



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 11, Issue 1

February 2026

*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

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The first Board members in 2016.

Left to right: Jenny Mayoral (Treasurer), Jeffery Harmon (President), Annette Jennings (Vice President), and Carol Sierra (Secretary).

## The Murrieta Valley Historical Society

### 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, Part 1

By Jeffery G. Harmon

This year we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Murrieta Valley Historical Society. We have had many successes, faced multiple obstacles, and have suffered losses. Through the years we have continued to preserve our community's legacy, and to educate people on the rich and diverse history of this area. We thank the board for their leadership, for our members and volunteers for their support, and for the donors who have ensured that we continue to meet goals and to meet operational

and preservation needs. Join us as we look back at the history of the Society.

It all began one day at the Murrieta Public Library in 2015. Rebecca Farnbach, of the Temecula Valley Historical Society, was giving a historical presentation. I was also a TVHS member and attended the event. Afterwards I was approached by Murrieta resident, Jason Brawner and he introduced me to Pat and Annette Jennings.



Volunteers at the Historic Lakeman House and Ray's Café  
on April 15, 2017.

Jason's shared concerns about the Historic Lakeman House and Ray's Café owned by Skip Bezanson. The Jennings and I agreed that some type of action needed to take place to help Skip and to save the property. We discussed the idea of forming a historical society in Murrieta, but the Jennings requested that we discuss it further in the coming year.

In March 2016, Pat and Annette Jennings invited several representatives from various local civic groups to meet at their house to discuss the formation of a historical society. It was a lively conversation with many ideas and suggestions proposed to us. Afterwards, the Jennings and I decided to further discuss our options.

On April 6, 2016, we

gathered at the Jennings residents and formed the Murrieta Valley Historical Society. The Board members were I, as president, Annette Jennings, vice president, Carol Sierra, secretary and Jenny Mayoral, treasurer. Ashley Jennings Bigay was tasked with creating the Society's website, a Facebook account, and an Instagram account.

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, the Jennings hosted a Society booth at the 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Murrieta Fireman's BBQ. Attendees were shown artifacts related to Murrieta's history and stories were shared. Over thirty people signed the interest list as support for the Society began to grow.

Pat Jennings gave the first presentation, Murrieta: Then and Now, at the Murrieta Public Library's community

room on June 6<sup>th</sup>. The event was well attended and received. Later that month, the Society's non-profit status was approved. The Society was then able to open a bank account, and to begin a membership drive, chaired by Annette.

The Society's first community event occurred on July 12<sup>th</sup>. In honor of the City of Murrieta's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, an unearthing of a time capsule event took place at the Murrieta Fire Station #1. The event was a great success, with City officials, city staff, civic leaders and members of the community joining in the celebration. The event provided the opportunity to make connections for future Society endeavors.

The first event the Society held at the Historic Hunt House was on September 12, 2016. We celebrated Murrieta's oldest pioneers in the community with each person receiving a Lifetime Membership. The recipients are living treasurers, with memories, experiences, and connections to the growth and development of our community. We wanted to honor them and to encourage them to share their knowledge with us so that we could preserve the history of Murrieta.

By October, Connie Cain McConnell became a director and was assigned Public Relations chair. Connie represented the Historic Downtown Merchants Association. The HDMA was a group of merchants and residents who pro-

moted businesses and the history in the Downtown area. By 2016, the organization had disbanded, and the remaining funds were transferred to the Historical Society, earmarked for special projects for Pioneer Park on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

As the year came to a close, the Society was growing. As we looked to the New Year, we hoped to find a location for board meetings, historic presentations, and a location for a museum. We never imagined that Skip Bezanson and Ray's Café would create an opportunity for us to reach many of our goals.

The Bezanson family opened Ray's Café in 1950 and

operated it until 2006. Skip was the last member of the family to live at the Historic Lakeman House next to the café. The City officials paid Skip a wellness check at his home in early 2017. It was determined that the property was unfit for occupancy and Skip was forced to move to his sister, Muriel's home in Hemet.

The City determined that the property needed to be cleaned up due to safety concerns for the community. The swift solution was to raze the buildings and bulldoze the property. This provided a golden opportunity for the young Historical Society to step in and assist the City.

On April 8, 2017, a small crew of Society volunteers arrived at the Bezanson property and began a four month cleanup project in partnership with the City, Waste Management, Casey Jurado and Jason Brawner. During our time at the property, we recovered over 10,000 photographs, documents, and artifacts related to Murrieta's history. All historic items were donated by the Bezanson family. Then on August 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> the project came to a close when we held a large yard sale at the property for the remaining items.

On March 14, 2017, we met with Brian Ambrose, Lea Kolek, and Michelle Hamilton at the Historic Hunt House to dis-



On September 12, 2016, Murrieta pioneers were presented with a Lifetime Membership.

