

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

April 2011

Volume 11 – Issue 4

1980 Storm Remembered

Wrecks To The Rescue

By Bill Harker

Five storms crossed the Pacific bumper to bumper in 1980 picking up moisture which they dumped continuously for six days on the Temecula Valley. The ground became saturated and the resulting runoff played havoc with the area.

Rancho California Road washed out in several places as well as the roads in the sparsely settled, at the time, hills on the east and west sides of the valley. People were isolated for several days with no way to get in or out and a local emergency was declared.

The National Guard came in with large helicopters and used Sam Hicks Monument Park as a staging area for the airlifting of supplies and food for both animals and people. A number of sorties were flown dropping bales of hay and alfalfa for the farm animals, dog and cat food and food for human consumption.

The tremendous and unceasing flow of water filled both the Temecula and Murrieta creeks to their banks and water came up within four inches of the roadway on the Main Street bridge in Old Town Temecula. Several cars went down into gullies where roads were washed out and Vail Lake rose so high it ran over the dam putting the Valle de Caballos area under one foot of water that flooded the area along De Portola Road. It was that same storm that caused Lake Elsinore to overflow wiping out a lot of substandard real estate. Fortunately there was no loss of life, but a number of people had some very close calls.

The old town of Temecula is in a flood plain and it has been forecast that a one hundred year flood would inundate the town under three feet of water. Back in the '30s it was flooded with almost one foot of water and the high water marks can still be seen inside some of the older buildings.

At the height of the 1980 storms, the banks on both sides of Murrieta Creek began eroding away just downstream of the Main Street Bridge. The old slaughter house on Pujol Street which sat on the edge of the creek was undermined and half of the structure fell into the swollen creek and was never seen again.

The raging torrent also began eating away at the east side of the creek bank behind Bert Hornsveld's hardware store and lumber yard (now the parking area behind The Stampede) as well as behind the old Patton's Nursery. Something had to be done and done quickly.

A short distance down the street, on Santiago Road, there was an auto wrecking yard owned and operated by Frank Slaughter. He had been operating there for years and often donated old cars for use in bashing booths at various charitable events around town where, for a buck, you could take a sledge

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.

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Calendar Of Events

Monday, April 25 –

Monthly meeting at Little Temecula History Center, 6 to 8 p.m. Murray Lee, Curator of Chinese American History at the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum will present "The Story of Ah Quin" patriarch and railroad labor broker within the S.D. Chinese community of the 1880's and beyond.

Saturday, April 30 –

Alamos-Hyatt School Reunion, 10:00 a.m. at the Alamos School House at Lake Skinner County Park. Potluck so bring your favorite dish. Water, coffee, iced tea and paper plates provided. All welcome. For further info contact Mimi Milholland at 951-926-5080.

Saturday, May 21 –

A special Walking Tour of San Diego's China Town, followed by a visit to the San Diego Chinese History Museum and a special "tea" in their garden for our group. Reservations & prepayment of \$5 required. Group size limited.

Monday, May 23 –

Monthly meeting at Little Temecula History Center, 6 to 8 p.m. Presentation on the De Anza Trail history, along with a video of one of the annual trail ride events conducted by the De Anza Caballeros.

Wrecks to the Rescue (Continued from Page 1)

hammer and pound away on the old hulks inflicting what ever damage you were capable of.

Someone came up with the idea of dumping old cars into the creek along the bank to divert the water. It was obvious the job was much too big for the traditional sandbags. True to form, Frank came to their aid and said they could have all the old cars they needed. A rescue crew went into immediate action and hauled and towed old wrecks to the creek's edge and dumped them in. The cars, laid end to end along the bank, down in the water, kept the creek from eating away anymore of the bank at that location and saved the day for some very worried merchants and townspeople.

Whether Frank ever got his cars back is beside the point, what matters is that Yankee ingenuity and Frank's generosity will be long remembered in Temecula.

(Editors Note: Multiple times in Temecula's history floods have devastated the area. More than one has qualified us as a federal disaster area. A significant storm hit the area also in 1993, and due to debris accumulating in the Murrieta Creek, the Old Town area was hit very hard. Some folks that were here during both the 1980 and 1993 storms indicate that 1980 seemed the worst.)

