



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 10. Issue 3

May 2025

*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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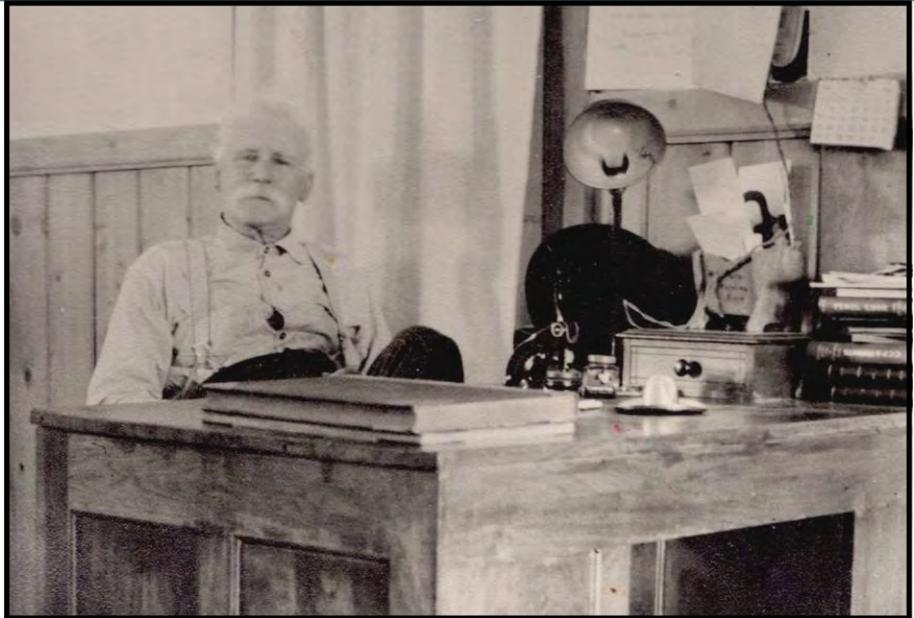
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A publication of the

Murrieta Valley Historical Society

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Judge William H. Thorne, Sr. (Source: Patricia Sesser Donation)

## Judge William H. Thorne and His Court by Jeffery G. Harmon

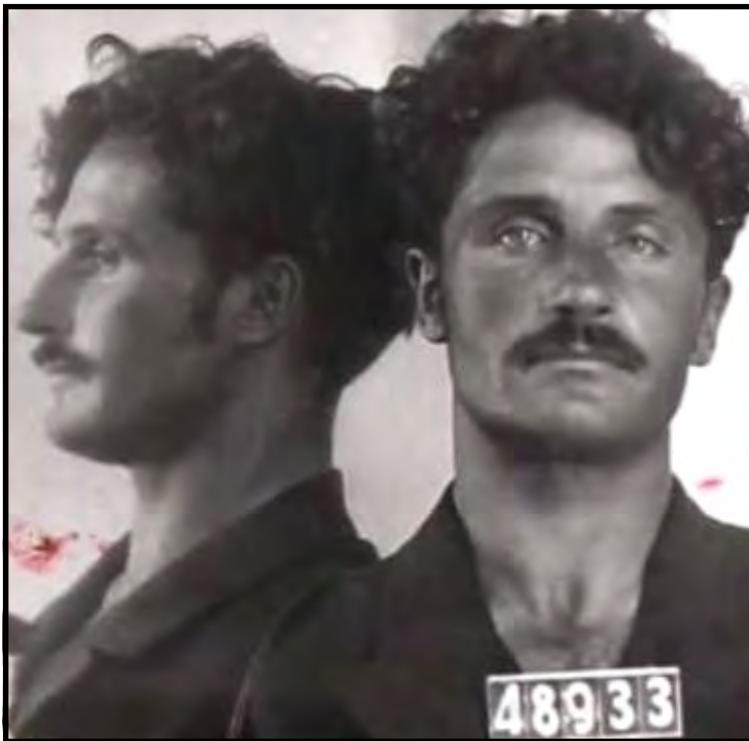
Judge William H. Thorne served as Justice of the Peace for the Murrieta Judicial District from 1919 until his death in 1940. The cases he tried ranged from minor to serious offenses. He was well known in the area for his impartial decisions and his amiable manner. All business acquaintances and friends spoke highly of him.

