Society was notified that Shirley Johnson owned the Small Company safe and wanted to donate it. Pat and Annette Jennings contacted Shirley's brother-in-law, David Johnson, and made arrangements to drive to Arizona to accept the donation.

The Jennings drove 450 miles to Oro Valley and stayed the night. The next morning, Pat maneuvered a truck and trailer back down a steep driveway to the ga-

rage below. Together Pat and Annette wrestled the 117-year old safe into the trailer. They padded the door so that it wouldn't lock on the journey back.

During the visit Annette Jennings and Shirley Johnson shared their Murrieta memories. Shirley then donated the Johnson ranch bell, two branding irons, and other historic items to the Society. The Jennings thanked Shirley and her family for their generous donation. The Jennings then drove 450 miles back to Murrieta.

When the safe arrived in Murrieta, the Jennings drove the extra block to parade the safe passed the old Small company store. An important piece of Murrieta's history had returned home.

We want to say thank you to Pat and Annette Jennings for going the extra mile and to David Johnson, Shirley Johnson, and their families for their donations. We would also like to thank all those that were involved in this acquisition. Sometimes it takes a village to preserve Murrieta's history. Thank you.

## President's Message by Jeffery Harmon

Happy New Year! For our freshman year we laid the groundwork for the historical society. Now as we enter our sophomore year, it is time to hit the ground running! As a member of the historical society, what do you want us to accomplish this year? Please let us know because this society represents all our ideas, not the dreams of a chosen few.

This year we hope to take part in more city events so that we can demonstrate that our local history is important. To do this, we need volunteers who will

help us plan ahead so that we can make a positive impact in our community. If you would like to participate, please let us know. We would love for you to help.

Our big vision for the year is a temporary museum. There have been several proposals made, but we need more volunteers to make the dream a reality. We need a place where local school children can learn about their city's rich and diverse history. We need a place where we can gather local treasures, artifacts, and oral stories in a safe and se-

cure location. If you have any ideas, please share them with us.

Finally, if you would like to join us on the Board in order to share in the goals and objectives of our society, please let us know. The monthly Board meeting is open to any members who are looking for ways to be involved.

With the New Year upon us, let us share with our friends and family our interests in our local history. Encourage them to become members so that we can make an impact in our city. Thank you for patronage.

## 100 Years Ago

Valuable silica quartz mines have been discovered near Murrieta and are being developed by Jean Laborde and the Trujillo brothers. Two cars of silica have been shipped from this mine this week to Los Angeles. January 12, 1917 (RDP)

H. Zimmerman, manager of warehouse No. 5, of Globe Mills, Colton, just finished a shipment of five cars of wheat this week from Murrieta.

Mr. and Mrs. John McNeill have a daughter, born Sunday, January 7.

Oliver Freeman and family have moved again to their mountain home on the Santa Rosa.

The continued rains called a halt in farming. Some have their crop in and many have not. No snow fell to speak of this time.

(January 20, 1917, RDP)

## The Bar U Brand By David Johnson

The Johnson Ranch was located in Tenaja, eleven miles west of Murrieta. The ranch was acquired in a trade between my grandfather, Lawrence Johnson, and the Tarwater family. Lawrence traded an apartment building in Los Angeles for the ranch property.

The 640-acre ranch shared a boundary fence with the Vail Ranch Company. The east side boundary was about three miles long. As I understand, when the Vail Co. re-fenced the boundary, the posts were moved a foot or two to the west. This was unsatisfactory to Grandma Johnson and a lawsuit ensued. The suit found the Vail Co. liable and required them to move and maintain the fence; hence the Bar-U brand was born.



Bar-U branding iron  
donated by the Johnson Family

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*Murrieta Valley Historical Society*



**GUEST SPEAKER:**  
*Carl Love*

Listen to stories from  
Carl Love's book,  
From Two Lanes  
to the Fast Lane  
followed by a Q&A  
and book signing.

**Monday, Jan 9th**  
**6 PM - Hunt House**  
**41810 Juniper**  
**Street, Murrieta**

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## 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:  
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Address:  
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Phone number:  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Checks payable to:  
Murrieta Valley Historical  
Society

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Murrieta, CA 92564