

# TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

January 2012

Volume 12 – Issue 1

*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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Albert and Carrie Nienke in front of their service station located on Highway 395 near the Pala Road Bridge in the 1930s. The water tank behind them was used as a shower for campers at the trailer park across the highway. (Photo: Courtesy of Gene Oxe)

### **The Albert Nienke Family**

## **Early Area Residents And Entrepreneurs**

**By Jeffery G. Harmon**

Albert Nienke got off the train at the Murrieta Depot, but was unable to rent a horse. So he followed the railroad tracks south to the small town of Temecula. There Albert rented a horse and buggy from Johnny Gibb and toured the valley. He loved the area, and decided to move his family from Los Angeles to Temecula.

Albert Frederick Nienke was a German immigrant, who was born in 1873. He worked as a lumberjack in the Wisconsin forests. He married Clara Otto on November 24, 1897 and they raised three children, Elizabeth, James, and Mabel. Clara became ill with tuberculosis. The local doctor gave her three months to live and suggested that the family move to Southern California, where the climate might prolong Clara's life. Without a second thought, Albert moved the family to Redondo Beach, California. Clara's health began to improve; she would live for another twenty-three years. Albert found work as a foreman for a local lumber company. Then he and his family moved to Temecula in 1915, where Albert established the Temecula Lumber Company.

His oldest daughter, Elizabeth nicknamed Libbie, would take the train each morning from Temecula to Elsinore to attend Elsinore High School. She would go on horseback rides with her friends into the Temecula hills. During baseball games at the Murrieta Hot Springs, she would cheer

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# Calendar Of Events

**Saturday, January 14** – 10 a.m.

Temecula Valley Museum on Mercedes St. in Old Town, a Walking Tour of Old Town Temecula. Meet at the Museum to start tour 10 a.m., \$2 per person donation requested.

**Monday, January 23** – 6 p.m.

TVHS monthly meeting at Little Temecula History Center. Byron Harrington will present program on the 1875 Campo Gunfight. He has written a book "Campo, The Forgotten Gunfight", which will be available.

**Saturday, January 28** – 10 a.m.

Opening of "Tools of the Trade" Gallery Show at the Temecula Valley Museum. A display of antique tools used by various skilled workers in the past.

**Monday, February 27** -- 6 p.m.

TVHS monthly meeting at Little Temecula History Center. Steve Clugston will do a first person presentation as George Washington.

**Monday, March 26** – 6 p.m.

TVHS monthly meeting at Little Temecula History Center, education program to be determined.

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## Out of the Archives

### **Burn Sends Local To Los Angeles Doctor**

*(Lake Elsinore Valley Press,  
September 30, 1921)*

Louie Pasas was in Los Angeles for a couple of days the first of the week. Some days ago he had the misfortune to have his forehead burned by hot asphaltum while working at the Pauba ranch and the Vail Company sent him to their company doctor in Los Angeles for medical aid.

## Albert Nienke Family

(Continued from Page 1)

for her home team, the Temecula Indians. She worked at a Hemet cannery for one season, and also clerked at the Burnham store on occasion.

A classmate, John Hamilton Watts, had caught her eye. He was drafted and served in World War I. On his return home from the war, he first stopped at the Nienke home to pay Libbie a visit. He moved to Los Angeles where he found work, but he still managed to travel to Temecula on the weekends to see the woman he loved. The couple was married on February 21, 1923 in Ventura County.

James Nienke, Albert's only son, also attended Elsinore High School. He tried his hand at farming in Hemet, but eventually moved to Los Angeles to find steady work. He married Serena Cantarini, a local Temecula girl and daughter of Swiss immigrants. During World War II, James joined the military even though he was overage.

"He had no children," Gene Oxe, Jim's nephew, explained, "So he figured he had nothing to loose. He was in the medical corps during the war and saw action in the African campaign."

Albert and Clara's youngest daughter, Mabel, did not like the dusty dirty streets of Temecula. She preferred city life. As a young girl, she attended the Temecula Union School and had several friends that she played with. As time passed, her mother's health started to decline. In May 1922, Mabel and her mother moved to Riverside for a month so that Clara could be under a physician's care. Because of growing health concerns, Clara and Mabel eventually lived in Riverside for a year.

Then in June 1923, Clara and Mabel moved to San Bernardino. By March 1924, Clara's health had declined to a point the doctors sent her to her home in Temecula. Mrs. Luella Jennings, a trained nurse from Elsinore, took care of Clara in her final days. On May 10, 1924 Clara Nienke passed away. In the fall of 1925, Mabel went to live with her sister's family, the Watts, in Covina. She attended Covina High School, while she was there. She would later graduate in June 1929 from Saint Mary's Academy in Los Angeles.

Albert's second wife was Carrie Jones from Texas, a maid who may have worked for the Nienke household at one time. The couple never had children of their own.

In the early 1930s, Albert had left the Temecula Lumber Company. Next, he made a financial transaction that failed and left him in dire straits. He purchased a service station on Highway 395 near the intersection of Pala Road. The family living quarters were behind the station. Next door, Albert set up a petting zoo, with a few deer and other farm animals. On the north side of the highway, Albert had a small piece of property for a trailer campground.

