



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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March 2020

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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Snow covered the historic home on December 31, 2014
(Photo by Jeffery G. Harmon)

The Thompson/Small House

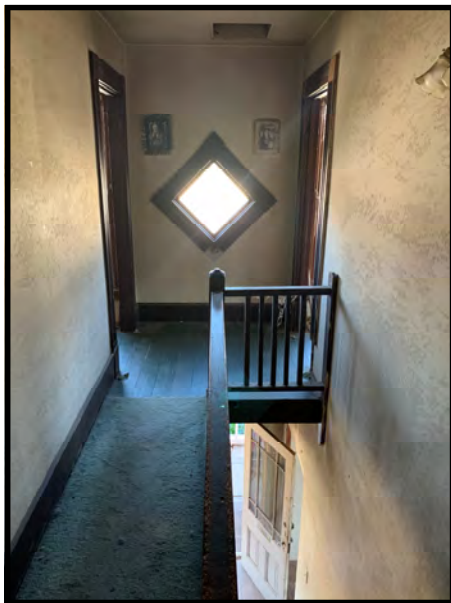
By Jeffery G. Harmon

The Historic Thompson/Small House located at 24771 Washington Avenue was built in 1903 by Henry Clay Thompson. The red, two-story house, with its signature diamond framed window, has been a recognizable landmark in the Historic Downtown Murrieta District for over one hundred years. Its history is interwoven with a pioneer family and the mercantile store next door.

Henry Clay Thompson was born December 9, 1843 in Han-

cock County, Ohio. He was the son of John and Rachel (Wilson) Thompson. Henry and his brothers served during the Civil War. Two of his brothers were killed and one was severely wounded. After the war Henry returned to Shawnee County, Kansas and married Sarah Harris in 1865.

Henry and Sarah had seven children: Willis (1866), Miles Walter (1869), Clifford (1871), Joseph (1873), Edith (1875), Mabel (1877), and Harry (1881). Sarah died on



View of the diamond window on the second floor.
(Photo by author)

May 23, 1883, in Auburn, Shawnee Co., Kansas. Henry never remarried. Two years later his son, Willis, died in November 1885.

After his wife's and son's deaths, Henry needed a fresh start. According to family tradition, the Thompson family traveled to Murrieta by train in 1887. Henry purchased 400 acres of land in the French Valley. The Thompsons were successful farmers and transported their harvested crops by horse drawn wagons through the Hogbacks along Los Alamos Road to the warehouse next to the railroad tracks.

Henry Thompson was elected Riverside County Supervisor of the 4th District in 1894 and served for four years, from 1895 to 1899. He ran on the Populist Party ticket. The Populist Party was formed by farmers

in Southern states with the goal of reducing their tax burden. During his tenure, Thompson reduced the taxes on Southwest Riverside County farmers by consolidating the judicial districts of Temecula and Murrieta.

In 1896, Hutchinson & Brown terminated their lease on the Murrieta Reservation, a one-thousand-acre plot of land owned by Juan Murrieta. Henry Thompson and his sons then leased the land in 1897 and moved their farming operations between Murrieta and Temecula. They bought the defunct Linda Rosa cannery building in October 1899 and used the materials to build a new barn.

Abram Burnett built a home in 1885 on the eastside of Washington Avenue near the corner of Juniper Street. On May 5, 1899, he died from a brief illness. Five months after his death, his widow, Rachel, leased their home to Henry Thompson. Henry's daughter, Mabel, lived with him until she married Frank Irely in 1902.

After renting the house for four years, Rachel Burnett sold her home in October 1903 to Earnest and Mary Lakeman. Henry Thompson had purchased several vacant town lots across the street. After he moved out of the Burnett house he announced that he was going to build a large house on one of his lots. "H. C. Thompson is building an 8-room house on Washington Avenue. The Bennett (Burnett) place, formerly occupied by Mr. Thompson, has been sold to Los Ange-

les parties, who will soon take possession." (November 12, 1903, Riverside Daily Press)

Henry knew that as he got older, he would need someone to care for him and his house. Henry's daughter, Edith Thompson, had married Albert Kimball Small on June 30, 1894. Albert Small came from a merchant family. Albert and Edith settled in Santa Ana, California in 1903. During this time Albert worked in a general store. Henry asked the Small family to move back to Murrieta to live with him. To sweeten the deal, he offered to build a store on a few vacant lots next to his house and create a partnership with his son-in-law. The A. K. Small & Co. General Store was built and opened in 1909 on the corner of Juniper Street and Washington Avenue.