Front row: Alice Vose ( 1928-2020 ) and Paulette Lee ( 1935- 2026 )

Second row: Dudley Sykes ( 1946-2021 ) Donna Garrison Lent, Peggy Thompson Goffman, Mary Alice Dunham Kean ( 1938-1922 ) and Marvin Curran ( 1928-2022 )

Back row: Connie Cain McConnell, Les Dunham, Calvin Sykes and Gilbert "Skip" Bezanson ( 1941-2019 )

cuss the feasibility of using the facility to establish a museum. One month later, we stood before the City Council and made a formal request.

The City realized that we had accumulated many items from the Bezanson property and they agreed that those items needed a museum. However, in order for the museum to be opened to the public, the Historic Hunt House needed to have an ADA ramp installed. Fundraising efforts began for the project by Annette Jennings.

The Historic Hunt House was leased to the Society on February 23, 2018. Pat Jennings oversaw repairs to the building. Pancho Mayoral, a professional contractor and painter, volunteered his services to repaint the exterior and interior of the museum.

On April 9, 2018, Mayor Jonathan Ingram met with Pat Jennings at the Historic Hunt House to discuss the project. Mayor Ingram secured the drafting engineer drawings for the proposed ADA ramp in order for it to be approved by the City Planning Department. He also arranged a meeting with Waste Management, who donated \$6,000 toward the project.

Annette Jennings was nominated to be the Museum Director in August. She had begun receiving donated furniture for future exhibits and the research room. She began planning out the exhibits and deciding upon the museum layout.



The Murrieta Museum Opening Day Ceremony. Alice Vose and Marvin Curran cutting the ribbon with Mayor Pro-Tem Randon Lane and County Supervisor Chuck Washington.

Two Eagle Scout projects were also being constructed as hands on exhibits for the museum.

Fundraising efforts continued for the ramp. On September 12<sup>th</sup> a tour and a dinner fundraiser was held at the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. The Society raised \$1,000 for the museum. Later, a local contractor and his friends made several large donations that helped the Society reach their goal. By November, construction began on the ramp at a cost of \$12,000.

The Murrieta Museum opened on April 28, 2019 during the 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Murrieta Fireman's BBQ. Alice Vose, 91, and Marvin Curran, 90, the oldest lifelong residents in Murrieta were given the honor of cutting the ribbon and officially opening

the museum. When the door swung open, the crowd poured in.

Afterwards, the museum was opened once a week on Thursdays or by appointment. In the first few months, several groups visited the museum to take a tour and learn about Murrieta's history. I began conducting monthly walking tours of the Historic Downtown District. Behind the scenes, research and preservation were in full swing.

The future looked bright for the museum and we were all excited to share the history of Murrieta with residents and visitors. However, a year later a pandemic swept the world and the Society and the museum faced an uncertain future.

Part 2 to follow

# President's Update

Greetings and Happy New Year! 2025 was another successful year full of activities, events, and museum visitors. The historic sidewalk sticker emblem project was successfully updated and expanded. There are now twenty locations marked in the Historic Downtown District. We want to thank Annette Jennings for coordinating the fundraising and organization of the project, we would like to thank Ashley Jennings Bigay for all her work on the layouts and the website coordination, and we want to thank Pat Jennings prepped for the install of the stickers.

This project update could

not have been possible without the generous donations and sponsorships of the program. Through fundraising efforts, visitors to Murrieta can continue to learn about the rich and diverse history of our community.

As this year begins, we look forward to continuing our Third Grade field trips and other private museum tour events. We would like to thank all of our volunteers that help make these events so successful.

Recently, we had two special guests visit the museum. It was two members of the Juan Murrieta family. We were able to share with them their family's

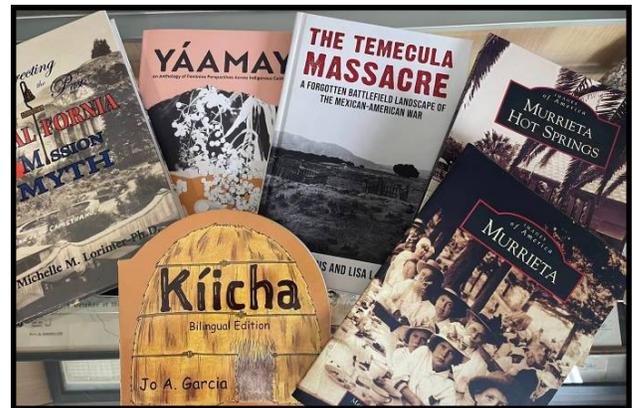
history and to encourage them to assist us in adding to our research. We also discussed the possibility of hosting a Juan Murrieta family reunion at the museum. We hope to continue to meet with the family and learn more about their families.

Please follow us on Facebook or Instagram @murrieta museum or on our website at [info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org)

If you have any questions, please call us at: 951-677-7758

Thank you,

Jeffery G. Harmon



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**The General  
Monthly Board Meeting  
is held on the second  
Monday at 5:30 p.m.  
Please join us at  
the Murrieta Museum**



**MUSEUM Hours**  
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The Murrieta Museum,  
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