

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

October 2009

Volume 9 – Issue 10

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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Part 1 of 2 Part Series

Vail Family History Before Coming to Area

By Rebecca Marshall Farnbach

Two greenhorns from the East with good business savvy cashed in on adventure and made their fortunes in frontier Arizona. When they needed more pastureland in 1904 they came to Southern California and bought four former Mexican ranchos, amassing 87,500 acres from Temecula to Lake Elsinore. The enterprise dominated the area economically and was the largest employer. The Temecula bank and other businesses were formed to support the huge Vail Ranch. This is the story of how they happened to settle in California.

Walter Lennox Vail was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1852, the same year Indians gathered at Apis' adobe by Temecula Creek to sign the Treaty of Peace and Friendship. By Walter's sixth birthday, he and his family moved to New Jersey where his father owned grain farms and a mill. Although Walter agreed to someday take over the family business, he dreamed of venturing to the West. When profits fell, Walter's father sold the grain business, freeing Walter from obligation to family business, so, on the day he turned twenty-one, he bade his family goodbye, and with one hundred dollars in his pocket, he left to seek his fame and fortune in the West.

Walter's story is not just about success. In fact, his first venture didn't go well at all. He traveled to Virginia City, Nevada, hoping to strike it rich in the silver mines. He was a timekeeper in the silver mines, but he didn't like the gambling and drinking, and he didn't make a fortune. When his savings were stolen, he asked Nathan Vail for help. Uncle Nathan urged him to buy a ranch near Tucson, Arizona to start a cattle raising enterprise. The rest of his story is legendary.

Walter made his first trip to the Arizona ranch in 1876 with a prospective investor. They traveled south from Tucson on mud roads and arrived at a tumbledown adobe house surrounded by a few cattle. The wild country with few conveniences and reports of recent Indian raids on white settlers frightened the prospective partner, who was immediately disinterested.

Uncle Nathan then contacted Herbert Hislop, a young

(Continued on Page 2)

Calendar Of Events

Monday, October 12 –

Monthly meeting Pujol Schoolhouse – 6 to 8 p.m.
"Reflections on the 20th Anniversary of Temecula's Cityhood" by Jimmy & Peg Moore.

Sunday, November 1 –

"Barbecue at Vail Ranch"

This will be the final event of the year-long celebration of 150th Anniversary of the 1st Post Office in Temecula. With the Wolf Store at the center, will have music, gunfighters, stagecoach, & other displays / activities. Western attire suggested. TVHS will jointly participate as part of its annual heritage dinner. Advance tickets available for \$15. 11 am to 5 pm.

Saturday, November 7 –

"Heritage Day" This event is part of the Erle Stanley Gardner annual weekend celebration, and will include historical groups, music, activities and displays. Sam Hicks Monument Park From 10 am to 3 pm.

Monday, November 9 –

Monthly meeting Pujol Schoolhouse – 6 to 8 p.m.
"Martha and Julia" -- Martha Culbertson will share her experiences and relationship with Julia Child and her husband Paul. Julia & Paul visited the Culbertsons at their winery many times.

man he met in London, where Nathan had made a fortune installing the city's first streetcars. In 1876 Walter Vail and Herbert Hislop, two twenty-four-year-old greenhorns, purchased Fish Ranch. A month later they bought an adjacent ranch property that came complete with sheep, cattle and a yellow dog named Billy.

When an Englishman named John Harvey joined the venture a few months later, the locals dubbed the enterprise "The English Boys Outfit," despite the fact that Walter was an American.

They soon bought more cattle and sold the sheep. The ranchers built a corral, attaching the only gate to the wall their adobe house so they could vigilantly guard against Apache raiders and animal predators.

While the two Englishmen preferred to stay at the ranch, Walter eagerly traveled into New Mexico to buy more cattle. Walter wrote of his adventures in the "Wild West," to his older brother Edward in New York City. In one letter, Walter told about camping with some of the ranch cowboys along the San Pedro River in New Mexico during a cattle buying trip. Apaches came within 50 yards of them and stole the cowboys' horses, plus a large number of wild horses the cowboys had rounded up. The cowboys thought they would track the Apaches and steal the horses back, but after seeing how badly they were outnumbered, the cowboys gave up pursuit.

Walter's letter didn't say how they got home with the cattle after they were stranded without horses 200 miles from home, but he did mention that the same Indians headed immediately to the ranch, killing three neighbors and stealing horses from every ranch except for theirs.

Another adventure is described in a later letter, "I left the ranch to be gone one day and was gone seven. I have been in the saddle from daylight to dark, and part of the time I have ridden half the night as well. I found after I left home that some of the cattle that we bought from Mr. Miller had gone back to the San Pedro River, so I went right after them."

Walter told how he almost lost his life trying to defend his dog Billy. Billy always ran under the tongue of Walter's butcher wagon, between the mules. One day, a big dog "jumped on Billy and was chewing him up. I picked up a stock and was beating the big dog off of Billy when the owner of the dog came up and pulled out a gun. In a minute several men with six shooters drawn were facing each other and I was in the middle. But some way, although I was scared, I felt most anxious to prevent a fight. I think I said, 'You men are all friends of mine; don't kill each other over a yellow dog.' One of them laughed and I said: 'Come with me,' and we all went into George's saloon and I paid for the drinks and that ended the trouble."

