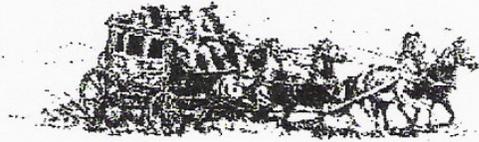


TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

June 2014

Volume 14 – Issue 6

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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The First National Bank
(Photo Courtesy of the Eli E. Barnett Family)

The Bank – A Cornerstone in Temecula for 100 Years

By Rebecca Marshall Farnbach

When the railroad came to the area in 1882 it prompted a myriad of changes. In fact, it made the center of commerce, literally the entire town, move 2 ½ miles from its previous location around the Wolf Store to establish what was then called “New Town”, now affectionately known as “Old Town”.

Frederick Thomas Perris was the chief engineer for the construction of the California Southern Railroad through the area. He not only surveyed the train route, but he also surveyed lots and street lines for the new town site. These lots and streets are still closely maintained to his original measurements.

Few buildings graced the landscape for the first few years of the new settlement. Early structures east of the Murrieta Creek from the train depot included the Machado Store (now soon to be an eatery called “1909”), the Welty Hotel (now known as the Temecula Hotel, which is on the market for purchase), and the Escallier Hotel and billiard parlor (at the location of Rosa’s Cantina today). A little later Phillip Pohlman won a land lottery for his lot across from the Welty Hotel and built the

(Continued on Page 2)

Calendar Of Events

COME CELEBRATE

The Bank's 100th Anniversary

Tuesday, June 10 –

1910s – 1920s

Model T Club Display

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony – 5pm

Wednesday, June 11 –

1930s – 1940s

Reenactment of the 1930

Bank Robbery – 5 pm

Classic Cars on Display

Thursday, June 12 –

1950s – 1960s

Hot Rods on Display

Thursday, June 19 –

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

TVHS Special Event

Tour of the Historic Murrieta Hot

Springs Resort by Tony

Guenther and Malcolm Barnett

Contact Lisa Woodward to RSVP

(951) 514-7406

Monday, June 23rd – 6 p.m.

TVHS Monthly Meeting:

President Dick Fox will present

"Restoring an Antique Printing Press"

May 24 ~ July 13

Temecula Valley Museum

Current Exhibit:

Bear in Mind: Story of the California Grizzly.

Welcome New Members:

John and Sherri Simpson

Thank you for renewing your membership:

Terry Bracci

Martin Dinsenbacher

Lisa Woodward

The Bank (Continued from Page 1)

Mercantile Store with bricks discarded from a brick factory in Wolf Valley.

When coming to town on the train, a man would need to rent a horse and maybe a buggy or wagon to proceed to his destination, much as we rent automobiles at airports these days. For that purpose, Hugh McConville's livery at the northwest corner of Main and Front Streets had a thriving business. That is, until automobiles became readily available and livery businesses became a thing of the past and the livery closed in 1912.

During the heyday of the livery stable, corrals for rented and boarded horses extended north along Front Street. Photographs show a large water tower atop wooden supports north of the building, alongside the street. The potbellied stove inside the livery building was a place where men of the community would gather on a cool late afternoon and swap stories. Upstairs meeting rooms provided facilities where parties and dances gave diversions to families in the fledgling little town. In a Fallbrook Free Press account by Helene Seay in the 1960s she said "the dance floor was kept smooth and polished by spreading wax on the floor, then dragging bales of hay across it until it shone like glass". Vail Ranch foreman Louie Roripaugh said there were dances in the upstairs hall every Saturday night.

Frank Hall helped run the livery stable and witnessed the first phone lines installed in Temecula. In a back corner of the livery, he used a tiny switchboard to connect the few calls coming in and going out of Temecula.

After the livery business closed, the rough wood building occupied the corner where the main road in and out of town intersected with the road from the train station and someone had an idea. With the growing successes of both the Vail Ranch and the granite industry south of town, it became increasingly difficult for the two businesses to obtain cash for payroll, often traveling to Riverside or other cities to a financial institution. The idea occurred to Mahlon Vail that Temecula should have its own bank. He was joined by Albert Nienke in promoting the institution and in 1914, it became a reality.

Construction was done by the Remington Company of Los Angeles of the fortress-like two-story concrete building. Solid, 18-inch thick walls of cement were poured by laborers pushing wheelbarrows up ramps and along scaffolding. The building was reinforced with steel rods anchored into steel plates.

Murrieta News 100 years ago

June 5, 1914
Riverside Daily Press

The Farmers' Cooperative club meets at the hall the last Monday night in each month, the object being to encourage fruit and vegetable growing and exchange ideas and experience on all kind of farming, especially the growing of pears with a view to working for a cannery.

June 14, 1914
Riverside Daily Press

William Nelson has traded his blacksmith shop at Murrieta for the Snow residence here (Elsinore). The misses Pauline and Evaline Nelson have joined their father. Mrs. Nelson will return to Elsinore in a few weeks.

June 20, 1914
Riverside Daily Press

W. E. Burr, of the Colton mills, has had warehouse No. 5 at Murrieta recovered with galvanized iron and 2 X 4 sheeting. He is also fixing up a room 10 by 20 adjoining the barber shop for an office. He owns the building.

