

Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

April 2016

Volume 1 – Issue 1

*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.*

2016 Officers

President Jeffery G. Harmon
Vice President Annette Jennings
Secretary Carol Sierra
Treasurer Jenny Mayoral

Directors

Committee Chairs

Research & Preservation

Public Relations

Membership

Program Speakers

Projects

Events/Education

Newsletter Editor
Jeffery G. Harmon

A Publication of the
Murrieta Valley Historical Society
Murrieta, CA
951- 397-4862
Email:
murrietahistoricalsociety@gmail.com



The original 1887 church bell displayed in the new
Murrieta Methodist Church courtyard
(Photo by Jeffery Harmon)

Remembering the Murrieta Methodist Church Arson Fire By Jeffery G. Harmon

On April 10, 1963, as the town residents slept, the electric siren suddenly rang out at the Murrieta Volunteer Fire Station. Eleven year old Pat Jennings jumped out of bed to see what was happening. His father, Bill Jennings, who was a volunteer firefighter, had gotten dressed and raced out the front door. He did not have to travel far to locate the fire. Adjacent from the Jennings residents, the Murrieta Methodist Church at the corner of A Street and Washington Avenue was engulfed in flames.

The Murrieta Volunteer Firefighters had formed in 1947. During its first year, the Murrieta Methodist Church bell would call them to action. In 1948, Murrieta's first fire station was built behind the Murrieta Machine Shop on C Street. A new civil defense electric siren was installed.

(Continued on Page 2)

Calendar Of Events

Monthly Meetings

Wednesday, April 6th
at 6:00 p.m. at the
Jennings residence

Wednesday, May 4th
at 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday June 1st
at 6:00 p.m.

Local Events

Sunday, April 24th
11:30 a.m. to 4:30
p.m.
The 69th Annual
Fireman's BBQ

Saturday, June 25,
City of Murrieta's 25th
Birthday Bash

Membership Activity

New Member

Renewals

(Fire Continued from Page 1)

If there was an emergency in town, residents could call the fire chief, Raymond Thompson, or they could call the Murrieta Machine Shop. Outside the bay doors there was a switch that could be thrown to sound the alarm.

When the siren rang out, all the town dogs would howl in protest. Inside the station, a chalkboard was used to announce where the fire was located. If a volunteer arrived after the truck had left the station, he could look at the board and join the crew. The Murrieta children would jump on their bicycles and race to the station to see where the action was.

As Bill Jennings approached the church fire, he probably saw Pastor Tom Warmer, who lived in the parsonage next to the church, standing outside his residence with a few personal belongings. As the town gathered, the volunteer firefighters knew there was nothing they could do to save the seventy-six year old structure. The older children raced into the parsonage and began pulling furniture out in case it too would succumb to the flames.

The firefighters decided to try and save the pastor's residence. They soaked the walls facing the church with water. The heat shattered the windows, but in the end, their efforts saved the fifty-four year old residence.

According to family lore, John Dunham had approached the front of the church, when suddenly the church bell came crashing down. Bill Jennings quickly grabbed John and pulled him to safety. In the end, everyone stood back and watched as the old Methodist church's roof came crashing down with a violent roar.

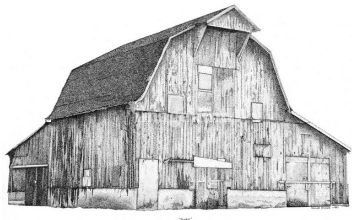
As the sun rose over the Murrieta Valley, the church was a heap of smoldering rubble. The air was thick with the smell of smoke as firefighters finally put out the remaining embers. In the weeks ahead, Murrieta children explored the vacant church lot and gathered long rusty square nails.

The Methodist Church was rebuilt at the corner of Kalmia Street and Adams Avenue. The bell, melted and gnarled, was recovered and rests on a monument in the new church courtyard. Today, the parsonage is the home of the Murrieta Valley Funeral Home. The original church

SAVE OUR HISTORY

Top Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties 2016

1. Burnett/Lakeman House
2. Howard Sykes Ranch on Adams Avenue
3. Raymond Thompson House
4. Doolittle House
5. Judge William Thorne/Curtis Thompson House
6. Hutchinson House
7. Buchanan House
8. 1910 House
(24370 Adams Ave)
9. 1937 House
(24570 Washington Ave)
10. Murrieta Equestrian Center



A square nail from the church rubble collected by Pat Jennings

(Fire Continued from Page 3)

footprint is underneath the funeral home's parking lot. Pat Jennings followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Murrieta Fire Department. Deputy Fire Chief Pat retired on November 5, 2015 after 28 years of serving the Murrieta community.

If you have memories of the 1963 fire, please share them with us. Together we can preserve Murrieta's rich history.

From the Murrieta Archives:

January 14, 1921
By Olive Miller

Saturday evening about 5 o'clock the large barn owned by George Lambert took fire in some unknown manner and in just a short time was all in flames as a north wind was blowing. Eight or ten tons of hay, 50 chickens, and \$100 worth in machinery besides the barn was his loss at least \$1000. Vernon James lost between 25 and 50 tons of hay, which was insured. A. J. Sykes lost 175 tons of hay, insured, and 25 tons of rent hay for the Pauba ranch. The wind carried the fire to the barns and shed of the Fountain House, and only by strenuous efforts of the citizens, was the hotel and tank house saved. Mrs. K. E. Sleeper's loss is about \$2500. She wishes to thank everyone who worked so hard to save her home and helped in the readjustment and caring for the furniture.

At 6 o'clock Monday morning the Holiness church was discovered to be on fire. As a high wind was blowing, it soon destroyed the building and but for the timely sprinkle of rain, that end of town might have burned, as the wind blew the burning shingles all over the block. No one knows the origin of the fire. The Holiness people wish their friends to know that they will hold services in the cottage across the street by the guild hall until they can rebuild.

The fire coming so soon after the one Saturday evening looks as though the fire bug had come to Murrieta.

MURRIETA HISTORY MUSEUM

It is the desire of the Society to establish a museum in Murrieta's Historic Downtown in order to preserve and present the rich and diverse history of our city.

The Society is in need of a building space donation for our non-profit group.

Please contact us if you have suggestions or contributions.



President's Message

Jeffery Harmon

"Why doesn't Murrieta have a society preserving and promoting the historic legacy of the Murrieta Valley?"

This question has been asked over and over by concerned parties through the years. Temecula, Wildomar and Lake Elsinore are cities with a historical society, yet Murrieta does not.

The simple answer that has been given is that the City of Murrieta decided to have a historic commission rather than a historical society. Key historical preservationists were placed on the commission, but they had no power other than to advise the city of the historical significance of an area that was going to be developed.

The City recently disbanded the historic commission, and there is a concern that Murrieta's historical treasures will be lost.

When asked about a Murrieta History Museum, people are quick to mention the Heritage Room at the Murrieta Public Library. However, during the recession, the archivist position was discontinued. Today, Librarian Laura Davis oversees the room, the reference desk, and events. The room is a depository of records available for research, but it does not have the space to showcase the vast artifacts that represent Murrieta's history.

It is the hope of the Society, that a group of people will band together to rescue what historical sites are left in the valley and help preserve and promote their historical value to the next generation.

If you have a passion for local history, please consider becoming a member of our society. Together we can preserve Murrieta's past, for future residents and guests to explore and enjoy.

If you want more information, please contact me:

My personal email: jethrosire@yahoo.com

My personal cell number: (951) 837-5905