Albert and Edith had five children who grew up in their grandfather's home. Their oldest son, Eugene Small, left Murrieta and attended high school in Santa Ana. When President Wilson declared war on Germany in April 1917, Eugene was the first Murrieta native son to volunteer to serve in the navy.

While Eugene was at sea, a large wave crashed over the ship's bow during a storm. He was almost swept overboard, but he was stopped by the railing. He received extensive injuries, but survived the accident. He returned to his grandfather's Murrieta home to recover from wounds. Afterwards, Eugene showed no interest in running his

father's store. He was more interested in farming and following after other interests.

Meanwhile in 1918, the Murrieta Grain Elevator was constructed. Albert Small was named the operation manager. The company office was established at the Small store. Albert was now juggling two jobs, operating his general store and managing the grain elevator.

Henry Clay Thompson died at the Riverside County Hospital on October 19, 1920. His funeral was one of the largest attended funerals in Murrieta's early history. There were at least 50 children, grandchildren, and relatives in attendance. He was laid to rest in Evergreen Memorial Park in Riverside. Before he died, he sold off his remaining land holdings to his two grandsons, Melville and Paul Thompson. The Small family inherited the house and the mercantile store. By this time, most of the Small children had left the home except Edward Small, the youngest.

In March 1923, Albert Small sold the mercantile store to George Burnham and his son, Frank Burnham. Frank bought out his father's interests in 1931 and became its sole proprietor. The store was renamed Burnham's General Merchandise Store.

Albert Small was appointed postmaster in 1928. On March 14, 1928, Albert moved the post office from the Murrieta

Train Depot to the south end of the Burnham store. The post office remained at the corner of Juniper and Washington until July 1, 1940 when a new post office was built and opened at the corner of C Street and Washington. Albert was succeeded by postmistress Rose Tarwater in 1936.

Albert Small purchased the Murrieta Garage for his son, Edward, in May 1934. The garage was located across the street from the former Small Store. The A. K. Small & Son Murrieta Service Station remained in operation until it was sold to M. W. Thompson in October 1936.

When Albert Small died on October 26, 1940, his wife, Edith took ownership of the house. In September 1942, Edward Small enlisted in the army. Eugene also enlisted and served as a training officer in Texas for three years during World War II.

Edith Small continued to live in the house until she died on December 16, 1953. Then Eugene Small inherited the house. On October 4, 1968, Eugene Small married Mrs. Hazel (Hankison) Johnson. Eugene and Hazel lived in a house on 2nd Ave, but Eugene owned his former home.

On January 21, 1969, Eugene entered his childhood home to repair a leak in the roof. When he reached the top of the stairs, he had a heart attack and died. Skip Bezanson, whose family operated Ray's Café

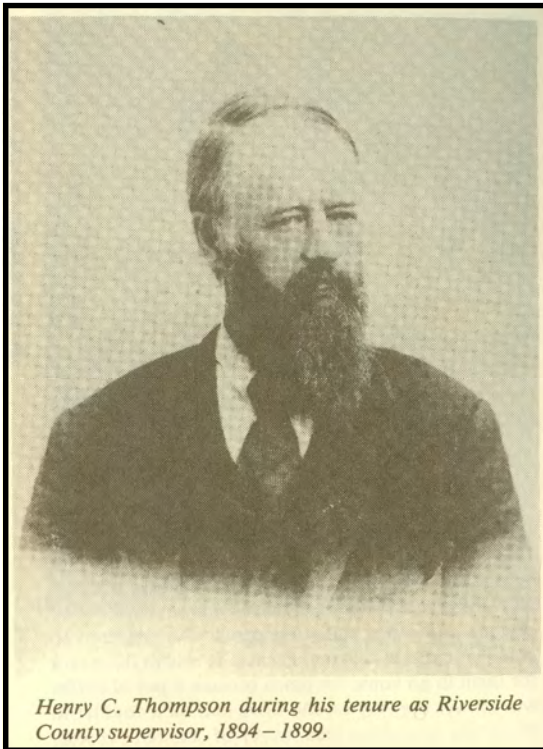
across the street, entered the home and carried Eugene's body out of the house. Later, Hazel sold the home.

