



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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(Photo by Robert Vose, 1960s)

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

1918 ~ 2018

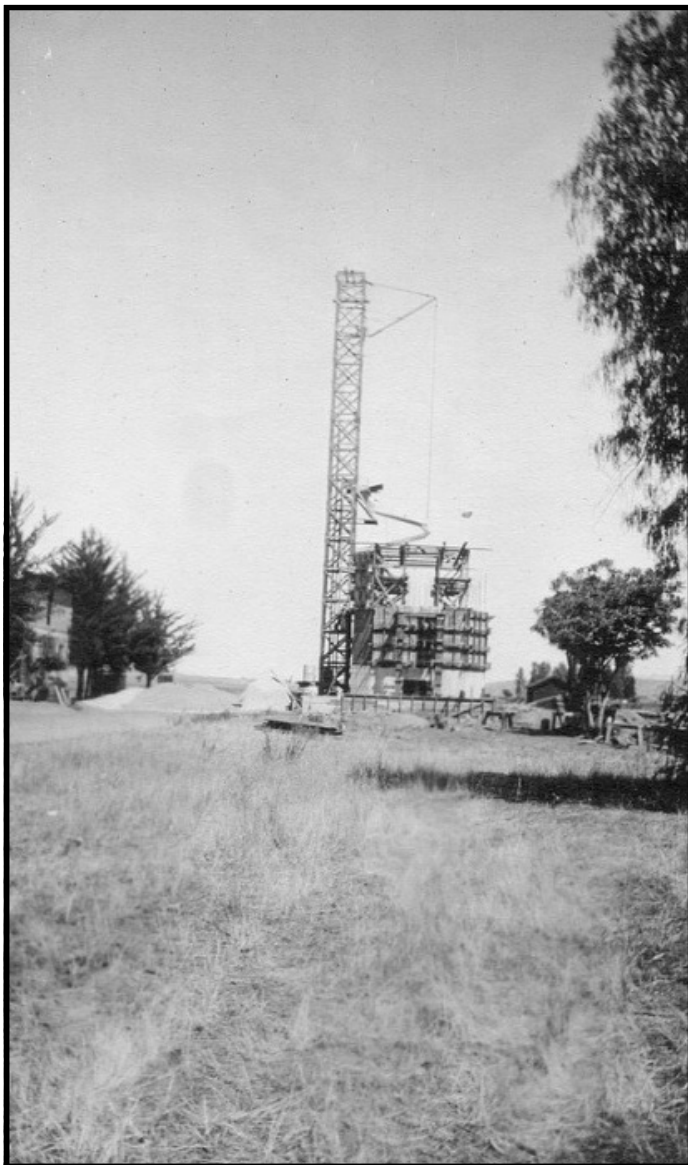
The Murrieta Valley Grain Elevator

By Jeffery G. Harmon

The use of grain elevators and selling grain in bulk was not a novel concept in 1918. Midwest farmers had joined together years before and constructed community grain elevators next to railroad tracks and had their crops shipped to large city markets in bulk. However, the Pacific Coast farmers were behind the times with many still relying on grain sacks

imported from Calcutta, India by British merchants. With World War I raging in Europe, the cost of imported grain sacks increased by two hundred percent in 1918. These circumstances led to one of the greatest agricultural achievements in the valley, the construction of the Murrieta grain elevator.

Since the founding of Mur-



On August 1, 1918, the steel skeletal frame was being assembled before the pouring of the cement.
(Source: E Hale Curran collection)

Francisco Chronicle)

William F. Mixon, editor of a Woodland newspaper in Yolo County, California, raised an outcry as the imported grain sack prices rose to 27 cents each in February 1918.

“There are used in California in an average year 35,000,000 grain bags to sack the cereals alone.” Mixon says. “There are other millions used to sack the potatoes and onions and beans. With prices of sacks 200 percent above the normal, it is easily figured that the California farmer will have to spend practically \$5,000,000 excess for sacks this year.” (February 14, 1918, San Francisco Chronicle)

British merchants in Calcutta, India were accused of profiteering during war time. In their defense, prices for British merchandise had increased since the war with Germany began in 1914. German submarines had sunk many merchant ships, causing millions of dollars in lost revenues. If the British merchants had raised prices of grain sacks in 1918, it was to recover and secure their business revenues.