Rev. Mr. Bormose and family will work for Mr. Torbett of Wildomar in apricot drying. He will be boss in the orchard and Mrs. Bormose and Ruth will cut in the shed.

The Bank (Continued from Page 2)

Photographs taken during the construction show the Escallier & Winkels General Merchandise Store to the west of the building on Main Street with signage advertising hay and grain. Hitching posts in front and an early gasoline station across the street demonstrate the era of change from horse to mechanized transportation. (The first gasoline station will be a topic for a future article.) Photographs taken after the bank was finished show the Escallier & Winkels store were no longer in that location. There were empty lots to the west and north. Later the Halls moved the telephone switchboard into the café and bus depot they built next door to the north. The framework of those buildings is still standing, supporting the adjacent store.

When the First National Bank of Temecula opened in June 1914, Eli Barnett, a local merchant was president. Hugo Guenther, the proprietor of the Guenther Murrieta Hot Springs Resort, was vice president. These served as bank managers: C.P. Shumate, Greenfield, Jack Chisholm, John Booge, and Bob Sartain. The following served on the board of five directors at times: John McSweeney, Hugo Guenther, Mahlon Vail, Alexander Borel, Joe Nicholas, Rudolph Brown, Albert Nienke, and Frank Burnham.

There are a lot of stories that can be told about both the livery stable and of the bank, including ones about the explosion at the livery stable and the one and only bank robbery, but those stories will be told another time.

A less well-know story was when "Hooley" Freeman, a fun-loving prankster whose father was foreman at the Vail Ranch and whose sister Agnes was the teller during the robbery mentioned above, made a bet that he could ride his horse into the bank. Instead of making a withdrawal, his horse left a deposit on the bank floor before it bucked and reared and gave everyone a scare. Hooley ended up in jail and when he was presented with a bill for the horse's feed while they were in custody; he sued the bank for it and won the case.

Mahlon Vail controlled the majority of the bank stock and referred to the bank as his "hock shop". Loans were at times made on collateral, like a pawn shop. In the early days, loans were limited to \$2,500 regardless of the status of the applicant or his collateral. During the years as a bank, there were meeting rooms upstairs, and for a while in the early 1930s Paul Strelner operated the Hotel Paul in three upstairs apartments.

Erle Stanley Gardner wrote in a 1967 issue of the High Country that the bank went through the depression without foreclosing on any ranch in the community. But in 1941 a new manager extended several sizable loans to a friend who was "just on the verge of

President's Message by Dick Fox

At our monthly meeting May 19, TVHS welcomed three of the scholarship recipients that were selected by our committee. Lynn, Cheryl, and Bonnie along with Peggy Webb's super assistance provided an incredible array of refreshments – including a chocolate cake.

After the reception period those in attendance had an opportunity to meet the parents of these graduating seniors, as well as hear from them about their interests and plans for the future. We will meet the fourth recipient at our June meeting.

It is always refreshing to meet young people who have their feet well planted on the ground, and are moving ahead into the adult phase of life. TVHS can be proud of this project. We have certainly provided encouragement to some fine young people, and it appears that this may become a regular annual event.

Well done TVHS.

Dick Fox, President

The Bank(Continued from Page 3)

making huge dividends". The man's business failed and that ended the legacy of the banking institution in the heart of Old Town. The First National Bank of Elsinore took over its assets.

In 1965, the year after the Vail Ranch sold the land encompassing the island of land of Old Town, a Security Pacific Bank opened across Main Street from The Bank, in a building adjoining today's Rosa's Cantina. As time passed and the population grew exponentially, one bank after another was established in Temecula, until now, when we have more banks and credit unions than can be easily counted and there are three Bank of America branches alone.

In 1949 Herbert Leatham bought the bank building and reopened the upstairs hotel. After Herbert died, his nephew Joe Leatham and his family used the downstairs as a residence. In the 1950s, realtor Frank C., Cotter had an office in the building. In 1965, Bob and Jean Reininger bought it and opened it as an antique shop "Sign of the Pitcher" advertising "Antiques and Rare Books".

Finally in 1978 Dave Covarrubias and his family brought it to its current status as The Bank of Mexican Food. When he sold the business in 2007 Craig and Christy Puma bought the building and are not only proprietors of their restaurant, but are also huge promoters of Old Town Temecula. They have opened a patio area for outdoor drinks and dining. Tourists, vintage car enthusiasts frequent their business where the dining room is decorated with memorabilia from the building's past.

At 5 pm on June 10, 2014, the Pumas invite the public to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of the bank. Also, at 5 pm on June 11, the public is invited to watch the Old Town Temecula Gunfighters reenact the robbery of 1930.

In 1935 the railroad tracks were removed and the depot was torn down, but Old Town Temecula remains and the solid bank building is standing strong one hundred years after it first opened. The Temecula Valley Historical Society salutes all those who have kept the legacy alive through the century of service.

Please join us for a
"Meet & Greet" time
at 5:30 PM on Monday, June 23rd,
prior to the meeting
at 6:00 PM.

We would like to get to know you.

REFRESHMENTS
will be served!