William Henry Thorne was born January 26, 1862 in Palmyra, Wisconsin. He was the son of English immigrants John and Mary (Jolliffe) Thorne. During the Civil

War, his father served as a private in the 29<sup>th</sup>, Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, Co. F.

When William was a young man he became a mining engineer and his occupation took him all over the North American continent. He eventually settled in Southern California.

He married Nina May Wickerd on November 22, 1893 in Eagle Rock, Los Angeles County, California. Nina was the daughter of Isaiah and Affa (Stevens) Wickerd. William and Nina had two



Michael Diaz, Temecula bank robber, appeared before Judge Thorne for a preliminary hearing before being sent to Riverside for trial.

Source: Ancestry.com, San Quentin photos

children: William H. Jr., and Nellie. Later, the Wickerd family moved to Murrieta and the Thorne family followed them in January 1912. William built a home for his family on Adams Avenue and made a living as a farmer.

Judge William Thorne was elected Justice of the Peace of the Murrieta Judicial District in April 1919. The district extended from Murrieta to Temecula and the San Diego county line and out east to Aguanga. He received a \$10 monthly salary for his services. He was known to try cases right at his plow when the constable brought someone in. He would hold court in the field in order to save the people involved, time and

money. Yet most proceedings were held in his home office.

Judge Thorne presided over a variety of cases over the years. In 1929, there was a preliminary hearing for three men who were taken into custody by Constable Melville Thompson for possession of a 25-gallon still in operation in a Temecula dwelling. After the hearing, Judge Thorne transferred the men to the Superior Court of Riverside to stand trial for the felony charges.

The next year two men were brought to Thorne's court in April 1930 for conspiracy to commit a felony. They had attempted to kidnap Mrs. Evelyn Pico from her Temecula home.

They assaulted her husband Carlos Pico with a deadly weapon and attempted to rob the couple. After the incident, a third accomplice was taken to the Riverside Community hospital in critical condition as a result of a gunshot wound he received from Mr. Pico. After the preliminary hearing, the case was transferred to Riverside for trial.

In August 1930 another trial was held in the Murrieta court for a Temecula bank robber. Witnesses gave their testimonies about the event at the preliminary hearing.

Michael Diaz had walked into the First National Bank of Temecula the day before and whipped out a revolver from a sack he had under his arm. He forced the bank manager, J. W. Chisholm and Agnes Freeman, the cashier, into the bank safe and stole \$1,600. As Diaz left the bank, the employees escaped from the safe and Chisholm fired his gun at the bank robber as he drove off in a stolen car.

John McSweeney who heard the shots, leaped into his car to give chase. Chisholm clung to the car's running board as the two pursued Diaz. When the cars were close, Chisholm fired two shots that hit Diaz's windshield. Diaz immediately surrendered and returned the cash.

In Thorne's court, Diaz pleaded guilty to the crime and did not take the stand. He hoped by doing so he could avoid a prison sentence. After the hearing, Diaz was sent to

Riverside for trial. There the judge sentenced Diaz to prison for his crime.

Sometimes a Riverside judge would reverse Judge Thorne's ruling. One incident occurred in 1931. Temecula resident and business owner Joseph Winkels was arrested for possession of two gambling devices in his home. Winkels had frequent encounters with local lawmen over the years, primarily for liquor violations.

Judge Thorne found Winkels guilty and fined him \$100 by for violating the state law on gambling devices. However, \$75 dollars of the fine was suspended and Winkels was ordered to pay the remainder amount.

Winkels then proceeded to Riverside. There he told Judge O. K. Morton that the gambling devices had been left at his home for storage. He put the devices into working order for his and his friends' amusement. The devices were not for public gambling. Judge Morton accepted Winkels defense and reversed Judge Thorne's judgment.