Soon the story circulated throughout many major Califor-

rieta, the railroad provided the means for area dry farmers to transport their products to market. After the grain was harvested, it was sacked and sent by wagon to a warehouse on B Street. Grain buyers would travel to Murrieta to buy the harvested crops and have it transported by rail to company mills.

Most grain in the area was purchased by the Colton Globe Mills Company, which also sold grain sacks to the farmers. In June 1917, William E.

Burr, grain buyer for Colton, sold 55,500 grain sacks to Murrieta farmers for around ten cents each. Six months later the price for grain sacks doubled in January 1918.

“Grain bags are being quoted at 20 cents each to the users. How long until the man with a 5000-sack crop will build a \$2000 elevator rather than buy sacks for two crops? And some of the bags sold last year would hardly hold together while being filled.” (January 13, 1918, San

nia newspapers. At the same time, grain elevators were in the national news. In Chicago, the world's largest grain elevator had opened in February. California farmers immediately looked to the construction of grain elevators as a less expensive alternative to the purchasing of grain sacks.

Meanwhile some farmers began to threaten to hold their grain until the government provided economical means for the crops to be distributed. The War Time Trade Committee in Washington D.C. investigated the grain sack price allegations. The solution was to buy grain from farmers with the new grain sack price in mind, in hope of trying to restore crop profits. It was a fair offer, but the wheels of change had already begun.

The Sacramento Valley Bulk Grain Handlers Association formed in March 1918. County representatives from Glenn, Colusa, Butte, Sutter, Tehama, Shasta, Yolo, and Solano each pledged to construct at least one grain elevator that year. There was government opposition to the grain elevator movement, but in the end the cost outweighed government war time regulations.

The California Farm Bureau movement that had evolved over the years provided the means for farmers to meet, discuss, and organize a co-operative grain elevator company. The Riverside County Farm Bureau was formed on April 15, 1917 with thirteen farm centers. Jo-



The Murrieta Grain Elevator, 1958
(Source: E Hale Curran Collection)

seph V. Thompson was elected the first director of the Murrieta Farm Center.

When President Wilson declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, one of the first war time measures to be enacted was the call for farmers to increase wheat production. Farmers increased their crops in response to the federal governments, urgent demand, but by 1918 the logistical problem of harvesting the large crop became

apparent. The rise in grain sack prices was too high a financial burden for California farmers to bear.

Another problem farmers faced was a labor shortage. Traditionally, there were men who were hired to sew sacks during the harvest. There were also men needed for the warehouse to unload and stack the grain sacks. Then when the trains came in, men were needed to load the sacks onto the train cars. With



The "Murrieta Sentinel" at 100 years old, November 8, 2017

Photo by Jeffery Harmon

many farm workers drafted into the military and serving in the European trenches, there were not enough laborers to continue sacking the grain.

On March 6, 1917, at the Riverside County Farm Bureau monthly meeting of directors, Joseph V. Thompson announced that Murrieta and area farmers had agreed to construct a grain elevator in Murrieta. This was to be the first such structure to be built in Riverside County.

The next day Thompson joined a few other Riverside County farm directors in attending the Emergency Food Production conference at Berkeley, California. Afterwards, a caravan was led throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys to visit farm bureaus, farm centers, and selected farms to demonstrate the latest in agricultural

techniques. One scheduled stop was the Chowchilla grain elevator in Madera County. After the trip, Thompson shared his experiences and findings at the monthly Murrieta Farm Center meeting.

The grain sack dilemma and the proposed elevator were discussed. Each year the Murrieta district purchased an average of 100,000 grain sacks for the harvest. With sacks selling at 27 cents each, the cost would be double from the year prior. Also the grain elevator meant that fewer men would be needed to handle the grain. The labor of two or three men would be saved on each combined harvester and that seven to eight less men would be required at the warehouse.

