



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 6, Issue II.

March 2021

*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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John Farthing grave marker (Source: Find-A-Grave)

## John A. Farthing

African American Settler and Businessman  
by Jeffery G. Harmon

John A. Farthing was an early African American settler in Murrieta. He operated the first African American restaurant and service station in Southwest Riverside County. He is remembered as a friendly man, who was willing to help those in times of need.

He was born on May 15, 1865 in Tennessee. He had settled in Riverside County by 1909 and made a living as a day laborer and as a fertilizer dealer in Elsinore.

Celena Anderson, John's wife, was born about 1870 in Indiana. She had family in Chicago and would travel back east to visit them often. Celena's first husband was William Barnett. They had one son, Claude A. Barnett, who was born in 1889. Claude founded the Associated Negro Press in 1919.

In November 1912, John purchased twenty acres in Murrieta from Charles Clogston on the southeast corner of Jefferson Avenue and Ivy Street. Even though he owned property in Murrieta,



Modern day location of Farthing's Corner at the intersection of Jefferson Avenue and Los Alamos Road/Ivy Street

John continued to live in Elsinore. Later he worked for six months in Imperial Valley. John and Celena moved from Elsinore to Murrieta in 1918 and bought a team of horses and a cow. John continued to work as a fertilizer dealer, and shipped carloads of fertilizer by railroad. He also conducted farming operations on the twenty acres.

The Farthings were once robbed in November 1922. Thieves had come to their property and stole eleven turkeys and six chickens.

J. Charles Rail and John Farthing went into partnership in August 1923. They opened a new Murrieta service station with a lunch counter at the southeast corner of Jefferson Avenue and Ivy Street.

"J. E. Rail and John Farthing have a new service station on the boulevard at the Farthing residence east of town. Mrs.

Farthing will have lunches, fruit, cold drinks etc., in connection. She is a fine cook." (August 8, 1923, Riverside Daily Press)

The Farthings' small restaurant specialized in chicken dinners. For example, twenty members of the Eastern Star of Oceanside drove to Murrieta for a chicken dinner with Mrs. Celena Farthing in October 1925.

In 1926, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Bates opened a service station and diner on the opposite corner of the Farthing restaurant. Soon the Ma and Pa Bates restaurant became a favorite hangout for local teens, and a famous stop along the Inland Highway. The new competition may have led to the Farthings closing their business by 1930.

In July 1930, John Farthing sold his 20-acre farm to Frank Fraser. The Farthing's property was listed with an or-