By 1879, after just three years of ranching, both Englishmen sold out to Walter. Walter's brother Edward, working south of New York's Wall Street as a ship chandler selling supplies to outfit ships, wanted Western adventures and left his job to take part in the ranching enterprise.

While in New York Edward had a hobby that paid good dividends later for the two brothers. Assaying, determining the

Presidents Message

If you missed the tour of the Diamond Lake and the Paleontology Museum in Hemet last week end you missed a good one. The fifteen persons who participated enjoyed a real inside look of the water system and saw things the normal tourist would not be admitted too. Our greatest thanks to Paul Price and his wife Kathi for arranging such a great tour, and an outstanding meal. Paul will be working on setting future tours and I recommend that you participate as they are beyond the type of tours normally offered by Senior Centers and commercial tour groups.

On November 1st the Temecula Valley Historical Society will hold its annual dinner in conjunction with the Heritage Day at the Vail Ranch Headquarters. Please plan on attending. The grounds will open at 11:00 A.M, with an honor guard at Noon.

Following the honor guard we will be able to purchase BBQ and all the trimmings and avail ourselves to various beverages until 3:00 P.M. Then we will have our annual meeting at which our new members will be welcomed. You will receive ballots in the mail soon. If you would like to become a Board member, please contact Barbara at Barbara.Tobin2@verizon.net or 760-6096.

Jimmy Moore

Vail Family Before California - (Continued)

value of precious metals in rock, fascinated him, and he frequently visited an assay office, assisting with calculations.

Business at the ranch took off when Edward joined Walter in Arizona. The two had a plan, and it worked. They bought all available acreage in the area, especially property that gave controlling water rights.

They held offices in every organization dealing with the cattle industry. Walter served on the Arizona Territorial Legislature, and they each served as Pima County Supervisors. While Walter presided over the Livestock Ranchman's Association he authored several regulations that were to their own advantage, including fencing regulations to curb cattle rustling.

The two brothers maintained strict control of every aspect of their ranching enterprise, never relinquishing management of operations to anyone else.

Although Walter didn't get rich from his first experience with silver mines, something happened one day at the ranch that changed his fortune. His friend Jerry Dillon looked up at the hillside and said, "There's a big ledge, and the whole damned hill is a total wreck with quartz boulders of ore."

They filed a claim and called it the Total Wreck Mine. They set up a stamp mill to extract the silver, and built a house for the mill man nearby. Edward, the assayer, wrote about the mill man later, "He said he slept fine as long as the mill was running, but if for any reason it stopped he was up there in a minute – anyone who has ever heard a quartz mill running would not consider it a lullaby to induce sleep."

A town grew around the mine. It boasted of fifty houses, three stores, three hotels, four saloons, a brewery, butcher shop and a lumberyard. The Vail, Arizona post office building sat on Vail Road. The Southern Pacific put rails to the new town. It brought supplies in and carried ore out.

The mine produced up to \$2000 worth of silver daily, with a total production of \$500,000. The Vails used capital from the Total Wreck mine to expand their ranch land holdings and to improve the herd. They bred Herefords at the Empire Ranch and shipped them out to fatten elsewhere before selling. By maintaining a superior quality of cattle, they could command higher prices.

In 1881, Walter Vail married his longtime sweetheart Margaret Newhall in New Jersey and took her to their Empire Ranch home. He had improved it from the bare adobe with dirt floor and no windows or doors, to one habitable by a civilized lady.

(Part 2 of this feature will appear next month)

Winchester Society Special Event

The Winchester Historical Society of Pleasant Valley is having a special celebration and Grand Reopening event on Sunday, October 18, at 1:00 p.m. They have spent the last 2 months busily finishing up the restoration of the upstairs of the Patterson House in Winchester. Along with this project they also renovated the banister on the stairs, and received some nice donations of authentic early Patterson family antiques to have as the center piece of a couple of the bedrooms. They also received from a Patterson family descendant some nice family pictures to add to their collection. Congratulations to the Winchester Society on their progress. Go see for yourselves.



*Temecula Valley Historical Society
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Membership Activity

New

Marie Flores

Renewals

Bank of Mexican Food

(The Pumas)

Emily Gerstbacher

Irene Hotchkiss

Bonnie Martland

Paul & Kathi Price

Rick Bouchard

Bonnie Reed

Visit the Great Oak?

People often ask how to see the Great Oak Tree. The Pechanga Cultural Department hosts tours on the third Friday of each month. Reservations for tours can be made by calling 951-308-9295.

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Join us for an . . .



Old Fashioned BBQ

*To Kick-Off Heritage Week, the final week of the year-long celebration
Recognizing the 150th Anniversary of the 1st Temecula Post Office*

**Many historic displays, gunfighters, live music, and activities
which are FREE to the public . . .**

Where: Old Vail Ranch Headquarters &
Wolf Store (2nd Temecula Post Office)

When: Sunday, November 1st -- 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Cost: BBQ tickets \$15 per person (\$18 at door)
(Water & soft drinks included) (Wine & Beer available
To purchase)

**Tickets available at: Baily's in Old Town, Temecula Valley Museum,
Chamber of Commerce, and Temecula's Main Post Office.**

**Note – TVHS Annual Heritage Dinner being held in conjunction with this event.*