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Out of the Archives

September 23, 1921, The Lake Elsinore Valley Press Newspaper

New Home Being Built *Miss Elizabeth Nienke reporting*
Much interest is centered on the attractive new home being built on a pretty site on the Pauba ranch southeast of town by Mr. Mahlon Vail. It is a huge affair of many rooms and built on the old Spanish style, low roofed, with the open court and of adobe. The house will boast of three fire-places, a huge cellar and all modern conveniences. Mr. Vail has named his home "Casa Loma," and on its completion will bring his wife, who is now in Los Angeles, to live here. Mr. Jacobs, of Rainbow, has the work in charge.

October 18, 1951, Lake Elsinore Valley Sun Newspaper

Old Timers Highlights *Temecula Column by Elizabeth Otto*
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nienke from Paradise, California are spending a few days in Temecula visiting old friends. Nienke recalls many interesting tales of the early days when he first came here about 38 years ago. The particular train he was on only came as far as Murrieta. Wishing to hire a horse to ride to Temecula he inquired around and found there was a funeral in town and no horses could be had that day so he and another man who also was coming to Temecula walked the rails the rest of the way. Having better luck here, he obtained a horse and buggy at the stables from Johnny Gibb (who wouldn't take any money for it) and rode into the back country where he met many fine people. He decided to settle here and tells of boarding at Mrs. Hall's (before she opened her restaurant) and says he had never known her to turn a hungry man away whether he had money or not. Nienke later opened the Temecula Valley Lumber Company and lived here until a few years ago when he and Mrs. Nienke moved to Paradise.

President's Message

As you can see from the articles in this month's newsletter, when it comes to natural disasters, history has a way of repeating itself. When people are in need, communities have traditionally come together to provide what assistance they can. Temecula's sister city, Daisen-Nakayama, is not in immediate danger, and it did not suffer directly from Japan's recent earthquakes and tsunami.

However, our prayers and support are needed by everyone in Japan as their country is trying to recover from a calamitous national tragedy made even more acute by the uncertainty of nuclear threat. Riverside's sister city, Sendai, did not fare as well as Daisen-Nakayama. Sendai, directly in the path of the tsunami was among the hardest hit areas and suffered massive destruction. The city's infrastructure will need to be rebuilt and Sendai's citizens are in dire need of aid.

In response to Sendai's Mayor Emiko Okuyama's request, the City of Riverside has launched a massive campaign to raise relief funds for Sendai. A number of fund raising events have been planned and personal donations are also being taken. All funds will go directly to Sendai relief. Please visit their website at www.riverside.ca.gov/sendairelief to see how you can help.

Bonnie Martland

Membership Renewals

Suzanne Dechert
Dale & Ann Silimperi
Roger & Lynn Cude
Will & Judy Hancock
Elaine & Robert Culverhouse
Rosemary Smith
Margaret Krings
Judy Knott

Little Known Fact

Walter Vail Leads 1906 S.F. Quake Relief

By Jeffery G. Harmon

Walter L. Vail, owner of the Vail Ranch in Temecula, but a resident of Los Angeles, was a business visitor at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco in March 1906. Little did he know that in a month, the beautiful hotel would be gutted by fire in the aftermath of one of California's greatest natural disasters. Furthermore, he would be appointed to lead the Los Angeles relief efforts in the wake of the terrible tragedy.

Early in the morning of April 18, 1906, San Francisco residents were awakened by a terrible earthquake. Gas and water lines were broken, and fires soon turned the city to ashes. Thousands of refugees poured into many cities throughout California, many looking for food, shelter, and a fresh start after losing everything.

Train companies offered the refugees free shuttle services to Los Angeles. On April 22, five carloads filled with 2,000 refugees arrived at the train depot. Estimates of 25,000 more refugees would be arriving as soon as trains were available to transport them. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce immediately organized the Citizens' Relief Committee. Walter Vail was appointed the Executive Director.

Two detention camps were created. Camp Angelus located at Agriculture Park, and Camp Detention at Sepulveda. Health officers checked the refugees as they departed the trains, searching for signs of any contagious diseases. If any sick people were found, the whole carload of passengers were vaccinated and quarantined for two weeks in one of the camps.