"There were never any trailers there." Gene explained, "It was a patch of ground with a lot of shade trees. If you wanted to take a shower, you would cross the highway and stand under a large water tank. There was a kerosene heater for the water."

A very important event took place one day at the service station. . . a dog barked. The sound attracted Albert's attention, so he came out to investigate. He spoke to the dog's owner, Erle Stanley Gardner. Before long, Erle decided to make camp at the trailer campground. He stayed a few days and a friendship soon developed between the Albert and Erle that would last the rest of their lives.

"He asked Grandpa to purchase him a ranch," Gene smiled. "He gave my grandfather power of attorney. Erle, a well-known author, knew that if any land seller knew who the buyer was, the seller would triple the price. So my grandfather bought the ranch for him."

Before long, Gardner asked Albert to come work at his newly purchased Temecula ranch. Albert accepted the offer. He leased his service station and began working for Gardner for several years.

"I remember when I met Gardner; I was immediately fascinated by him." Gene shared. "The stories he would share, the places he had been, and all the books he had in his house."

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# President's Message

I hope you all had a joyous and safe Christmas and that the New Year finds you well. It always surprises me how quickly the old year passes and the new one arrives; and the older I get, the quicker seems the passing.

During our December hiatus, I spent an afternoon visiting Mission San Luis Rey in Ocean-side. I hadn't been in a number of years, maybe even before I knew of its special significance to our area. As in previous visits, I was struck by how much history those old adobe walls have been privy to over its more than two centuries. A tiny adobe asistencia of the mission, in what is now Temecula, along Murrieta Creek, served as headquarters of a mission cattle ranching operation. The handful of acolytes at the asistencia and mission Indians could not have imagined that the quickly passing years would have brought so many people and such immense change to the quiet valley.

Not far from the location of that tiny asistencia stands the Temecula Community Center today. On Christmas, as has become custom, its doors opened to welcome in everyone who wished to enjoy a Christmas dinner, Christmas music and cheer and, of course, a visit with Santa. Gifts, and pies and welcoming volunteers abounded. Though the modern incarnation of Saint Nicolas might raise a few eyebrows, this Christmas event is an expression of community spirit that I think would have made the early mission padres proud.

*Bonnie Martland*

## **Albert Nienke Family** (Continued from Page 2)

In the early 1950s, Carrie's brother became ill. Albert and Carrie moved to Paradise, California to take care of her brother.

"Gardner again asked Grandpa to buy him some property in Paradise as an investment." Gene recalled, "So he did. However, Gardner was unable to pay Albert back for the purchase. Gardner instead went to a local general store and set up an account for Albert. Gardner took care of their household needs for the rest of Albert's life."

James Nienke died on August 27, 1954. The death of his son must have been difficult for Albert. Albert attended his son's funeral and afterward he traveled to Temecula. Perhaps he was looking for comfort by visiting old friends and to reminisce about his son's life during his years in Temecula.

In 1957, Albert was burning leaves on his property. Unknown to him, some of the leaves were covered with poison oak. Fragments of the toxic leaves got into his lungs and he soon became ill. His long time friend, Erle, was by Albert's bedside when he died on April 1, 1957. He was buried in the Evergreen Cemetery in Riverside next to his first wife, Clara. Erle Stanley Gardner attended his friend's funeral and would later write Albert Nienke's biography for the High Country Magazine, Issue 2.

Elizabeth Nienke Watts had one daughter, Margaret. On February 13, 1988 Elizabeth died in San Diego County. Mabel Nienke married Carl Oxe in 1932. Carl had a son, Charles Eugene "Gene" Oxe, from his first wife, Lola. Carl and Mabel would have a child of their own, James Albert Oxe. Mabel passed away at the age of 95 on October 8, 2007 in Union City, California. Her son, James, passed away on June 20, 2011.

Here are a few final thoughts about Albert Nienke: "He was known as the gentle giant." *Gene Oxe*. "He possesses that rare quality of bringing out the best in everyone." *Lake Elsinore Valley Sun, April 4, 1957*. "Nienke was a rugged, raw-boned German with an old-fashioned type of honesty and a sincerity which so permeated his being that there wasn't any room for the faintest trace of dissimulation." *Erle Stanley Gardner, High Country, Issue 2*.

The Nienke family will always be remembered for their contribution to the growth and development of Temecula. If you have any stories about the Nienke family, please share them with us.

## **Out of the Archives**

### **Twenty-seven Years as School Bus Driver Rewarded with Rest**

*(From the Lake Elsinore Valley Sun, February 7, 1952)*

After serving Temecula Grammar school for twenty-seven years in the capacity of bus driver and custodian, Al Otto retired February 1 and is planning an extended rest and vacation period before deciding what he will do.

