



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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February 2025

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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Looking north, the Murrieta Creek flooded Front Street in Temecula.
The Temecula Valley Garage is on the right.
Source: The Fernald Family Collection

The Flood of 1916 by Jeffery G. Harmon

There have been multiple floods in the Murrieta Valley over the past 150 years. The floods have caused devastation, and some have changed the course of local history. The Flood of 1916 was one of the largest floods in the area up to that time. It was a costly natural disaster that damaged roads, bridges, railroads and property.

December 1915 was a wet month when over two inches of rain had fallen on the dry valley landscape. Then on December

30th in the middle of the night, the temperatures dropped and the rain turned to snow. In the early morning light, residents awoke to the largest snowfall in Western Riverside County since 1882.

In Elsinore, between five to eight inches of snow fell in the area. The snow's weight caused limbs to break off of pepper trees, fruit trees and shade trees. Roads were impassible until the snow could be cleared away by the residents.



Looking north during the Flood of 1916 from the intersection of Front and Main streets in Temecula. The First National Bank of Temecula is on the left and St. Catherine's Church in the center.

Menifee Valley received eight inches of snow. The gum trees were torn to pieces and stripped of their limbs. The snow had stopped the ploughs for several days, but the farmers were grateful for the moisture as the ground was getting too dry to work.

It snowed for about five hours in Murrieta. Over a foot of snow blanketed the valley. The olive tree branches, already full of olives, broke under the snow's weight. The heavy snow caused the two large hay barns owned by J. V. Thompson and the Auld brothers to collapse.

By January 1916, the rains returned and the snow melted away. The rain continued through the month, but then on January 16th a large rainstorm struck the valley. The rains fell for two days dropping over nine inches of rain in Temecula. The Murrieta Creek rose as the rains

continued to fall. The Pechanga Creek that flowed at the base of the Temecula Grade into the Temecula Creek rose six feet over the Inland Highway Bridge.

From January 18th to January 26th, over 2.5 more inches of rain fell in the valley. Then on January 27th a second storm struck the area. Over 1.67 inches of rain fell on that day. The creeks and river were already full from the ongoing rainfall, but now the waters poured over the banks and flooded the streets of Temecula.

The waters washed out the San Jacinto River Bridge in Elsinore. The railroad between Perris and Murrieta was damaged by the floodwaters in Railroad Canyon and cut off services to Murrieta.

Undeterred, Murrieta residents found ways to get needed supplies until the roads and railroad tracks could be re-

paired. The Guenthers, owners of the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort, drove their departing guests in their bus through Menifee Valley to the Perris train depot. New resort guests would then take the bus back to Murrieta.

Albert K. Small drove his Ford delivery car to Perris twice to pick up supplies for his general store. Murrieta residents received no mail or newspapers for about a week. Temporary bridges were built in order to traverse flooded areas.

It was estimated that it would cost one thousand dollars to repair the road damage between Murrieta and Temecula. Three bridges were washed out in the Temecula District. The Pauba Bridge would cost \$10,000 to rebuild. The Barnett Bridge south of Murrieta over the Santa Gertrudis Creek was also damaged in the floods.

Though no bridges were

washed out in Murrieta, floodwaters covered the land causing considerable damage. The waters brought debris that littered the farm fields and pastures.

In Temecula, the floodwaters reached record heights. "Mr. Frank Fernald, of Temecula, reported that the flood of 1891 in Temecula Canyon rose to a height of about 2 feet on the trunk of a large oak tree on the bank at the ford. A neighbor, who was with him, said this height was very close to the peak of the flood of 1884. This tree was washed out during the flood of January, 1916, after the water had risen about 12 feet on the trunk." (Southern California Floods of January 1916, Department of the Interior, 1918)

In Murrieta, Isaiah Wickerd died on January 25th at the age of 84 at his son's house. The funeral was delayed for four days because of the heavy rain and high waters. As the storm subsided, the funeral proceeded at the Laurel Cemetery in Murrieta.

In February, less than an inch and a half of rain fell in the area. As the rains stopped, the waters receded and the Murrieta Creek returned to its normal levels. Soon mail and newspapers were being delivered to Murrieta from Corona via Elsinore. By the end of the month, repairs had been completed on the railroad and train service began again.

Though there was significant damage in the valley, the winter storm brought much needed rain for the Murrieta

farm land. After assessing the storm damage, the Riverside County Highway Commission proposed a \$700,000 bond to be issued for road and bridge repairs throughout the county. The county supervisors and members of the highway commission debated the issue for several months. Road repairs were minimal and it is unknown when the bridges were rebuilt.

Within a year, the Flood of 1916 was quickly forgotten as America entered World War I. Funding for county roads was diverted to the war effort. After the war, the county resumed efforts to repair and maintain the roads and highways. Sadly, more floods would strike the valley in the coming years.

Over 100 years later, improvements have been made in the area. The Murrieta Creek has been deepened and widened in Temecula in order to contain floodwaters. Vacant land between Cherry Street and the Santa Gertrudis Creek has been set aside as a flood basin. Main Street Bridge in Temecula and the new Guava Street Bridge in Murrieta no longer have pylons embedded in the creek, thus allowing debris to pass. Finally, the Adams Avenue levee along the east bank of the Murrieta Creek from Guava to Elm streets prevents flooding in the commercial district. It is the hope that these measures will protect residents and properties from future flooding disasters.



The floodwaters of 1916 reached the First National Bank of Temecula and the Welty Building behind it.

**MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
A FREE PRESENTATION**

HISTORY OF THE MURRIETA FIRE DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL BBQ

**SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025
10 AM | FREE PRESENTATION**

Murrieta Museum
41810 Juniper Street, Murrieta, CA 92562

Retired Murrieta Deputy Fire Chief, Murrieta Native, and Historian Pat Jennings will talk about the origins of Murrieta's longest running event, The Fireman's BBQ (1948-Present).



MURRIETA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PO BOX 1341, MURRIETA, CA 92564
MURRIETAHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

Find all you need on our linktr.ee
linktr.ee/murrietahistory



Museum Update

Greetings,

The Murrieta Valley Historical Society has installed two more historic markers in the Downtown area. This makes a total of 17 markers installed to date. The two new markers were placed for the Hunt House/Museum and Murrieta's first fire station on C Street. We would like to give a big thank you to Paul & Kathi Price for their sponsorship of the two latest markers and for their continued support.

The museum has had three 3rd grade school tours so far this school year with three more scheduled. The students are taught Murrieta's rich and diverse history at the museum and on their Historic Downtown walking tour. They also experi-

ence five hands on activities during their visit at the museum. We would like to thank our volunteers and financial supporters for making these tours a great success.

A new HVAC system has been installed at the museum by the City. We would like to offer a big thank you to the City of Murrieta for this system.

We offer private museum tours

by appointment, private walking tours and historic presentations. If you would like to become a volunteer for the museum contact us at

info@murrietahistoricalsociety.org

or 951-677-7758.

Thank you,

Annette Jennings,

Murrieta Museum Director



THANK YOU PAUL AND KATHI PRICE FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



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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**



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

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

CIRCLE ONE

INDIVIDUAL

\$25/ANNUAL

\$150/LIFE

FAMILY

\$35/ANNUAL

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BUSINESS

\$200/ANNUAL

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