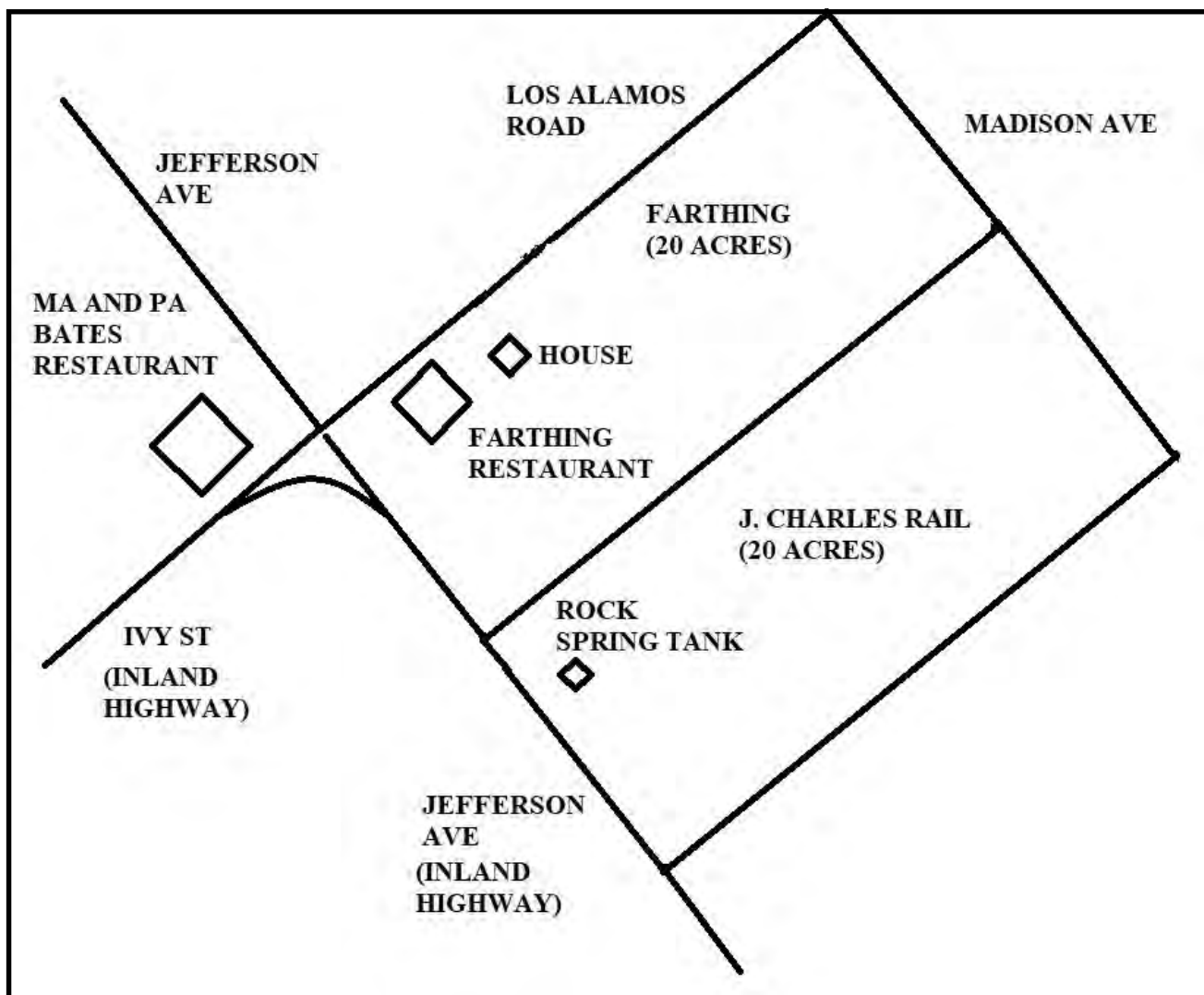
chard, a vineyard, and an alfalfa field. Frank purchased the property in order to raise sheep in pens for fattening. After the sale, John and Celena planned on traveling through the states on an extended excursion. However, they remained in Murrieta temporarily at the John Bryant ranch.

Fraser sold the former Farthing property in November to Mr. and Mrs. Alles. This led to John to file a lien on Fraser for the remaining balance for the property that was past owed, plus an additional \$400 in damages.

Mrs. Celena Farthing had friends and relatives in Los Angeles County. She made frequent trips to visit or to provide care for those with health needs. In September 1927, she traveled to Chicago to attend a family reunion and to attend her son's wedding. Mrs. Farthing moved to Los Angeles by 1931. No further information about her has been found. It is unknown if Celena died or if her marriage ended in a divorce.

The Batson family moved into the Farthing place in 1934. Meanwhile, John Farthing continued living in Murrieta. By the early 1940s, he received permission from E. Hale Curran to move his small dwelling onto her property on Clay Avenue. When she returned home that day, she found his small residence established in her front yard.

John Farthing died on November 11, 1945 at the Ar-



**Map Diagram of Farthing's Corner based on a 1938 aerial photo**

lington Hospital and was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery. E. Hale Curran purchased his headstone. It has been claimed that at one time he was the only African American Murrieta resident. However, John Farthing should also be remembered as a Murrieta pioneer, who established the first African American business in Murrieta.



John Farthing's 20 acre property extended from Jefferson Ave to Madison Avenue along Los Alamos Road. No structures owned by Farthing remain today.

Ma and Pa Bates Restaurant and Service Station operated from 1926 to 1937. It was later renamed King's Café. The buildings still remain standing, but empty.

J. Charles Rail, Farthing's business partner, owned

20 acres south of the Farthing property. In the late 1930s, Rail and his grandson built a rock spring tank on the property. The structure remains standing today.

The Inland Highway was the first cement highway in Riverside County. It traveled along Washington Avenue, Ivy Street and Jefferson Avenue from 1915 to 1931. It was the only paved road in Murrieta for many years.

## Museum Update

While the museum is still closed, I am working behind the scenes. I have been archiving photos and documents into binders and placing them in our research area and adding artifacts into display cases. We have received donated items during our closure and we are excited for you to see them.

I would like to thank the owners of Bailey's on B Street for helping us raise funds by selling the museum's books, note cards, post-cards and 395 stickers at their store. If anyone is interested in purchasing these items, please visit their store in Historic Downtown Murrieta.

