



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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February 2018

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.

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Murrieta Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 1341
Murrieta, CA 92564
951-387-4862
Email:
info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org



Earnest and Mary Lakeman standing outside Lakeman's Lunch Room on Washington Avenue (Source: E Hale Curran Collection)

The Lakeman Family

By Jeffery G. Harmon

The Lakeman House located at 24780 Washington Avenue is named after its former residents, the Lakeman family. The property was located on the county road, known as the Inland Highway. As more automobiles traveled through Murrieta, Earnest Lakeman saw an opportunity to open a café for the weary travelers. The Lakeman Lunch Room would

later be known as Ray's Murrieta Café. Though he did not build the house, Earnest Lakeman's name has been associated with the property for over a hundred years.

Earnest F. Lakeman was born in 1857 in Hanover, Germany. He immigrated to America on May 20, 1872 at the age of 15. It is unknown when he traveled from New York City and settled in Los Ange-



The Murrieta Garage, 1917. Dr. John Sturges seated in the back of the car with James Witcher posed to provide service. Note the two palm trees in the background. The one on the left is still standing in the front yard to this day. (Source: E Hale Curran collection)

les, California. In June 1901, he married Mary Jackson Witcher Loudon. Two years later, in October 1903, they bought the Murrieta house and property from Rachel Burnett for \$1,000.

Abram Burnett, Rachel's husband, built the house in 1885. When he died in 1899, Rachel rented the house to former county supervisor Henry Clay Thompson. She then moved to Long Beach to be near family and friends. By 1903, she had chosen to sell the property. She may have met the Lakeman family in the Los Angeles social scene, or she may have been in-

troduced to them through her niece, Ollie Zimmerman, who would marry James Witcher, Mary Lakeman's son.

Mary Jackson was born April 15, 1850 in Mississippi. She first married John Witcher and they lived in Texas. They had two sons, James (1872) and Adam (1873). John died and Mary married a second time to Mr. Loudon. They had one son, Clarence Webster Loudon (1881). It is unknown what happened to Mary's second husband. Mary and her third husband, Earnest, had no children.

After Earnest Lakeman

bought the property, he rented it to E. A. Stanley and his wife who lived in the house from February to May 1905. Frank N. Sizelove and his family then rented the house from June to October 1905. Frank had moved from Menifee to Murrieta to be near Doctor John Sturges. Frank was paralyzed after his gun accidentally dropped, discharged and he was shot in the back.

When Earnest and Mary Lakeman finally moved to Murrieta, Earnest worked at the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. Meanwhile he planted a small



From left to right: Mrs. Mary Lakeman, James Witcher, Mr. Earnest Lakeman, and grandson, Elmer Loudon. The Lakeman House is named for its former residents.
(Source: E. Hale Curran Collection)

orchard of pears, apples, figs, nectarines, and cherries. He then opened a small fruit stand on his property and began selling his homegrown products. In 1909, he expanded his business and built a confectionary store.

“Mr. Lakeman’s store is on the automobile road from Los Angeles to San Diego, where the weary traveler can refresh himself with ice cream, cold drinks, and a good smoke.” (August 15, 1911, *Riverside Independent Enterprise*)

Mary Lakeman’s son, James Witcher, had married Ollie Zimmerman by 1906 and had settled in Murrieta. They

had one adopted daughter, Gladys. In 1908, James found employment working in a Winchester warehouse for William Burr and the Globe Milling Company of Colton.

In October 1914, James Witcher opened the Murrieta Garage at the corner of Washington Avenue and Juniper Street. This was on the Lakeman property directly south of the house and store. Witcher had a gas pump and a metal building used as a mechanic’s workshop. The garage business increased as traffic grew along the developing Inland Highway.

The highway also

brought to town a criminal. On the evening of October 27, 1914, John J. Maginness, age 52, robbed the Lakeman store of \$80 and merchandise. He made his getaway and reached Elsinore where he spent the night. In the morning he hired an automobile and drove to Corona.

When the robbery was discovered, Murrieta notified authorities in Elsinore, Corona, Santa Ana, and San Diego. Officers arrested Maginness in Corona and transferred him to the county jail. He was charged with second degree burglary and sentenced to San Quentin prison for one year.



The Lakeman House, October 13, 2017

Photo by Dan Roque

The Lakemans visited on occasion Adam Witcher and his family in San Diego. Adam had been a prospector in his younger years. He married Bertha Kauffmann on July 5, 1900 in Los Angeles and they had five children. They settled in San Diego where Adam opened a mattress upholstery business. In 1908, he built a mattress factory, but two months later a capitalist bought him out. He then began buying and selling real estate.

After a few years, he bought a restaurant near Boulevard, California, and named it the White Star Café. He operated the business for over twenty years. He died at his daughter's home in Linda Vista on June 16, 1945.

Little is known about

Mary Lakeman's son, Clarence Loudon. He married Augusta "Gussie" Knolbauch on December 13, 1900 in Los Angeles. Gussie's parents were German immigrants who came to America in 1850. They were tailors by trade, and operated out of their home. They lived with the Loudon family in 1920 and Gussie was a seamstress.

