

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

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A Precious Piece of Area History . . .

The Oak Grove Stage Station

By Rebecca Marshall Farnbach

The property was visible but just out of reach the few times we sojourned between Temecula and Warner Springs and parked the car on the side of the highway to look through the fence at the national treasure in our neighborhood over the last twenty years. We struggled to see the Oak Grove stage station and positioned our camera lenses between bars of the iron fence. Even when San Diego County officials met us there for prearranged tours, no one showed up to open the gate. But, that all changed just before Memorial Day this year.

Mark Shook, the present owner of the adobe building, recently built a new house at the back of the property. The County of San Diego informed him that he may not occupy his new home until he meets terms of occupancy, which includes clean up of some of the older outbuildings on his property. Mark didn't like the County's interference with his plans.

So Shook took out a classified ad that ran in the Aguanga area High Country Journal newspaper on May 15th that read: Bids wanted for demolition and haul-away of Oak Grove Stage Station and three surrounding buildings.

This threat to demolish the stage station, which is not one of the terms for occupancy, got the attention of local preservationists. By 11 a.m. on Tuesday, May 23rd, emails and phone calls were flying to rally around the cause of saving the adobe stage station, getting people involved in several counties and even in California State preservation circles. Shook is pleased with the public interest in his property and believes it may give him leverage in his negotiations with the County of San Diego. Since May 30th, Shook has posted large signs on each approach to his property, which he has opened to visitors each Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. A guest book is available to record comments from visitors that have totaled nearly 200 each weekend.

For those of us historians in Temecula, we wanted to intercede with Shook before he tore the historical building down out of frustration. Just last fall we witnessed a similar situation with the owner of the Hyatt School, when the owner razed the building when he could not come to an agreement with Riverside County in spite of our attempted intervention. To understand why the Oak Grove adobe is important, here is some background. Although many of the Butterfield stations were established in preexisting buildings, some were constructed by the Butterfield Stage. The Oak Grove Station is believed to be one of only two stage stations built by Butterfield still in existence west of Arkansas. Warren Hall, superintendent of the Butterfield line through the area, arranged for its construction and lived in the Oak Grove adobe.

Most readers know the Butterfield Overland Mail Company was a stagecoach postal delivery that ran from St. Louis to San Francisco from 1858 to 1862, when Civil War skirmishes brought it to a halt. After the war, transcontinental trains delivered the mail, so only local stages were needed. The Butterfield line ran along the established Southern Emigrant Trail, with stations approximately every fourteen miles, coming from

It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Temecula Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.

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Calendar Of Events

Thursday, July 8 – Gallery Talk at Temecula Valley Museum, 7 p.m. by Justin Farmer noted for his native basket knowledge. Justin will talk about his new book *"Basketry Plants Used by Western American Indians"* also book signing event.

Sunday, July 11 – History Tour of San Juan Capistrano Walking the Historic District. Starting at 11:00 at O'Neill Museum across RR tracks from downtown parking garage. See back page in this issue for instructions, map and more details.

Monday, July 12 – Monthly Meeting at Little Temecula History Center, 6 to 8 p.m. Presentation by Howard Holter, Ph.D, Cal State Dominguez Hills professor, speaking on original land grants in Temecula, and both Pio and Andreas Pico.

Fri./Sat. July 16 & 17 – Cowboy Jubilee Music Festival & Trail Ride at Murrieta Equestrian Center. Music, gourmet cowboy Dinner, barn dance, displays, and trail rides. Fund raiser for Santa Rosa Plateau Foundation.

Monday, August 9 – Monthly Meeting at Little Temecula History Center, 6 to 8 p.m. Charles West, member of the San Diego Model-T Club will present *"How the Model T Changed the Face of America"*.

Yuma to Vallecito, San Felipe Valley, Warner Springs, Aguanga, Temecula, Murrieta and Lake Elsinore before heading north to San Francisco.

The Oak Grove station was a relay or swing station, where horses and mail were exchanged. It was not a meal stop like Temecula was, where riders could purchase a hasty meal before proceeding on their way.

