



# Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 6, Issue IV

July 2021

*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

Email:  
[info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org)



Henry's Place (Source: Sykes Collection)

## Henry's Place

By Jeffery G. Harmon

Henry's Place was a restaurant owned by Henry and Alwine Eilers. It was where the former Ray's Murrieta Café on Washington Avenue is presently located. The Eilers operated their restaurant for twenty-five years, but only a few people today remember them.

Henry J. Eilers was born May 11, 1877 in Oldenburg, Germany. He was the son of Henry and Helen (Adix) Eilers. When he was thirteen years old, he sailed to New York City and landed in December 1890. He later moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he

met another German immigrant, Alwine L. Semmelhack.

Alwine was born April 25, 1880 in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. She was the daughter of Martin and Sopy (Holm) Semmelhack. Her parents and their five children immigrated to America and arrived in New York City on May 11, 1894. They then traveled west and settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Martin and Sopy's sixth child, Charles, was born there in January 1895.

Henry and Alwine were

E 462	
Family name Eilers	Given name or names Henry
Address MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN	
Certificate no. (or vol. and page) 9808 V 22	Title and location of court CIRCUIT
Country of birth or allegiance Germany	When born (or age) 1877
Date and port of arrival in U. S. Dec 1890 NEW YORK	Date of naturalization 9-12-1905
Names and addresses of witnesses Fred Holm Martin Semmelhack	
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Form No. 1-IP. 14-3202	

Henry Eilers Naturalization Card, September 12, 1905. His father-in-law, Martin Semmelhack, and possibly Martin's brother-in-law, Fred Holm, were named as witnesses. Source: familysearch.org

married in Milwaukee on October 31, 1903. Two years later, they became naturalized citizens. Later, the couple moved to Los Angeles, California. When America entered World War I, Henry signed up for the draft. At the time he was working as a waiter for Percy Staley at the Rincon Inn in Carpentaria, California. By 1920, Henry was working at another restaurant in Los Angeles. The Eilers then found work at Guenther's Murrieta Hot Springs Resort and began making friends within the community.

In December 1924, Earnest Lakeman, a German immigrant and owner of the Lakeman Lunch Room in Murrieta, sold his business and residence to the Eilers. The business was renamed Henry's Place and opened in January 1925. The menu was described as German-American cuisine. It is believed that Henry hired local carpenter,

Jack Hamilton, to construct the iconic portico on the front of the restaurant.

Alwine's family often came to Murrieta to visit. Her sister, Margaret, married Mr. Jacoby and they lived on Catalina Island. Mrs. Margaret Jacoby was a frequent visitor at her sister's home in Murrieta. In 1928, Alwine's brother, Frederick, and his family traveled from Wisconsin to Southern California to visit.

After Mrs. Eiler's mother passed away, her father, Martin, moved to Murrieta and lived with them. Martin passed away on June 16, 1939 and was cremated.

Henry's Place was also a gathering place for celebrations. For example, Richard Heine and Helene Langer, German immigrants and employees of the Hot Springs, were married in May

1931 in the Murrieta Methodist Episcopal Church. The minister read the ceremony partly in English and in German. After the ceremony, a wedding dinner was held at the restaurant.

Another celebration took place at the restaurant in March 1937. Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Coppel of Perris celebrated their 15<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary by having dinner at Henry's Place.

A special celebration took place at Henry's Place on May 7, 1944. Fourteen people gathered to celebrate with Alwine her 50 years living in America. She was proud that she was an American citizen and grateful for the opportunities the country had offered her.

The Eilers did not have any children of their own, but they were supporters of the Murrieta Grammar School. In December 1929, Mrs. Eiler prepared a supper for the seventh graders at the restaurant.

Mr. Waechter, a friend of the Eilers, came to live with them for awhile. John Fred Herman Waechter was born in Bielefeld, Germany on October 17, 1882. In 1907, he immigrated to the United States. He made his way west, and eventually found work as a cook at the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort. He worked there for a number of years. In 1930, he was listed as a butcher.

Mr. Waechter never married, and his only known relative lived in Germany. He died on April 10, 1973 and was laid to

rest in the Elsinore Valley Cemetery. His personal trunk containing a few photographs was left behind in the Eiler's home.