Charlotte Lombard purchased the home in January 1974. She lived in the house for six years. She was described as a "hippie" and she was into crystals and the New Age movement. It was during this time that a rumor began that the house was being used as a bordello. However, no evidence has been found to support the claim.

James and April Szymanski purchased the home in April 1985. The Szymanski family lived at the home until they sold it to Jason and Kristen Steiner in July 2019. They are renovating the house and plan to open a barbecue restaurant there and to share the rich and vibrant



The staircase with closet underneath
(Photo by author)



Henry C. Thompson during his tenure as Riverside County supervisor, 1894 – 1899.

history of the place with their customers.

The Historic Thompson/Small House has a long, valuable history. It was built by a Murrieta pioneer who was a former county supervisor. The home was directly connected with the A. K. Small & Co. General Store. It is a historically significant home and important not just to the family, but to the town of Murrieta.

MUSEUM *Hours*

THURSDAYS
1 - 4 PM

For groups and tours call (951) 387-4862

The Murrieta Museum,
A Center of Culture and History
is located at
41810 Juniper Street
at Hunt Memorial Park.

2020 Presentations

March 9th – Gerry Nicholas -

Portrayal of

Samuel "O.T." Hackett

May 11th – Steve Lech- Rails to San Jacinto –

The Coming of the Railroad
to the San Jacinto Valley

July 13th - Shelley Leddy —

Portrayal of

Catherine Fernald- "Trixie"

September 14th – TBD

November 9th- Pat Jennings-

Montana Dinosaur Dig experience

Museum Update

Recently the Museum received a grant and the funds were used to purchase the Past Perfect software and needed equipment. This program is used by many museums in archiving documents, photographs and other artifacts. We will now begin the lengthy process of archiving the current collection. Once completed, visitors will be able to conduct research at the museum.

For the past few months Murrieta Elementary School 3rd grade students have been learning

about the history of Murrieta at the museum. Students and teachers have taken a walking tour through Historic Downtown Murrieta, toured the museum and learned with hands-on activities. We also offer group tours by appointment. Please call 951-387-4862 to make an appointment.

The City of Murrieta Public Works Department has installed directional signs throughout the city for the Museum.

The Museum will be open during the Murrieta Fire and Rescue Annual

BBQ on Sunday, April 19th from 9 am-3 pm. Please come by and see what's new on display.

We would like to thank our volunteers who have assisted us in the museum operations and the school tours. We would also like to thank our members and supporters for helping us preserve Murrieta's history. Thank you.

Annette Jennings

Museum Director



<https://www.gofundme.com/murrietamuseum>



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Next General Board Meeting

March 2, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.


At the Murrieta Museum

41810 Juniper Street

(At Hunt Memorial Park)

All members welcome to attend

Gerry Nicholas presents
SAMUEL "O.T." HACKETT





MONDAY, MARCH 9 AT 6 PM
MURRIETA PUBLIC LIBRARY, 8 TOWN SQUARE

Samuel Hackett was a stagecoach driver who owned and operated the local mail route from San Diego to Temecula from 1878 to 1886. He was known as "On Time" Hackett. People claimed they could set their watches to Hackett's arrivals and departures.

MURRIETA MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER
41810 JUNIPER STREET, MURRIETA, CA 92562
MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY (951) 387-4862 | MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

MURRIETA PUBLIC LIBRARY
8 TOWN SQUARE, MURRIETA, CA 92562
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MURRIETALIBRARY.INFO



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