



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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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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Eugene Lee Small

Murrieta Veteran of Two World Wars

By Jeffery Harmon

When President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany in April 1917, one young Murrieta man immediately joined the Navy in order to serve and defend his country. Twenty years later when another war was declared, the same man answered the call. The son of a merchant, Eugene Lee Small's service to his friends, family, and his country cannot be forgotten.

Eugene "Gene" Small was born August 18, 1897 at the family home near the Tenaja Road in Murrieta, California. He was the son of Albert "Bert" K. and Edith (Thompson) Small. He was one of five children: Emma (1895), Eugene (1897), Chester (1901), Albert (1905) and Edward (1915). His father was a dry farmer, but around 1902, Bert Small moved his family to Orange County and began working in a general mercantile store.

Henry Clay Thompson, Eugene's maternal grandfather, rented the Burnett home at 24792



Edward T. Small, 95th Division, Eugene L. Small, Coast Pvt. AA 220th Gun Battalion, 1942 (Photo courtesy of Carol Bowden)

Washington Avenue from 1899 to 1903. When Rachel Burnett sold the home to Earnest Lakeman in 1903, Thompson moved across the street and began building a new residence at 24771 Washington Ave. The home was large because he had a big family and many grandchildren. Each year Edith Small would ride the train from Orange County to Murrieta to visit her father at his new house.

In 1909, Henry Thompson and his son-in-law, Albert Small,

formed the A. K. Small & Co. Eugene's family moved back to Murrieta, and moved into his grandfather's home. The Small general mercantile store was built south of the family home on the corner of Juniper and Washington. Soon Bert Small had a successful business and Thompson had his grandchildren with him.

Eugene Small attended school until the sixth grade. He dropped out of school in order to work on a family farm. At age 17, he passed the eighth grade exam and moved to Orange County to attend Orange Union High School. He was in his second year of high school when he dropped out and enlisted in the Navy.

He was assigned to the U.S.S. Frederick. The ship was part of the Cruiser Force, Squadron One, Division Two. It served as the convoy escort group's flagship during all of

1917 and 1918. The convoy escorted ships ferrying troops across the Atlantic to Europe. German submarines were patrolling the waters, and Eugene's crew was ready to defend their American troops.

During a storm at sea in early 1918, Eugene was on deck when a wave crashed over the deck.

"Eugene Small, who joined the navy, is in a hospital on the Atlantic coast, owing to an injury received by a wave sweeping the deck during a storm at sea. He may come home soon." (April 20, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

Eugene's niece, Carol Small Bowden shared, "The ship made a sudden evasive maneuver that caught the deck watch off guard. He [Gene] was nearly swept overboard, but was flung against a stanchion that saved his life. He suffered severe internal injuries from the impact. He

was not expected to live before the ship reached shore, but he did."

He was taken to the naval hospital on the East Coast and underwent an operation. When his health was stable, he was transferred by train to San Bernardino and then transported to San Diego's naval hospital.

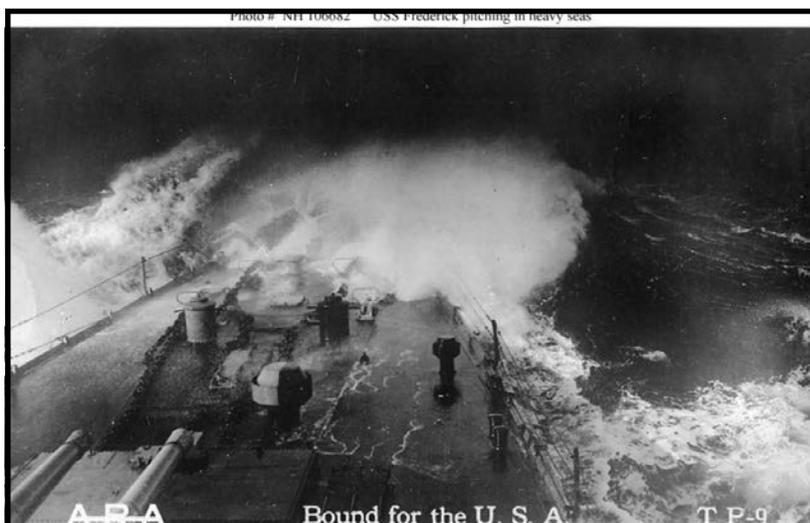
"Eugene Small of the U. S. Navy was transferred from an Atlantic coast hospital to San Diego. A. K. Small and wife met their son at San Bernardino last Saturday and Mr. Small went on to San Diego Sunday." (October 25, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

As the war ended in November 1918, Eugene Small remained under the care of the navy physicians.

