



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 2. Issue 5.

May 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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A publication of the

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The Murrieta Town Hall served as a meeting place for the Murrieta Farm Center. (Source: E Hale Curran Collection, Murrieta Public Library, Heritage)

The Riverside County Farm Bureau

The Murrieta Farm Center (1917)

By Jeffery Harmon

The first meeting of the Riverside County Farm Bureau was on May 5, 1917. Its purpose was to promote and represent agriculture in Riverside County. Of the thirteen Farm Centers organized within the county, the second largest was in Murrieta. The Bureau provided a monthly meeting venue where farmers could learn the latest expert agricultural innovations and theories, and voice their needs. Farm Bureaus became instruments to meet American

government requests for agricultural products during World War I through a cooperative effort. Murrieta farmers could purchase products in bulk and collaborate to find solutions to improve crop and livestock production.

A county farm bureau employed a university farm advisor who would communicate up-to-date agricultural information and find solutions for local farming needs. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 provided federal and state



William B. Parker
1885-1974

Source:
Journal of Economic Entomology
VI 68, Issue 2
1 April 1975

funding for the farm advisor's salary. Each county was asked to provide an annual budget of \$2,000 for the farm advisor's traveling and operating expenses.

To form a county farm bureau, one-fifth of the farmers had to become members. There were 2,688 registered farmers in Riverside County in 1917, which meant 550 paid members were needed. An annual membership cost \$1.00, which is roughly equal to about \$21 dollars in 2017. There were many benefits for members. For example, the farm adviser taught how to operate farms more efficiently, how to increase crop production, and how to prevent crop and livestock diseases.

On March 24, 1917, farmers from Temecula, Murrieta, Wildomar, and Auld Valley gathered at the Murrieta Town Hall to discuss the formation of the Riverside County Farm Bureau. On March 31st, the Murri-

eta Farm Center was organized and at least sixty-two farmers joined. Joseph V. Thompson was elected director and George L. Black was named secretary-treasurer.

The first board of directors meeting of the Riverside County Farm Bureau took place on April 18, 1917 in Riverside. The Bureau was organized and a constitution and bylaws were adopted. Farm Centers were established in Arlington, Highgrove, Corona, Nuevo, Perris, Jurupa, Elsinore, Murrieta, Fruitvale, Little Lake, Banning, Palo Verde Valley, and Blythe. The organization was presented to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors that afternoon, and the Board voted an annual appropriation of \$2,000 for three years for the farm advisor.

Professor William B. Parker, of the University of California, Berkeley, was named the farm advisor for Riverside County. Parker was the Assistant State Leader of Farm Advisors and had worked tirelessly with elected Riverside County Farm Bureau President, John L. Bishop in organizing the thirteen farm centers. On May 1st, Parker began working in Riverside and the first bureau meeting took place four days later.

The Bureau was the first one organized in California after President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany in April. The government believed that the war could last between one to three years and so began many war preparations. The

first mandate the President requested was an increase in wheat production for the following year.

Monthly Farm Center meetings discussed how to meet the government's demands. An increase in crops meant an increase in labor, but with the draft, farm labor shortages were predicted. Seed dealers saw an opportunity to raise prices, but the cooperative spirit of the Bureau allowed farmers to buy in bulk at a lower price.

A home front war campaign began between the farmers, ground squirrels, and crop diseases. All the challenges the farmers faced, the Bureau provided the means to find solutions to support the war effort. As one reporter explained, "The hoe is mightier than the sword" (May 8, 1917 Riverside Independent Enterprise).

The first Murrieta Farm Center monthly meeting was held on Tuesday night, May 15th. The next month, Murrieta farmers began to plan for a large harvest. "A farm bureau warehouse, in which may be stored the products from the entire district, is being considered by the farmers of the Murrieta center, who have a big harvest of beans, potatoes and other crops coming on." (June 23, 1917, Riverside Daily Press)

The farm center was not a men's club, but a farming community center. There were programs for men, women and children. The first work of the

Farm Bureau for women was a demonstration on canning, drying and curing fruits and vegetables held in Murrieta on June 22nd. Tin cans were needed for the war effort. Women were asked to use glass jars for preserving food and to store food for winter use so that more food could be sent to Europe.