After the Butterfield Overland Stages stopped running, Hezekiah Cable ran a tavern in the adobe. U.M. Kenniston served as a postmaster there from 1870 to 1875. Joseph Marks purchased the property and ran a post office, store, stable and wayside inn. James Bell acquired it in 1888. He and his family managed the Butterfield Tavern, a hotel, store and swimming hole. Bell's offspring kept the property going, adding a gas pump, until Bell's son-in-law John Wentworth sold it in 1955 to Cecil Britt.

The Britts operated a cafe and then turned it into a grocery store and put in modern gas pumps. Miles Shook purchased the property in 1985. In the early 1990s Shook furnished it with antiques and life size figures, opening the grounds for tourists to walk through. At some point wood siding was added to protect the adobe. Until its recent reopening, the gates were locked after Mile Shook died a few years ago. The property now has placards showing its designation as a State and National Historical Landmark. It is an historic resource too valuable to lose.

Now when you step through the gate between the metal bars that formerly separated us from the historical landmark, you enter a place where time stands still. You view ox carts that represent the mode of travel for those who traversed the Southern Emigrant Trail, now a state highway. Piped music transports the visitor to an earlier time as they view vignettes staged behind the old glass windows embedded in the thick adobe walls, depicting the old stage stop and its uses through several periods of time.

We members of the Temecula Valley Historical Society have pledged the current owner our support for preserving the old stage station, whether to volunteer service in clearing weeds, demolishing old outbuildings, or in helping him to meet terms of occupancy for his new home.

We would like to encourage people to visit the historical site and to put a little bit of green into the donation box.

(Note: A special thanks goes to Edwin and Judy Britt, and Phil Brigandi for supplying some of the information in this article).

July 12th Meeting Speaker, Howard Holter, Ph.D.

Dr. Howard Holter will tell the story of Pio Pico, the last governor of Mexican California, focusing on Pico's ownership of the Santa Margarita Rancho lands from 1836 - 1870, and telling about Temecula, disputes Pico had with Native Americans in the region and of the wealth he gained from the land he owned.

Dr. Holter received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin and taught history at Cal State Dominguez Hills until he retired to Murrieta in 2007. As a historic preservationist Dr. Holter has restored several Mexican adobes and ranches for the state of California including "The Pio Pico Mansion State Historic Park" in Whittier.

Annual Meeting Date Set

Mark your calendars – the Annual Meeting of the Temecula Valley Historical Society will be held on Saturday, November 13, 2010. Plans are evolving around that date, with the event to be held at the Little Temecula History Center. In addition to a wonderful program on the history of the Temecula Tractor Race, presented by Bob Morris; the event will include an art show which will remain on display through the next day (Sunday, November 14). Watch for more details in the Newsletter in the coming months.

President's Message

Hope you all enjoy the trip to San Juan Capistrano to view the museums and Mission on July 11th. Lisa Woodward has set up a wonderful trip with a load of options.

We welcome our newest member to the Board of the Temecula Valley Historical Society. Elaine Culverhouse has joined us to fill one of the several of the vacancies that were created this year. Elaine is a retired Navy Nurse. Welcome aboard Elaine. If you are interested in joining the Board, call me at (951) 302-9536.

We have had several members of the Genealogy Society indicate that our monthly meeting conflicts with their monthly meeting, and they would like to attend both. At our last Board meeting we voted to change our meeting date from the 2nd Monday of the Month to the 4th Monday. Because of our guest speaker scheduling, we will not implement the change until the month of September. Please mark your calendars for the new meeting dates.

Jimmy Moore

Recent Membership Renewals

Tom & Naomi Woods
Bob & Julie Ulrey
Vince & Audrey Cilurzo
Dr. Lee & Helen Lovaas
Pat Lallou

Remembering Dad . . .

Sunday Drives into the Past

By Bonnie Martland

In the days before oil spills and inflated gas prices, Sunday drives were a tradition for many families. My dad's perpetually sunburned left elbow was testament to his love of driving in vehicles with what he called four in one air conditioning, (one car, four open windows). Piling all six of us kids in the station wagon and heading for destinations often unknown to us, was our definition of quality time.