"Eugene Small returned to camp at San Diego last Monday. He is under the care of physicians yet and may have to undergo a third operation." (April 11, 1919, Riverside Daily Press)

Eugene was honorably discharged in August 1919. In November, he announced that he was attending the farm school at Davis, California. By 1920, he found work in Hollister, California. He worked in the area for two years before returning to Murrieta in March 1922.

Meanwhile, his grandfather, Henry Thompson, died in 1920 from heart trouble. His father, Bert Small, had been working at the Murrieta Valley



Wave crashing over the bow of the USS Frederick
Source: Naval History and Heritage Command Online Library

Grain Elevator Co. since it had been established in 1918. By 1922, Bert Small sold the general store to George and Frank Burnham. None of Bert's sons showed any interest in continuing the family business.

After settling back in Murrieta, Eugene found work wherever he could. In 1923, Eugene and his brother Chester worked for the Murrieta Oil Company for two weeks, watching over a new oil well. In 1924, the brothers worked on the roads for the Pauba Ranch in Temecula. In June 1925, Eugene was harvesting a bumper crop of barley. During the same year, Chester had found work constructing a road up Mt. Wilson in Los Angeles.

Eugene continued farming for several years. During that time he visited doctors in San Diego on occasion to relieve his pain from his war injuries. In November 1931, he had another operation at the San Diego hospital. He recovered and continued to work in the area.

Carol shares, "It is my understanding that he spent years in and out of veteran's hospitals after the war. I remember he learned rug weaving in physical therapy there, and there were some lovely rugs in the family home in Murrieta that my grandmother was very proud of (which were never used – only admired). He made frequent visits to the Veteran's Hospital at Whipple, Arizona, in the 1930s, and that was why he was a frequent visitor to our home in

Phoenix."

In 1940, his father, Bert Small died. On August 27, 1942, Eugene enlisted in the Army. He had no wife and children, and was determined to be in the action.

"At one time, as an adult, he was enamored of a school teacher, but thought himself too uneducated to approach her." Carol remarked.

Eugene was a private in the Coast Anti-aircraft 220th Gun Battalion. Carol shared, "In 1942 he was sent to Texas to train recruits. His previous health problems and the Texas heat led him to request a discharge, to which he was entitled at the age of 45. Combat is a younger man's job, as is training for combat."

After the war, Eugene continued to work in Murrieta. He was employed at the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort working in the boiler room, and maintain-

ing the plumbing that provided hot water to the rooms.

Carol explained, "He learned steam/pipe fitting in the Navy, and used that skill as a steam engineer at the Murrieta Hot Springs, as his health allowed, until his retirement."

Eugene married Hazel Irene Johnson on October 4, 1968, during a surprise double ring ceremony in Riverside, California. The newlywed couple made their home at 24610 Second Avenue on the corner of Kalmia St. in Murrieta.

On January 21, 1969, Eugene was at the old family home on Washington Avenue. He had gone to the house to check for leaks in the roof. He climbed the stairs, but when he reached the second floor landing, he had a heart attack and died. His sister, Mrs. Emma Compton, found him. He was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery in Murri-

(Continued on page 4)



Eugene Small's grave marker at the Laurel Cemetery in Murrieta, CA. (Source: Find-A-Grave.com)



Henry Clay Thompson began building this eight-room home by November 1903. Albert K. Small and his family moved into the home in 1909. Eugene died in this house in 1969. Location: 24771 Washington Avenue (Photo by Jeffery G. Harmon)

eta. His widow, Hazel, died eleven years later on April 13, 1980, and was laid to rest by his side.

Carol shared more of her fond memories. “He was very solicitous of his mother and sister. He visited all his brothers frequently, and kept in touch with his sister’s son and his family, as well as Chester’s daughter and her family. He was the brother who always came to help when my father needed help – building a garage in Phoenix, running a chicken and rabbit business in Chula Vista after his discharge from the army, helping out in the mobile home park in

El Cajon that my father bought in 1963, and also babysitting my two sons, born 1964 and 1966, and helping us lay a patio and walkways in our yard in San Diego. He was always independent, coming and going on a private schedule, but always welcome, always generous, always kind.”