Professor Parker sent out 800 postcards in June to Riverside County farmers to see if there were any fears of labor shortage. He only received 45 responses, which indicated that farmers were confident that they had enough laborers for the year's harvest. By July, the Hemet Co-operative Cannery put out a call for workers. The Women's Labor Relief Corps was quickly formed and women were summoned to do their patriotic duty and fill the cannery labor shortage. Within a year, the Women's Land Army would march into the Elsinore Valley to meet the area's labor needs. The Farm Bureau office in Riverside soon became an employment center for farmers and laborers.

In July at the Arlington Farm Center, a proposal was made to establish a cow testing department within the Farm Bureau. The organization was responsible for hiring a tester and purchasing the necessary supplies, paying expenses, etc. "The object of the test is to weed out the poor cows and determine the value of the good ones. The Babcock tester is being used to determine the percent of butter

fat (a cow produces)." (September 17, 1917, Riverside Daily Press) One dairyman who joined the department was Mahlon Vail, owner of the Vail Ranch in Temecula. He operated one of the county's largest dairies with 120 cows.

A silo raising demonstration was held October 2nd in Arlington. The Farm Bureau strongly advocated the erecting of silos for storing livestock feed. "The products of a given area can be stored in less space as silage than as dry forage." (September 4, 1917, Riverside Independent Enterprise) The silo movement may have planted the "seed" for Murrieta farmers to build a grain elevator the following year.

California Governor William D. Stephens attended a luncheon at the Mission Inn with the Farm Bureau directors on October 9th. He was in Riverside for the opening ceremonies of the fifth annual Riverside County Fair. He spoke of America's commitment to defeat Germany and the importance of California's agricultural resources for the war effort. During the meeting, Joseph V. Thompson gave a brief report of the progress in the Murrieta Valley.

In October, the U.S. Department of Agriculture sent W. S. Wilkinson, a specialist on growing grain, to speak at the Farm Centers in order to assist county farmers in meeting the government's request for an increase in wheat planting. He

discussed a fungal infection called smut that was invisible to the naked eye. Smut was affecting the germination of wheat seeds, reducing crop production. He offered a few proven solutions to county farmers.

One solution was washing wheat with bluestone. The smut was removed from the seeds and government reports showed an increase in crop production after the treatment. Murrieta farmers banded together and bought a barrel of bluestone at a cheaper rate. They began immediately treating their crops in hopes of high yields the following year.

There were ninety-two in attendance at the November meeting of the Murrieta Farm

(Continued on page 4)

JOHN L. BISHOP, FATHER COUNTY FARM BUREAU



Source: February 8, 1918,
Riverside Independent Enterprise

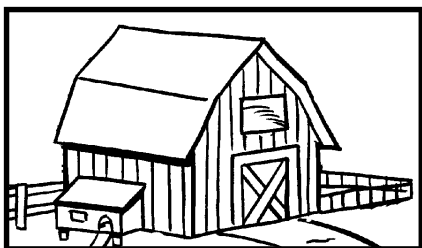


The Murrieta Valley Grain Elevator on New Clay Road. The Murrieta Farm Center that was organized in 1917, brought innovative agricultural ideas to the valley and fostered a collaborative movement that led to the construction of the grain elevator in 1918. The City of Murrieta currently owns the property.
(Photo by Jeffery G. Harmon)

Center. There were discussions of the Farm Bureau creating a county cooperative market.

“A marketing committee, to get a census of crops which might be marketed through the farm bureau organization was appointed, comprising H. E. Davis, H. D. Small (Smohl), Roy Roripaugh, H. M. Wickard and Glen Torbet” (November 22, 1917, Riverside Daily Press)

The cooperative market concept was that farmers with



similar products could work together and save money on shipping costs to the buyer’s market. A county cooperative market was almost established on December 8th, but concerns halted the process until expert legal council could be sought. In the past, few Murrieta farmers had used a cooperative market strategy to gain better prices. The farmers now understood its benefits and would utilize it the next year with the formation of the grain elevator co-op.