The purposed grain elevator was estimated to cost

\$15,000 to build, but it eliminated the farmer's dependency on grain sacks and solved the current labor shortage. If the farmers had waited until after the war, there wouldn't have been any money for construction. With the high prices of grain, the farmers had the money and credit needed to build the elevator.

On March 30, 1917, the Murrieta Valley Elevator Company was formed. Mr. Ormsby of the Consolidated Bank of Elsinore offered a \$5,000 loan at a low interest rate and was willing to raise it another \$3,000. At the end of the meeting, \$9,900 had been invested. The company officers elected were: Joseph V. Thompson, president, H. E. Davis, secretary, Charles A. Auld, first vice president, Vernon James, second vice president, and John Walters, treasurer.

On April 17th at the Murrieta Farm Center's monthly meeting, Joseph V. Thompson was unanimously re-elected the farm center's director. Plans for the grain elevator were further discussed. The Davidson Construction Company of Los Angeles was hired for the building project.

A site was surveyed near the railroad tracks at the intersection of Clay and A streets just north of the Fountain House Hotel. The elevator's construction began in May 1918. Residents gathered as the first cement slab was poured for the foundation. A skeletal rebar frame was first built, providing an outline of

how the completed project would look.

The construction crew began pouring cement into the wood forms in July. The outside walls, the piers, and the floors were all laid. By the end of September, the grain elevator's structure was completed. Several families who had lived in Murrieta during the project, left and returned to their homes in Los Angeles. Next, George B. Wilson, of Los Angeles, was hired to install the machinery.

One month later, the project was finished. The completed elevator was 80 feet high with six large silos and two smaller ones. There was a storage capacity of 2500 hundred-weight bags of grain in the large silos and the small silos held 500 bags. It was estimated that the elevator was capable of holding

up to 30,000 bushels of grain.

The Great War ended on November 11, 1918 eclipsing the news of the elevator's completion. Nine days later, the Murrieta Valley Elevator Company's held its opening ceremonies. Riverside County Farm Bureau president John L. Bishop, County Farm Adviser R. N. Wilson and his assistant, Mr. Nebe- lung were present for the event.

Unfortunately, the harvest season had come to a close. Area farmers had to purchase the overpriced sacks that year, but they knew it would be the last time. A few farmers brought their late crops to the elevator after it opened. The next year's harvest would be the elevator's first full scale operation.

The construction of the Murrieta Valley grain elevator

was a direct reaction to America's involvement in World War I. The Murrieta Farm Center created in 1917 under the Riverside County Farm Bureau generated the co-operative spirit that led to Murrieta's greatest agricultural achievement. Through the crucible of conflict, the farming communities banded together and established the Murrieta grain elevator.

The elevator closed in 1983 when dry farming operations declined as housing tracks began to cover the landscape. The machinery was removed and several buildings were torn down, or were left in ruins. All that remains today are the empty graffiti covered silos and fading memories. Yet the one hundred year old monument continues to stand as a tribute to area farmers and the great American spirit.




Little House of Treasures
Antiques, Vintage Goods, Home Decor

Don & Rea Douglas

24980 Washington Ave. 951-304-1981/cell 951-970-3329
Murrieta, CA 92562 FB:LittleHouseofTreasuresMurrieta

We would like to thank members Don and Rea Douglas, owners of the Little House of Treasures, for their continuous support of the Historical Society. They have a donation jar on their counter and they have glass cases they will be donating to the museum. Copies of our monthly newsletter can be pick up as well. Please visit their store and thank them for their service to our community.

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Next Monthly Board Meeting:

Monday, February 5, 2018 at 5:30 p.m.

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 AND PRESIDENT JEFFERY HARMON, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MURRIETA PUBLIC LIBRARY, PRESENTS:


THE LEGACY OF THE LAKEMAN HOUSE

MONDAY, JANUARY 8TH | 6 PM


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