Jake Henricksen has posted on YouTube the Museum tour teaser video. More videos will be uploaded soon. Search on YouTube for Murrieta Historical Society if you would like to see the video.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you once we can safely open up the museum again.

Thank you,

Annette Jennings, Museum Director



Our thoughts and prayers go out to all our friends, families, and members during these difficult times. Please contact us and let us know how you and your family are doing. Stay safe and stay well.



Dudley Allen Sykes was born on April 17, 1946 in San Diego County. He was the son of Howard and Nina Sykes.

He attended the Murrieta Grammar School and graduated from Elsinore Union High School in 1964. While in high school, he was a member of the Future Farm-

## In Memory of Dudley Allen Sykes (1946-2021)

ers of America. He worked with his father on the Sykes farm.

He was a member of the Murrieta Volunteer Fire Department from August 1975 to January 1988. He passed away on January 19, 2021.

He was preceded in death by his parents, and one brother, Amos. He is survived by his brother Calvin, and his sister, Thaylea.

He will be laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery in Murrieta.



In Memory of Eldor "Al" Vollbrecht

## *In Memory of Eldor "Al" Vollbrecht* 1942—2020

A true Murrietian passed away on Monday, December 28, 2020, Eldor "Al" Vollbrecht. He was born on September 24, 1942 in Minnesota where he grew up and attended Mankato State University receiving a BS in Political Science. He was a journalist for the Mankato Free Press.

Al served in the United States Air Force from 1964 to 1968 as a Staff Sergeant (E-5) at Lajes Field AFB in the Azores. Al remained in close contact with his barrack mates for over 50 years. He met President Johnson during his service.

Al began his hard work for his communities when he was the Director of the Chamber of Commerce in Longmont, Colorado. Later he worked for the City of Carson. In 1992, he became the Communications and Public Information Officer for the City of Murrieta, less than one year after the city's incorporation. Residents would have seen Al's handy work in many city projects, but most notable was the inaugural Push Cart Christmas Parade from the Community Services Department.

If you knew Al, it was probably from Murrieta's oldest family-run restaurant in town, Honeycutt Farms, where the staff and the customers knew him and his order by heart, or through the Rotary Club of Mur-

rieta. Al was a strong presence in the Rotary having a hand in many projects, including but certainly not limited to: Sister Club, Children's Health International Projects (CHIPs), where Al traveled on medical missions for surgical repair on cleft lips and palates for children in need, and the Field of Honor (the field of flags) and the Veterans Art Chalk Walk which can be seen every November at Murrieta Town Square Park. Al's work will continue as the "Murrieta Walk through Time" Historical Monuments are still being designed for future installment.

Al was also a board member of the California Chamber Orchestra, a member of the California/Nevada Festival & Events Association (CalFest), and the Murrieta Cemetery board. He served as the Treasurer for the Murrieta Valley Historical Society from July 2019 to December 2020. Al also used his experience to obtain donations that helped the society open up Murrieta's first official history museum. Inside the museum, Al paid for a beautiful timeline that wraps around the exhibit hall.

He leaves those he cherished: brother, Keith Vollbrecht and sister-in-law Marsha, from Waseca, Minnesota, his sister Carla Southworth and brother-

in-law Tom from Medford, Minnesota, nephew Shaun Southworth and his wife Heidi, niece Michelle Southworth and great-nephew Jacob McHenry of whom Al was very proud. Al was preceded in death by his parents, Eldor and Viola Vollbrecht.

Al chose to be released from the hospital on December 28, and returned to his home where his partner of 10 years, Yojiro "Jiro" Iba, held him while he looked out into his most beloved garden. Al and Jiro have spent their time together traveling around the world including Jiro's hometown of Hiroshima, Japan and most recently (before shut down) to New Zealand and Australia. They enjoyed gardening and attending many concerts and performances together. Jiro will always remember Al being his bravest at the end of his life. Al was cherished by so many in this world and his memory and hard work will live on through his dedication to his communities. Rest in Peace Al, let us continue the work. In lieu of flowers please consider making a donation in Al's name to the Rotary Club of Murrieta or the Murrieta Valley Historical Society. Thank you.

Written by

Ashley Jennings Bigay

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### Next General Board Meeting TBA

General Board Meetings are virtual in a Zoom meeting format. Anyone interested in joining us, please send an email to info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org and we will email you the Zoom link before the meeting



The Murrieta Museum,  
41810 Juniper Street  
at Hunt Memorial Park.

## BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

**JOIN ONLINE!**  
[MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG)

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