The Eilers operated their restaurant seven days a week without missing a day. However, Henry's Place closed for the first time in 18 years in August 1943. After it was closed for one day, it reopened. No explanation was given for the closure in the local newspaper.

In February 1945, Henry Eilers fell and broke his hip. He was sent to the Riverside Community Hospital to recover from his injury. He became ill from an infection and died at his Murrieta home one month later. It is believed that he was cremated.

After Henry's death, Alwine continued to operate the restaurant. The first public tele-

phone booth was installed next to Henry's Place in January 1946. One month later, a thief broke into the booth and stole the money.

In 1950, Alwine leased the restaurant to Ray Bezanson. Ray was a musician, a composer and a songwriter. His band had played at the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort for over ten years. Ray renamed the restaurant, the Murrieta Café. Three years later, Ray bought the restaurant and renamed it, Ray's Murrieta Café.

Alwine continued to live in her house next to the café. Her brother, Nickolas and his wife, Caroline, lived in Wisconsin. During the 1950s, they would spend their winters living with Alwine in Murrieta. Caroline died in the Hemet Valley Hospital on February 25, 1957. She was a member of the Chris-

tian Science Church and was cremated.

In February 1956, Alwine was gravely ill and sent to the Hemet Valley Hospital. She recovered, but her health continued to decline. She died in her home on December 20, 1959 and was also cremated.

After Mrs. Eilers death, Ray Bezanson purchased her home. A few possessions were claimed by her surviving family members. The Eilers left no heirs, and no grave markers, but only a small private German library in their former home. As time passed, Henry's Place became a distant memory. Today we recognize and remember the Eilers' for their hard work and their contributions to the community.

Here is a peak inside Herman Waechter's personal trunk. Two colorized framed photos and a personal satchel are founded in the top drawer. Underneath the drawer there are two photographs with no names. An old woman, who could be his mother in Germany and another photo that might be of Herman and his brother. When Herman died in 1973, there were no known relatives to claim his belongings. So his trunk remained in the house, until it was removed in 2017. Today it is in the Murrieta Museum archive room



# Museum Update

The Murrieta Museum is now open every Thursday from 1-4 pm. The museum is located at 41810 Juniper Street in the Historic Downtown Murrieta.

The museum will now be open on the first Saturday of every month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

This past month, the museum has received a donation of photos, documents and artifacts re-

lated to the history of the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort from Tony Guenther. Marvin Curran donated Murrieta items and photos from his mother, E. Hale Curran's collection. I am excited to get these items on display soon.

Special thanks to Excel Landscape for their sponsorship. They will be helping us create the Al

Vollbrecht Memorial Garden located in front of the museum. Excel will be working with Yojiro Iba to complete this project.

If you are interested in a private or a group tour of the museum, please call: 951-397-4862 for an appointment.

Thank you,  
Annette Jennings



Tony Guenther donated this fiber glass copy of the Fritz Guenther Memorial he had commissioned. The memorial, is located at Pond Park in Murrieta. This is one of many Murrieta Hot Springs items that was recently donated to the museum.




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40477 Murrieta Hot Springs Road, D2  
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*Murrieta Valley Historical Society*  
**HISTORIC  
WALKING TOURS**

**Saturday, July 10 and Saturday, July 24**

**9 to 10:30 AM | \$5 donations  
Meets at the Alley Way  
24810 Washington Ave**



**venmo**



**MURRIETA VALLEY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PO BOX 1341, MURRIETA, CA 92564  
(951) 387-4862  
MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG**

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

Phone: 951-387-4862

E-mail:  
info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org

### Next General Board Meeting TBA

General Board Meetings are virtual in a Zoom meeting format. Anyone interested in joining us, please send an email to info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org and we will email you the Zoom link before the meeting



The Murrieta Museum,  
41810 Juniper Street  
at Hunt Memorial Park.

## BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

**JOIN ONLINE!**  
[MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG)

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murrietahistoricalsociety.org  
info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org  
(951) 387-4362  
PO Box 1341, Murrieta, CA 92564