



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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*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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Email:

info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org



Their wedding day, September 14, 1943  
Source: The Sykes Family

## Howard H. and Nina Sykes

By Jeffery G. Harmon

Howard and Nina Sykes owned and operated a ranch on Adams Ave for over fifty years. They raised four children, who attended the local school and the Elsinore high school. Together they served the community in civic, church, and volunteer opportunities. The Howard Sykes family left a lasting legacy for the Murrieta community.

Howard Henry Sykes was born on December 28, 1906, at home in Murrieta. He was the son

of Amos and Dovie (Miller) Sykes. He attended the Murrieta Grammar School and then graduated from Elsinore Union High School in 1926. In his youth, he was an active member of the Murrieta Methodist Church.

During World War II, Howard was employed as a machinist at an airplane factory in San Diego. One day, at a local coffee shop, Howard met Nina Gummerson. Nina also worked at the factory as a "Rosie the Riv-



From left to right: Dudley, Thaylea and her two sons, Brian and Adam, Nina, Howard, and Calvin Sykes. Source: The Sykes family

eter.” The young couple began dating and soon fell in love.

Nina Joan Gummerson was born October 4, 1913 in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. She was the daughter of Thomas and Grayce (Vipond) Gummerson. Howard Sykes married Nina Gummerson on September 14, 1943 on the front lawn of his father’s Murrieta ranch.

Howard and Nina settled in Chula Vista, California and continued to work at the factory. Their first three children were born during this time. They were Amos Charles (1944), Dudley (1946), and Thaylea (1948).

As a wedding gift, Amos Sykes gave Howard 20 acres on Adams Avenue between Ivy and Juniper streets. Nina wanted to raise her children on the ranch in

Murrieta. In 1949, the family moved and settled on the property. Their fourth son, Calvin, was born on the ranch in 1950.

“My dad delivered me at the house. Then Dr. Comstock, of Elsinore, came down and spanked my butt and declared me a healthy baby boy.” Calvin explained with a chuckle.

Howard grew hay on his ranch. He also continued to work his father’s ranch on Hayes and the Sykes’ Lower ranch. His three sons also grew up farming the land.

Nina’s mother, Grayce, was struck blind by a mysterious illness in 1950. Thomas and Grayce then moved to Murrieta. Howard built a small house on the ranch for Nina’s parents. A year later, on May 10, 1951, Thomas died. Nina would then

care for her mother the rest of her days.

Nina was an active member of the community. From 1954 to 1959, she was a member of the Ground Observers Corps. She volunteered 205 hours at the Murrieta post to watch the skies for enemy planes. She was also active with the Cub Scouts and the Parents and Teachers Club.

Nina accompanied her mother to the Murrieta Methodist Church. Grayce, though blind, taught Sunday school class for many years. She also served as president of the Women’s Society of Christian Service. Grayce passed away on July 11, 1967 and she was laid beside her husband in the Laurel Cemetery in Murrieta.

In July 1953, Howard Sykes was appointed a fire com-



missioner for the Murrieta Fire District. As commissioner, he helped supervise fire services, manage budgets, and approved fire personnel. The commission ensured that the fire department had equipment to service the needs of the community. Other services that were provided were code enforcement, issuing citations, safety inspections, and community education. He served as a commissioner for thirty-nine years and left office in December 1992.

As a second income, Howard worked as a truck driver for the Riverside County Road Department for three years. Howard also was appointed a trustee of the Murrieta Valley Cemetery District on June 1, 1961 and served until 2005.

Nina Sykes died on April 10, 2003 in Murrieta and was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery. Two years later, Howard Sykes died at his ranch home on August 1, 2005 and was laid to rest beside his wife. The contributions and service of Howard and Nina Sykes to the community have left a long lasting impression in the area.

For over 135 years, four generations of the Sykes family have lived in the Murrieta Valley. They have raised families, grown crops, operated businesses and contributed to the community's development. They have served in civic duties, volunteered their services, and gave when there was a need. The Sykes legacy should be remembered and celebrated for generations to come.