“My cousin, Judith Small McMullen, named her daughter Eugenia in honor of our uncle. My older son was named Mark Eugene Gronwald for the same reason. My uncle was much loved by his entire family.”

Today, Eugene Lee Small is still remembered by

friends and family members. His service to Murrieta and to his country is unknown to the many new area residents. At his gravesite, visitors can view his grave marker and be reminded of the sacrifice of one of Murrieta’s native sons, who answered America’s call not once, but twice. May we continue to honor his memory by sharing his story in the years to come.

Author’s Note: If you have a story or a memory of Eugene Small, please share it with us.

Email:

info@murrietahistoricalociety.org



In April 2017, Inge Haeupler, of Austria, visited with Pat and Annette Jennings. Inge has been researching the family of Juan Murrieta's wife, Adele Golsch, for many years and has been making annual visits to our area in her pursuit of details. In her professional life, she was in charge of foreign relations for the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Pat and Annette Jennings, two of our society founders, exchanged books and other photos and local information with Inge, including two books about local history written by long-time residents, and the other published by a Polish historical entity that included a chapter written by Inge and concerning the Golaszewski family, as they were known in Poland. Report by Al Vollbrecht

Welcome
New Members
March
 The Strode Family
April
 Pat Farmer
 Lynn Hornecker
 Chuck Jensen
 Carolyn House Greenwood
May
 Judith & Emilio Gonzales
 Jack & Sally Samaniego



On March 27, 2017, Pat Jennings gave a presentation on the History of Murrieta for the Community Women's Society at the Golf Knolls Recreation Center. Afterwards Marilynn Marti presented Pat with a \$50 donation for the Society.



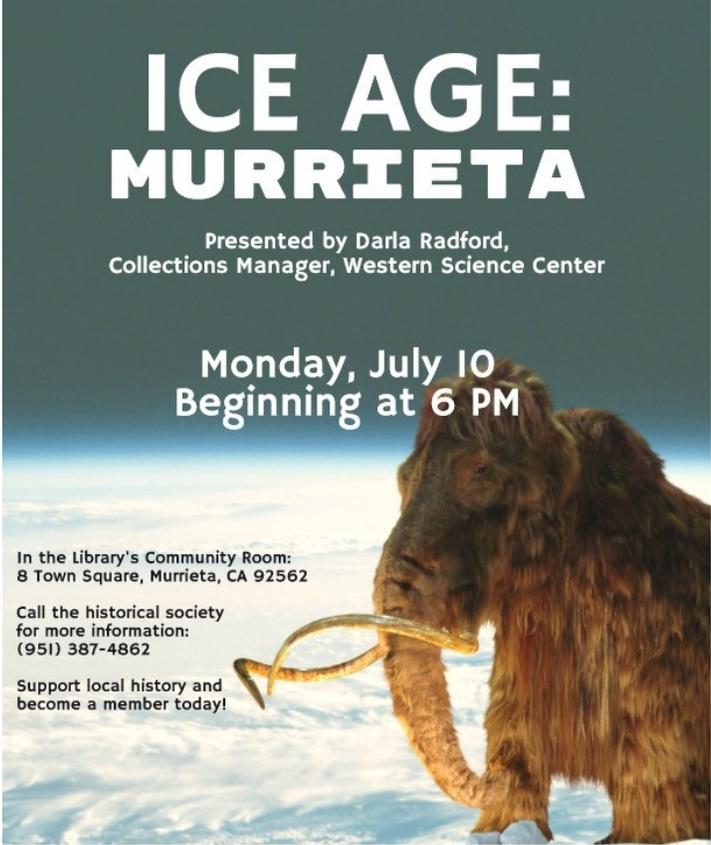
Our booth at the 70th Annual Murrieta Fireman's BBQ

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Next Monthly Board Meeting:

Monday, June 26, 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



**ICE AGE:
MURRIETA**

Presented by Darla Radford,
Collections Manager, Western Science Center

**Monday, July 10
Beginning at 6 PM**

In the Library's Community Room:
8 Town Square, Murrieta, CA 92562

Call the historical society
for more information:
(951) 387-4862

Support local history and
become a member today!

 **MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
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Membership Application

Individual

Annual \$25.00
Lifetime \$150.00

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Annual \$35.00
Lifetime \$250.00

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Business

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one year and will be up for
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