As the year came to a close, American troops were entrenched in Europe and more troops were in route. The Farm Bureau had rallied the county farmers into a cooperative organization with 750 members.

To win the war, farmers pledged 4,480 acres for wheat planting. With new knowledge and expert training the farming communities stood proud in their patriotic duty to meet the government’s demands.

One hundred years later, the Riverside County Farm Bureau continues to serve the needs of the county farmers. The Murrieta Town Hall that served as a farm center is no longer standing and large scale dry farming in Murrieta Valley is a thing of the past. Today one monument remains as a testimony to the farmers’ collaborative efforts as members of the Farm Bureau; the Murrieta Valley Grain Elevator.

POST OFFICE POLITICS

By David Johnson

In the 40's and well into the 1950's, a messenger from the central post office in Riverside, California delivered all U.S. mail to the backdoor of the Murrieta Post Office. The post office was then located on the northwest corner of Washington and C Street in downtown Murrieta. (The original building, now housing a real estate office, sits at the same location today.)

Deliveries were daily between the hours of 9:30 and 10:30 am, except Saturday, Sunday and federal holidays. It was during this relatively narrow window of time that all political issues were discussed, disputed and polled.

Every morning, rain or shine, the likes of Urban Tarwater, Amos Sykes, Vic Garrison, Ray Thompson, Mike Mance, Hugo Guenther, Frank Burnham, Gordon Knott, Ira Rail, Oscar Madison, and others, gathered on the post office steps, anticipating what fortunes might befall them in the daily post. All participants were male and of voting age. Although never stated, being male was a prerequisite for membership in this exclusive fraternity.

It was during these unannounced assemblies that local, state and federal policies were dissected, examined, reassembled and decided on - at least to

the satisfaction of those local voting men. I am not sure how much impact the ritual had on the overall outcome, but that didn't seem to concern the participants.

A second and very important prerequisite to membership was the length of time in the community. If not a first or second generation member of the settlement, you were considered a newcomer. Every now and then a "newcomer" would offer his thoughts about a current event, only to be ignored. I think it was at meetings like this where the phrase "Good Old Boys" was coined.

By today's standard, impromptu meetings such as these would be viewed as unconstitutional, illegal, or at the very least, unethical. However, bear in mind, that this was a time before cell phones, computers, and television. Trust was earned, not sold, and the individual had a very real interest in the evolving community affairs and the outcome of political issues. The community benefitted in many ways from these gatherings. A fire department was created, a water district materialized, dirt streets were paved, electrical service expanded and community service organizations were formed.

All in all, Murrieta is a

better place, in a large part due to the efforts of the Post Office Politicians. It all may have happened sooner if newcomers and women had been more involved; but, I guess that is something we will never know.

The town of Murrieta that evolved into a thriving city with a population of more than 105,000 that exists today is here because of those efforts. We can only speculate as to what might have been.

Welcome New Members

December

Tom & Susan Brusch

January

Cathy Prince

Cynthia Occhipinti

Carol Carson
(Lifetime Member)

David & Cathy Johnson

February

Carol Kravagna Hanson
(Lifetime Member)

Jay & Vanessa Long

March

Tony Guenther
(Lifetime Member)

Paul & Kathie Price

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Next Monthly Board Meeting:

Monday, May 1, 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


SAGA OF THE GOLD SEEKERS
PRESENTED BY HISTORIAN PAUL J. PRICE

THE MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INVITES YOU TO COME LEARN ABOUT THE RICH HISTORY OF OUR LOCAL MINES.

MONDAY, MAY 8 BEGINNING @ 6 PM

MEETING IN THE LIBRARY'S COMMUNITY ROOM:
8 TOWN SQUARE,
MURRIETA 92562

CALL US FOR MORE INFORMATION AT
(951) 387-4862




BRING YOUR PICK AND SHOVEL AS WE EXCAVATE THE CURIOSITIES OF OUR COUNTY'S HIDDEN WEALTH!

SUPPORT LOCAL HISTORY AND BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 1341, MURRIETA, CA 92564 | (951) 387-4862
MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY@GMAIL.COM
MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG (COMING SOON)

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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: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

Membership: _____

\$ _____

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