

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

August 2012

Volume 12 – Issue 8

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.

2011 Officers

President Bonnie Martland
Vice President Dick Fox
Secretary Elaine Culverhouse
Treasurer Lynn Cude
Past President Jimmy Moore

Directors

Bill Harker Elaine Eshom
Bonnie Reed Darell Farnbach
Lisa Woodward Thomas Long
Pat Lallou
Myra Masiel-Zamora

Committee Chairs

Research & Preservation

Darell Farnbach

Public Relations

Dick Fox

Membership

Bill Harker

Program Speakers

Rebecca Farnbach

Projects

Jimmy Moore

Events/Education

Lisa Woodward

Historian

Thomas Long

A Publication of the

Temecula Valley Historical Society

P.O. Box 157

Temecula, CA 92593

951-303-6860

www.temeculahistoricalsociety.org



Find us on
Facebook



*A 1952 visit to the former Dripping Springs prison site
Pictured from left to right: Major General George F. Good, USMC,
Mahlon Vail, Rear Admiral Ira H. Nunn
Photo Courtesy of the Wilkinson Collection*

The Dripping Springs Prison Labor Camp (1931-1935)

By Jeffery G. Harmon

State Highway 79, between Temecula and Aguanga, is a beautiful two-lane highway that follows the Temecula River and the foothills of Palomar Mountain. Transformation of this road from dirt to a modern highway was advocated by the Imperial Highway Association, who envisioned a route from El Segundo to El Centro. The men who constructed the Temecula-to-Aguanga segment were Riverside County prisoners. They were housed at the Dripping Springs Prison Labor Camp between 1931 and 1935.

As hard economic times descended on America during the Great Depression, criminal activity began to rise. Petty theft, violence, and public drunkenness landed many juveniles and adults in the county jail. To alleviate overcrowding, prisoners were assigned to work camps to build county highways and roads. Sentences were thirty days to a year. The men were given three meals a day, shelter, and on the job training. The prisoner labor system brought beautiful highways to the county and improved transportation and commerce.

(Continued on Page 2)

Calendar Of Events

Thursday, August 9 – 7 p.m.
Temecula Valley Museum
Gallery Talk: Kevin Noble
Presents "The Old West"

Monday, August 13 – 6:30 p.m.
Temecula Valley Genealogical
Society: Wayne Rogers presents
"War of 1812, 200th Anniversary"
At the Temecula Civic Center

Tuesday, August 14 – 5:30p.m.
Author James Thomas
Presents, Lewis & Clark and
The Corp of Discovery
At the Elks Lodge
For more information contact:
James Thomas
Email:
Jimthomas41@gmail.com
Phone: 760-742-1464

Monday, August 27 – 6 p.m.
TVHS monthly meeting at Little
Temecula History Center
Gordon Johnson presents:
"Old Songs from Pala"
A Pala Tribal Member, author
And former newspaper columnist
His books will be available for
Purchase following the program
See President's Message for
More information.

Monday, September 24– 6 p.m.
TVHS monthly meeting at Little
Temecula History Center
Reena Deutsch, PhD, presents:
"San Diego & Arizona Railway:
The Impossible Railroad."

Temecula Valley Museum Exhibition

June 30 ~ September 16, 2012
"The Old West"
Take a look back at daily wear in
The Old West during the late
1800's.

Camp (Continued from Page 1)

Elwood C. Wickerd, foreman for the Elsinore road district, was promoted to superintendent of the Keen Camp Prisoner Labor Camp in June 1927. The camp was located near Mountain Center, at present day McCall Memorial Park. At that time, the camp was working on the Hemet-Idyllwild Road, which would be followed by the Pines-to-Palms Highway. By 1931, the camp had completed its assignments in the San Jacinto Mountains and was to be relocated to Dripping Springs.

The Vail Ranch leased 18 acres to the county for the campsite. In May 1931, twenty-five prisoners, housed in temporary quarters, began constructing the new prison labor camp. Two guards were assigned to oversee the project.