The Sykes tractor and other farm implements can be seen on display on Jefferson Ave. Photo by Jeffery G. Harmon



The Sykes barn is all that remains of the former Howard Sykes Ranch. Photo by Jeffery G. Harmon

In Memory of  
Mary Alice (Dunham) Kean  
December 12, 1938 - December 31, 2022

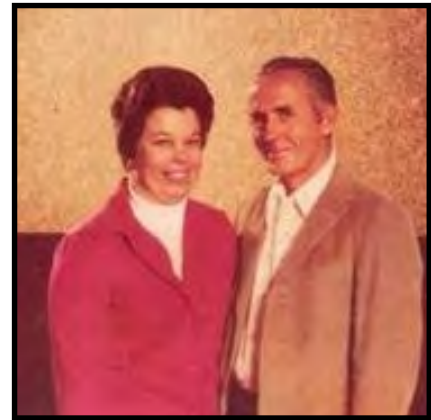
She was born in Murrieta, Ca at Home to Elmo A. Dunham and Ethelyn M. Dunham (Graham). She attended Murrieta Elementary School (at the old school on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street) from 1<sup>st</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and then went to Elsinore High School, 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, graduating in 1956. She loved riding her horse, 4-H and attending dances, and family events all over the valley. The summer after High School she went to a Beauty School in San Bernardino.

Her Aunt Myrtle Claypool (Dunham) introduced her to Jimmy Kean and they fell in love and married on July 12, 1956. They set up house in San Bernardino and a year later in July 1957 they had their first daughter Theresa (Terri), with daughter Karyn following in February 1959. The family moved to Wildomar briefly then to Murrieta. Son Steve came along in October 1964 and their family was complete.

Mary joined the Murrieta Elementary School PTC and would become President for a year. She was active in her community, participating in Plays, Murrieta Elementary School activities, Murrieta Volunteer Fire Dept Annual BBQ, 4-H, Kids Sports, Methodist Church activities, served on the Laurel Cemetery Board, Member of the Historical Downtown Murrieta Association, Board Member of the first Murrieta Valley Historical Society. She participated and volunteered at the Murrieta Museum, located in the Historic Hunt House.

Also she was a volunteer of the Ground Observers Corps which was located at the Garrisons garage. Mary started working in 1974 at Hudson Oxygen for a year then at Bianchi International from 1975 – 2001.

Mary and Jim loved camping and did so all over California. Her love of finding and collecting na-



tive artifacts came from her Grandmother Mary Graham of Lake Elsinore. She had a gift of spotting even the smallest rock or arrowhead on her many hikes in the hills and river bed after a rain.

She was dedicated to her family and her many lifelong friends. She taught her granddaughters how to make pies and enjoyed the yearly Holidays with her family.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Mary's name to Chapel Coffee Campus – Lily Kelly Ministries (<https://www.lilykellyministries.org/pages/chapel-coffee-campus/>) or Murrieta Valley Historical Society/Museum, PO Box 1341, Murrieta, CA 92564 <http://murrietahistoricalociety.org/>



# Museum Update

Hello everyone, this last month the museum has been busy with presentations, walking tours and an outreach booth at the Murrieta Market Night. Did you know you can go to our website and see our upcoming events and browse our collections? Just go to

[murrietahistoricalsociety.org](http://murrietahistoricalsociety.org)  
 We would also like to thank Ashley for updating our website.

We have received some exciting donations from Arlean Garrison's family and the Thompson family. These donations have several photos and

documents for future displays in the museum. Patricia Thompson Sesser donated Judge William Thorne's desk from his days as Murrieta's Justice of the Peace. Stop by the museum and take a look at our new additions.

Aimee Edgeworth is offering a Genealogy Group on the first Saturday of every month from 9 to 10 AM in the museum. The group is growing! If you are interested in genealogy you are invited to **join for free.**

The Murrieta Fire and Rescue Annual BBQ will be Saturday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at Town

Square Park. The museum will also be open that day from

10 AM to 3 PM.

Thank you to the Murrieta Valley Historical Society Board, members and volunteers for your continuous support, we couldn't do it without you.

Happy St. Patrick's Day




Annette Jennings,  
 Museum Director



**Scan the QR code to visit our website.**

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Murrieta Valley Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1341  
Murrieta, CA 92564

Phone: 951-387-4862  
E-mail: [info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org)

### 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](mailto: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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[murrietahistoricalsociety.org](http://murrietahistoricalsociety.org)  
[info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org)  
(951) 387-4362  
PO Box 1341, Murrieta, CA 92564