A couple of weekends ago I found myself on a spur of the moment drive out to the old Oak Grove Butterfield Stage stop with a couple of other history buffs. Just over the San Diego - Riverside County line, some 20+ miles from Temecula on State Highway 79. I had passed it tantalizingly many times in the last 30 years but it was never open! Now the owner is opening it to visitors on Saturdays and Sundays from 9 – 5. You can walk the grounds and listen to vintage music as you peer through the windows of the long thin adobe. Original adobe walls are visible in many places. Don't forget to take photos and sign the guest register! Across the road is a local landmark, a large red barn that each time I visit seems closer to collapse, but thus far has defied gravity. About 500 yards up the road on the same side as the stage station is a State Historical Marker to Camp Wright that held a small military detachment during the Civil War.

As we left Oak Grove we decided to visit the Warner Springs Station about a half hour further up the road on Rural Route 2, the Anza Borrego turnoff. As one of my comrades commented, our trip was reminiscent of the Sunday drives we all used to take. Surrounded by beautiful scenery the station itself is mostly in ruins and fenced in by chain link. Though marked by signs of failed restoration attempts, the amazing views will transport you back to a time when John Butterfield's stages ran from Arizona along the old Southern Immigrant Trail to deliver mail to California's early settlers.

On the way home we stopped at the Mission Asistencia in Santa Ysabel. Originally built in 1818, the current chapel, constructed in the 1920s was built close to the site of the original. We also stopped at Saint Francis Chapel in Warner Springs. Masses are held in both churches yet today and both have Indian cemeteries, though visitation is very limited.

As we were driving back to Temecula and imagining what traveling through the same countryside would have been like in earlier days we missed lunch which we will be sure to include in our next Sunday drive.

We are blessed in the Temecula Valley to have so many historic and worthwhile places to visit close by. Our first trip was so delightful, that we have determined to take more Sunday drives in the future and highlight them for you.

**** NOTE: Regular Meeting Date to Change ****

During the business/board portion of the Society's June meeting it was decided that we will move our meeting date to the 4th Monday of each month. Initially it was thought that we'd make the change effective in August, but that was not compatible with the August speakers schedule and commitments. So beginning in September, the regular meeting of TVHS will be on Monday, September 27 at 6:00 p.m. at the Little Temecula History Center.