Prisoners built "a 4 ½ mile pole-line for electricity and a 5 ½ mile line for telephone service; built a complete water system and installed a pumping-plant and a storage tank; constructed a sewage system; and lay gas pipes from portable tanks to the various buildings." (January 1, 1932, Riverside Daily Press)

One day, when Superintendent Wickerd visited the construction site, he saw a sign the prisoners had installed at the entrance.

"A \$100,000 hotel and health resort now under construction here. For reservations apply to (Judges) G. R. Freeman and O.K. Morton." (June 2, 1931, Riverside Daily Press)

Inmates were transferred to Dripping Springs in October. Juveniles were kept at Keen Camp to do highway maintenance. The new Riverside County Jail had 81 inmates and the prison camps had 100. Dripping Springs was assigned a three year building project. The camp would build thirty miles of 80-foot wide highway from Temecula to Aguanga. Superintendent Elwood C. Wickerd was confident that his men could get the job done.

The workday began at 6:30 each morning and ended in the evening in time to reach the camp by 6:00 p.m. Good behavior was rewarded with ten days off each month and it helped shorten an inmate's term if his conduct in camp warranted it. There were eleven guards, some with the road crew, a couple at the camp, some on night duty and a few taking turns on the Sunday shift.

During a tour of Riverside County, Mrs. Clara M. Pettus, inspector of jails for the State Department of Social Welfare noted, "[Prison Labor] does not take away jobs from citizens, because the roads which are being built by the prisoners would not be constructed at all if the counties had to let contracts for such jobs." (April 19, 1932, Riverside Daily Press)

During construction, in the spring of 1932, the road crew discovered a human skeleton 22 feet below the surface. Dr. Charles S. Bacon and several students from the Riverside Junior College's geology department visited and studied the site. Their findings and conclusions were not reported in the papers.

100 Years Ago

Riverside Independent
Enterprise
August 14, 1912

Sugar Beets will be added

E. E. Barnett, who owns 1000 acres of level valley land along the Santa Fe railway, about two miles north of Temecula, is one of the stockmen who is going to plant beets according to Deputy Sheriff D.G. Clayton. Barnett has made money in the stock business, and has given ranches to each of his children, but he remarked yesterday that \$50 an acre which he could get for his beets meant the end of the cattle business for him. He and F. H. Hall with two other men have gone in together on a proposition to supply an Anaheim factory on a contract. The Fullerton cut-off of the Santa Fe makes it easy for the valley product to reach a market until factories are established on the ground.

Another promising feature in the neighborhood is indicated by the new well sunk by these men. At a depth of 540 feet water was struck that flows 18 inches over the top of the 12-inch casing. The casing has not been perforated. When, in a few days perforating machines will be sent down, a much stronger flow is expected, ample for all the ranches in the neighborhood. The water is to be handled with an air compressor, which will do away with the usual pumping operations.

Camp (Continued from Page 2)

In July 1932, \$50,000 was cut from the county road construction budget. All machinery operation came to a halt. Paid county road employees were laid off. Road construction continued only with picks and shovels. However, Wickerd and his guards remained on the county payroll.

Besides the Temecula to Aguanga road, the camp constructed other roads. In 1933, a small group of inmates realigned Bundy Canyon Road in Wildomar. In 1935, the road crews finished constructing the Aguanga to Cahuilla Road. There were plans for the crew to build a road from Aguanga to Hemet along the St. John's Grade, but the project was postponed.

By 1935, the city of Banning began pressuring the county to move the prison camp back to Mt. San Jacinto. Civic leaders wanted the Banning to Idyllwild Road realigned and straightened immediately. The decision was made to transfer the inmates back to Keen Camp. Dripping Springs was abandoned in July 1935. One hundred prisoners were transferred to the mountain camp.

From 1928 to 1939, Superintendent Wickerd had 3,323 inmates at the prison camps constructing Riverside County roads and highways. There were 56 escapes during that time and all but one was captured. Escaped convicts knew that if they were caught, they would be sent to San Quentin or Folsom state prisons.