Five refugee camps were located in various parks. There 10,000 to 15,000 hot meals were served on a daily basis. On April 28, it was reported that Southern California had sent over a half a million dollars in cash and supplies for the relief of San Francisco. Walter Vail oversaw all operations and worked with many community leaders.

"The work of caring for the refugees is as well organized at this moment as if we had been doing it for five years." Mr. Vail declared, "The entire Los Angeles police force has been placed at my disposal by the Chamber of Commerce so that no undesirable refugees may be allowed to get into this city, or if they do gain entrance that they may be sent out again as quickly as possible." (LA Herald, April 28, 1906).

By the month of May, imposters became a nuisance. There were people who claimed to be refugees in order to profit from the disaster. An ordinance was passed that all imposters would be arrested. Walter Vail and the Citizens' Relief Committee controlled their funds and bills carefully. A hall in the Baker block



Walter Vail in his later years.

-- Photo Courtesy of VaARRA

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Notes

Mark Calendars For Special TVHS Event in May

The Education & Events Committee has announced that a special event has been scheduled for Saturday, May 21. We have reserved a Walking Tour of San Diego's China Town, followed by a visit to the San Diego Chinese History Museum and a special "tea" in their garden for our group. Reservations and prepayment of \$5 per person will be required before the end of April. The size of the group is limited to a total of 20 persons. Get your reservations and \$\$ in to either Bill Harker or Lisa Woodward by the end of April.

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Photos of Old Town Temecula Are Wanted

VARRA is seeking historical photos of Old Town Temecula to be used in a new Arcadia book they will be putting together as a fundraiser for VARRA. If you have photos from the 1980's or before of any places in Old Town, please contact Loretta Barnett (mlbarnett55@verizon.net), Rebecca Farnbach (rebfrnbach@aol.com), or call Darell Farnbach (951-552-3516) and they can make arrangements to scan your photos.

Vail Leads Relief Effort (Continued from Page 3)

was used to securely gather, store, and distribute supplies destined for San Francisco.

Soon the daily flood of refugees slowed to a hundred or less. The relief committee began to reduce its operations in June. Walter Vail and the executive committee closed the two large storerooms in the Baker block and distributed the last of the supplies and funds. Governor Pardee praised Los Angeles for their tireless relief efforts.

Five months later, on Thanksgiving Day, Walter Vail was struck by a street car. Three days later he succumbed to his injuries and died. At his memorial he was remembered as a successful cattle rancher and businessman. He should also be remembered as a civic leader who directed and organized the Los Angeles refugee relief effort of the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906.

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Out of the Archives

"Ramona" Character Dies After 57 Years Residence

(From the Elsinore Leader-Press Newspaper, January 12, 1933)

Mrs. Grace Gonzalez, one of the last surviving figures of the colorful life of Temecula valley that has been immortalized in the story of "Ramona", died after 57 years local residence on Tuesday evening at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Ben Barnett, near the settlement of Temecula.

Her vigorous pioneer spirit was evident in the life of Mrs. Gonzalez to the last. She died suddenly from heart trouble, complicated by her old age. She was 86 years, 8 months and 29 days of age.

From almost childhood, Mrs. Gonzalez has been associated with the life of Elsinore and Temecula valleys. She was a native of England. She came to what later was to be Elsinore valley in about 1876, as a traveling companion of the Summers, and stayed to spend her life as a pioneer of this section of Southern California.

She married Jose Gonzalez, a Castilian Spaniard, who figured prominently in the early life of Temecula valley. Jose Gonzalez held many offices in the early years of the valley, including that of county assessor. He was one of the characters in the story of "Ramona". Their first daughter was the first white child born in Temecula valley. She is Mrs. Ben Barnett, with whom Mrs. Grace Gonzalez has resided for the past twenty years and with whom she was living at the time of her death.

Survivors of the deceased include her daughter, Mrs. Ben Barnett; a son, Ormston J. Gonzalez of Temecula; a brother, George R. Street of Los Angeles; four grandchildren, Ralph, Chester, and Francis Barnett and Frank Gonzalez, all of Temecula.

Funeral services are being held this afternoon from the Everett chapel with Rev. George Cocking of Riverside officiating. Interment is in the Temecula cemetery by the side of her husband who preceded her by twelve years. W. L. Everett, local mortician, was in charge.