Beginning in the spring of 1922 with the newest style Model T Ford bus, open but equipped with isinglass curtains that rolled down in case of rain, Otto carried as passengers many of the present-day leaders of the Temecula-Murrieta community. Among them was Richard Barnett, until recently a member of Elsinore Union High School Board of Trustees, Margaret Ramsey, Albert Case and Margarine Kitch. Otto recalls the Temecula school board in 1922 consisted of Mrs. Jack Roripaugh, Mrs. Sade Clogstens, Mrs. Roy Roripaugh and Mrs. Frank Hall.

At the time the Temecula School's enrollment was larger than it is at the present time, according to Otto, since, during the past fifty years, Temecula's importance as a cattle and grain center attracted a larger number of residents than its present day industry. During that period Temecula had its own railroad station, bank and hotels.

During the period from 1922 to the present time Otto took a two-year leave from his duties.

# COMMITTEE REPORTS FOR 2011

## More Committee Reports

### **The Public Relations Committee**

– One of the goals for 2011 was to continue to publish the TVHS Newsletter in a timely manner for the months of January thru November, which has been accomplished. Early each month (always by the first week of the month), the Newsletter was at the printer, for Barbara Tobin to mail hardcopy to those who do not have e-mail, and an electronic version for those who are able to receive it in either Word or PDF format. Certainly Dale Garcia has done an excellent job of continuing to enhance and maintain the TVHS website.

One major goal the committee did not achieve was to complete an initial Powerpoint presentation as part of establishing a "speakers bureau". Neither the Powerpoint presentation got finished and released, nor a Speakers Bureau established. Maybe this coming year!  
(Submitted by Dick Fox)

### Out of the Archives

#### **Temecula Was Favorite Outdoor Movie Setting**

*(Lake Elsinore Valley Press,  
Miss Elizabeth Nienke reporting)*

**September 23, 1921** -- A group of movie people under Director Clemments, took a few wild west scenes at the Temecula depot just as the afternoon train came in Monday.

**October 21, 1921** -- Mrs. Houseman and son have secured the old pool hall of Mrs. Louie Escallier in which to show their motion pictures every Tuesday evening. "In Old Kentucky," featuring Anita Stewart was shown to a full house Tuesday. "The Thunderbolt" will be shown next week.

**The Project Committee** -- Completed an inventory of historical plaques' location and condition. Several plaques are missing. Plaques located were in good condition. We also sold Historic Highway 395 signs to local merchants, wholesale to the TVC&VB, and at several local area fairs and meets. No action has been taken on missing plaques. Also unfinished is the placement of plaques on several historic buildings, such as the barn at Yoder Ranch (Maurice Carrie Winery) and several old homes in Old Town. (Submitted by Jimmy Moore)

**Speaker Committee** -- Another year with interesting presenters to entertain and educate the Society. The topics preceded events and tours coordinated with other committees in the Society and with sister organizations. Some of the speakers came from a distance and others were members of our Society who shared some of their research in their areas of interest.

We started the year with a presentation on The Earps in Riverside County given by Marc Hendon, a commissioner on the Riverside County Historical Commission. In February, author and researcher Steve Lech gave the history of The Formation of Riverside County. In March, our board member Thomas Long, Ph.D. spoke on the California Gold Rush.

Murray Lee from the San Diego Chinese Cultural Center told us in April the story of An Lee. In May our own Dick Fox presented The DeAnza Trek. In June we heard the history of photography by Alan Brubaker and Steven Allen. In July our own Darell Farnbach gave a history of ranching in Southern California.

Jennifer Albin came in August to orient us for a tour of the National Archives in Perris. Bonnie Martland presented an overview of California's participation in the Civil War in September and in October Steve Clugston spoke on "Temecula's Civil War: The Showalter Affair", both in preparation for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events to be commemorated at a two-day event hosted by the Vail Ranch Restoration Association on Nov. 19 & 20.

Many more interesting programs are planned for 2012, again with a mix of speakers from within our organization and coming from a distance. We begin in January with a presentation on the Gunfight at Campos.

Thanks to all in the Society who present programs, suggest speakers and who encourage our speakers by attending their presentations. While business meetings may be somewhat boring to the onlooker, the heart of our organization is in the learning about our local history. (Submitted by Rebecca Farnbach)

**Research & Preservation Committee** -- The major accomplishment this year has been to get the Wolf Tomb maintenance on track. With some sweat equity from our president, her husband and myself, we did weeding and hauling which satisfied the City of Temecula. We hired a new gardener who has repaired drip watering systems and timers. Trees and bushes that looked dead are now revived and the vegetation looks great. We also hired a painter to scrape and paint the gateposts and now everything looks fresh and clean.

Another exciting thing for 2011 is that Jeffery Harmon, who is responsible for the Gossip Column on our website is back at it again. Jeffery has been collating gossip columns from local newspapers from 1920 forward. Jeffery is also working with Rebecca Farnbach and Loretta Barnett who are putting together another VaRRRA sponsored Arcadia book focusing on Old Town Temecula. Lisa Woodward and the Pechanga Cultural Department are also working on this and the Temecula Valley Museum staff has been most helpful in locating photographs for use in this book that will be released in the Fall of 2012.

We are looking forward to an exciting year of discovery in 2012.  
(Submitted by Darell Farnbach)