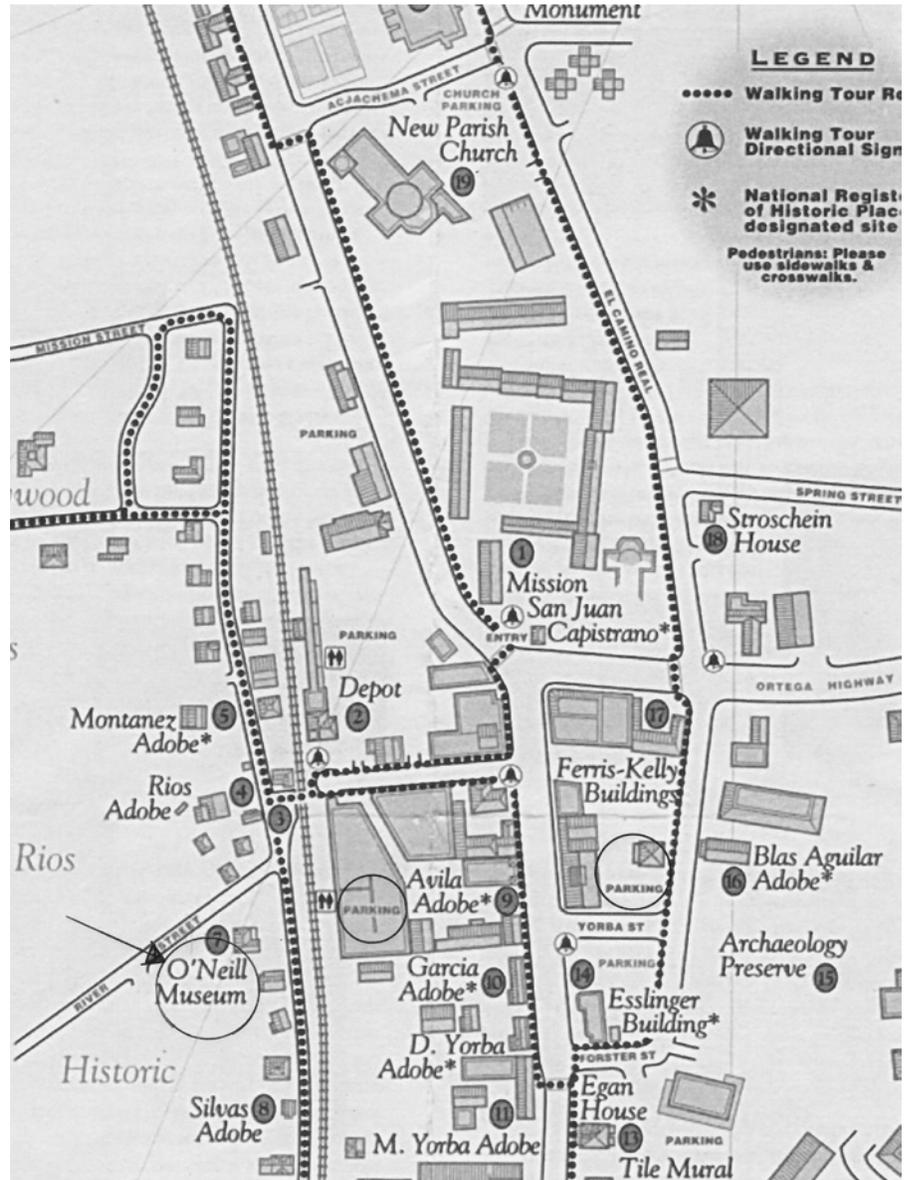
Special Outing Opportunity to Arizona Available in October

Some of us are going to attend the Empire Ranch Foundation's 10th Roundup and Open House near Tucson, Arizona on October 23rd. Walter Vail, who founded the immense Vail Ranch in Southern California, started the cattle business at the Empire Ranch in the 1870s. In 1881 Walter Vail took his bride to an Arizona adobe home that was later expanded and improved, and still stands today on a protected parcel of BLM land.

Members and friends of the Temecula Valley Historical Society are invited to travel to the Tucson area to participate in this special event featuring Western skills, lore & storytelling, tours of the historic ranch house, a kids corral, Western author's pavilion, historic displays, music, raffles and an auction accompanied by a huge Western Barbecue.

Carpooling is planned with departure for Arizona scheduled for Friday, October 22 and return on Monday, October 25, although participants may plan their own schedules. Possible side trips could include Casa Grande, historic Tucson, San Xavier Mission, Vail Arizona, Tombstone Arizona, and Yuma Penitentiary to name a few.

Stay tuned for more details on this special event that will be fun to share with our "sister" Vail Ranch enthusiasts from Arizona. For more information contact Darell Farnbach at 951-552-3516.



TVHS Tour Of Historic San Juan Capistrano

TVHS has scheduled a walking tour of the historic area of San Juan Capistrano for Sunday, July 11. The tour will begin at 11 a.m. at the SJC Historical Society building (the old O'Neill home), and will cover about 3-4 blocks downtown. The tour will last about 1 1/2 hour and will end at the Blas Aguilar Adobe which houses a small museum. It is suggested that people plan to arrive a bit early so they can visit the Historical Society headquarters in the O'Neil Museum.

The SJC Historical Society asks for a donation of \$2 per person and other places may have a similar expectation. Contact Lisa Woodward at LLWoodward@verizon.net or through her cell phone 951-514-7406. Carpooling is suggested.

There is a parking structure right across the railroad tracks from the Historical Society building (the O'Neill Museum) and the Los Rios Historic District (downtown). Also parking is available across from the Blas Aguilar Adobe where the tour will end. Those needing wheel chairs will need to make their own arrangements.