In another case, Murrieta rancher Arthur Vial was brought in to Thorne's court for driving while intoxicated in December 1931. Judge Thorne held a preliminary hearing and found Vial guilty. Vial was then sent to Riverside for trial. However, L. J. Difani, the lawyer for the defendant, argued in superior court that there was inefficiency in the preliminary hearings. The

judge ordered the case back to the Murrieta district court for correction.

Judge Thorne made the requested corrections and Vial was returned to Riverside. When Vial appeared before Judge Morton, he pleaded guilty and requested probation. On January 18, 1932, the judge granted Vial a one year probation, a \$200 fine, and a one month license suspension.

There were many other cases that Judge Thorne presided over during his twenty-one years in office. Then in June 1940, Judge William Thorne became deathly ill. On June 25, 1940,

Judge Thorne died at his Murrieta home. He was laid to rest in the Elsinore Valley Cemetery. Afterwards, Temecula resident A. B. Barnett was appointed Justice of the Peace for the Temecula-Murrieta District.

Judge William Thorne had served the community for twenty-one years. He was remembered as a fair, impartial judge, who made time to hear cases whether he was in field or in his home. A few years ago, his service desk was donated to the Murrieta Museum. It reminds visitors of how law and order was maintained in the valley and how justice was served by Judge Thorne.



In 1931, Joseph Winkels appeared before Judge Thorne for possession of gambling devices found in his home.  
Source: Temecula Valley Historical Society

# The 78th Annual Murrieta Fire Department BBQ, April 12, 2025



# Museum Update

Greetings,

We are finishing up with this school year of 3rd grade tours. I would like to thank my volunteers, Aimee Edgeworth, Craig Smedly, Kathi Price, Pat Jennings and LaShawn Butler for helping with the students.

The museum has welcomed several visitors from different countries, states and local residences; it has been great meeting everyone.

The Murrieta Fire Department's Annual BBQ was on April 12th, and the turnout was amazing. The Murrieta Valley Historical Society/Murrieta Museum had a

booth at the annual event and we enjoyed visiting with long time Murrieta residences and met new community members.

The Museum will have a booth at the 5K Run at Faith's Chapel on Washington Ave, May 3rd.

Did you know the museum has a small gift area? We have Historic Highway 395 T-shirts, tin signs, and stickers. We have note cards with historic buildings made by a local artist and several Murrieta Valley history books for sale. When you make a purchase, you are supporting your local museum.

Currently, when you become a new member or renew your membership you will receive a tote bag with several goodies inside.

We offer private museum tours by appointment, private walking tours and historic presentations. If you would like to become a volunteer for the museum contact us at

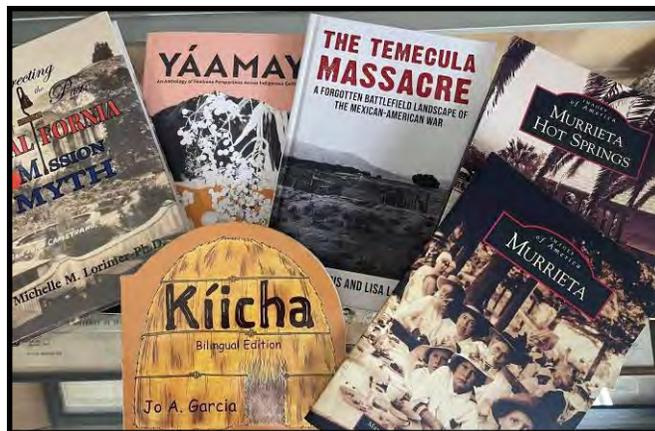
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or 951-677-7758.

Thank you,

Annette Jennings,

Murrieta Museum Director



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**The General  
Monthly Board Meeting  
is held on the second  
Monday at 5:30 p.m.  
Please join us at  
the Murrieta Museum**



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

## BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

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