The Loudons settled in Huntington Park and raised two boys, Elmer (1902), and Arthur (1906). Clarence and his family would visit Murrieta on occasion. Elmer sometimes had an extended stay with the Lakemans. Clarence died on August 7, 1950 in Los Angeles County.

Around 1916, Earnest Lakeman renovated and re-branded his store. His new

business was called the Lakeman Lunch Room. Jack Hamilton, a local Murrieta carpenter, built the iconic portico for the café in the early 1920s. In December 1918, Lakeman began building a rooming house on the lot adjoining his store. The new building was completed in April 1919. With his expanded business he now offered food and lodging for travelers on the Inland Highway.

Earnest Lakeman sold his home and café in December 1924 to Mr. and Mrs. Henry J. Eilers, also German immigrants. Lakeman then moved to Lynwood, California and opened another restaurant. Meanwhile, James Witcher remained in Murrieta while his wife, Ollie, cared for her ailing father, Henry S. Zimmerman.

Henry Zimmerman was a Civil War veteran, and an early Murrieta pioneer. He died quietly in his sleep on April 11, 1927. He was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery. Following his father-in-law's death, James Witcher leased the Murrieta Garage to Harry Lewis, of Elsinore, on August 1, 1927. The Lewis family then moved into the Witcher home, and James and Ollie moved to Los Angeles.

Ollie Witcher died on January 3, 1929 in Los Angeles. James moved to Lynwood and operated a trucking business in 1930. According to the census, he owned a radio and a home valued at \$4,000. He employed a housekeeper, Olive Bergne, and had a boarder,

Tommy Bergne, age six.

James Witcher married a second time to Mrs. Cora Mae Knapp on March 21, 1931. Cora was a renowned singer. It was claimed at the time that she was one of four female baritone singers in the United States. She often sang for special occasions and community events in Elsinore and Riverside.

James and Cora Witcher moved back to their Murrieta home in January 1932. Three years later Earnest and Mary Lakeman also moved back to Murrieta in April 1935. The Lakemans began to build a new home on the Witcher property.

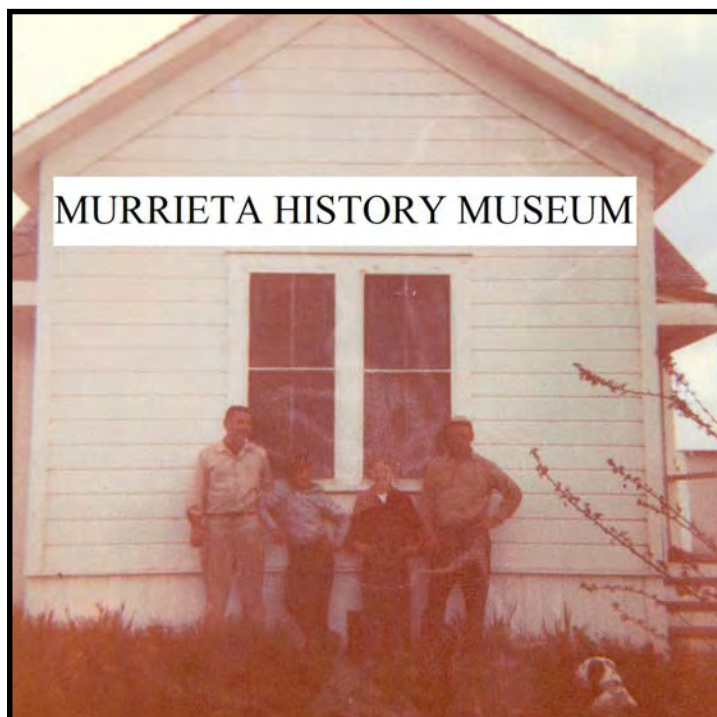
Earnest Lakeman died on November 12, 1935, and was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery. Following his death Mary Lakeman moved to Los Angeles. By 1940, she had returned to Murrieta and lived with James and Cora Witcher. She died on December 13, 1942 in Riverside County and was laid to rest next to her husband in an unmarked grave.

Two years later, James Witcher died on July 13, 1944, and was laid to rest in the Laurel Cemetery also in an unmarked grave. As for Witcher's Murrieta Garage, all that remains today is a vacant lot.

Earnest Lakeman is remembered as the man who established a café that has remained standing for over a hundred years. Though they did not build the house, the Lakeman House is so named for its beloved residents. The two historic buildings remain as a testament to a German immigrant and his family that chased after the American dream and found it in the town of Murrieta.



<https://www.gofundme.com/murrietamuseum>



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Murrieta Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 1341
Murrieta, CA 92564

Phone: 951-387-4862

E-mail:
info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org

Next Monthly Board Meeting:

Monday, February 5, 2018 at 5:30 p.m.

Honeycutt Farms Family Restaurant
40477 Murrieta Hot Springs Road, D2
(In the Alta Murrieta Shopping Center)

All members welcome to attend

MURRIETA FIRE: A BRIEF HISTORY



Murrieta Valley Historical Society and retired Murrieta Fire Deputy Chief, Historian, and Murrieta Native Pat Jennings, in partnership with the Murrieta Public Library.

Monday, March 12th, 2018 | 6 PM

Murrieta Public Library, 8 Town Square



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