Today the camp's legacy can be enjoyed by motorists who drive along State Highway 79 between Temecula and Aguanga. Vail Lake Resort now occupies the former prison site. The highway remains a testament to the men of the Dripping Springs Prison Labor Camp, whose blood and sweat paved the way for the area's future growth and economic prosperity.

Further Readings:

For Tourism and a Good Night's Sleep, J. Win Wilson, Wilson Howell, and the Beginnings of the Pines-to-Palms Highway by Steve Lech (2012)

From the Desert to the Sea: The Story of Imperial Highway by Phil Brigandi (The High Country Magazine Issue 67)

69 Years Ago

May 21, 1943

Riverside Daily Press

Writer Seeks Bandit Cave near Temecula

Mrs. Carrie F. Horne of Costa Mesa recently spent several days at the Palomar Hotel, Temecula. She is a historical writer and was looking for a cave in which legend says bandits hid when holding up the Butterfield Stage between 1858 and 1861.

If pictures of the cave can be taken, Mrs. Horne expects to publish them in a series of articles on old California.

115 Years Ago

Press and Horticulturist

August 21, 1897

The Sunset Telephone Company's line to San Diego has been completed and the burg of bay'n climate can now talk to the rest of the world through the medium of the hello girl. The opening of the line gives telephone connections to Elsinore and Temecula in Riverside County and San Diego, Escondido, National City and Valley Center in San Diego County.

75 Years Ago

August 19, 1937

Riverside Daily Press

Oswald Brothers Construction Company, which has had a camp established near Lee Lake, while its trucks were hauling sand and gravel for the improvement work on the Ortega highway, is moving its camp to a point below Temecula near Aguanga. From here it will haul materials for use on the Temecula highway.

Letter from the Editor:

Dear Readers:

We need your help with our upcoming story.

November: The Sam Hicks Monument Park

If you have any memories of this park between 1968-1982 we would love to hear from you! Please call or email us and together we can tell the history of this wonderful park!

President's Message by Bonnie Martland

We have had, and have; some pretty interesting and colorful characters who call the Temecula Valley home. If you are reading the newsletter, you have most probably become familiar with a number of them. However, if you have not been attending our monthly speaker presentations, you have missed hearing about some even more truly intriguing people. At our last general meeting Steve Williamson, of the Temecula Valley Museum, gave a presentation on one of the most colorful – and famous - of Temecula's residents; Erle Stanley Gardner. Steve spoke of him almost as one would a long-time eccentric, ambitious, colorful and indefatigable friend. A lawyer, writer of Perry Mason and other mystery stories, photographer, archer, producer, founder of the Court of Last Resort, amateur explorer; and so on; he was a truly remarkable man.

This month's meeting will feature Gordon Johnson local writer, editor and humorist. Author of *Rez Dogs Eat Beans*, and *Fast Cars and Fry Bread*, Mr. Johnson is a Cahuilla/Cupeno Indian who lives on the Pala Indian Reservation. A former columnist and feature writer for the Press Enterprise, he has recently earned his master's degree in fine arts. I heard Mr. Johnson speak a few months ago and was enthralled by the artistry with which he uses words to paint a visual and auditory picture. Like Erle Stanley Gardner, he is a photographer, and a master story teller with a wry wit and wonderful sense of humor. He has clarity of insight and a style that as I read, or listen to, can make me laugh and make me cry. Reservation life ...family life...his family has ties to early Temecula and Murrieta and their local lore.

Don't miss Mr. Johnson's presentation. I don't think he would mind being described as a colorful local character...as long as I make clear I mean artistically and grammatically.

25 Years Ago This Month

August 26, 1987, Rancho News

Volunteers are life-blood of Museum

Approximately 35 local residents volunteer at the (Old Town Temecula) museum, many from the Rancho-Temecula Women's Club and according to Ray Meyer, president of the museum board, they are crucial to the museum programs.

"We couldn't open the doors without them." Meyer said. "We rely totally on the docents. We wouldn't be able to afford to pay anybody for even five hours a week."

Tony Tobin, museum curator agrees, "They are the important things. Without them we wouldn't exist."

Regular volunteer shifts are five hours a month, but there are those who only work half-days, and volunteers who are on a standby basis, Meyer said.