

# TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

March 2019  
Volume 19 Issue 3

*It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Temecula Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.*

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*When it was finished in 1948, the Vail Dam was the largest and most expensive privately built dam in the U.S. — Photo courtesy of Whitney Wilkinson*

### Water Water Everywhere . . . ?

# The Temecula Valley And Its' Water History

By Darell Farnbach

Think of the Temecula Valley as God created it. Visualize a flat pan with an outlet on one side. The flat pan runs up to Lake Elsinore, around to French Valley, up to Sunshine Summit in San Diego County, past Aguanga and around the north side of Mt. Palomar, and down to Pechanga.

The outlet is the Santa Margarita Gorge. The drainage comes from Murrieta Creek, Santa Gertrudis Creek (sort of parallel to Winchester Road), Temecula Creek and Pechanga Creek.

This is what the Native Americans had. It provided them with year-round water, which gave the plants and animals what they needed for their subsistence. The land was very wet and swampy. Ducks, geese and all sorts of water fowl stopped by on their migrations.

When our valley became settled by the Spanish in about 1800 and later by the Mexicans in the 1840s this natural flat pan still provided all the water for the people and their domesticated animals such as sheep, horses and cattle.

Maybe a stream would be diverted to form a small lake or reservoir. Or a hand-dug well would be used for household use. A small orchard or field

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# Temecula Water History

could be planted and would provide for family and livestock and maybe enough to sell to a neighbor.

When California became a state in 1850, Americans started moving into the valley, requiring more water. The newcomers hand-dug wells up to 40 feet deep using a windmill to bring the water up to ground level where it would be stored in a tank. The tank not only provided storage, but also it provided water pressure. You could move the water uphill a little.

By the 1890s San Francisco Savings owned vast amounts of land in the valley and surrounding mountains - land that had been foreclosed on. You might wonder why ranch owners lost their ranches. It was from not having enough water to grow a profitable farm crop. There was a severe drought at that time.

San Francisco Savings formed the Cosmos Land and Water Company, mostly for the purpose of selling the land. They hired engineers to develop elaborate plans for water dams and they formed a water company on paper.

At about the same time, the Temecula Land and Water Company was formed for the same reason. They had a large 4<sup>th</sup> of July party to bring people into the area to buy property, but to no avail.

When Mr. Culver and Mr. Cobb leased part of the Pauba Ranch, Mr. Cobb sank a well over 500 feet down and it was an artesian well. He had tapped into the aquifer. So, that meant that the flat pan not only held water on the top, but there was also water under the pan, a lot of water, one of the largest aquifers in California, I was told.

The Vails bought most of the valley and water rights in 1905 and had more wells drilled. The water table dropped. Vail was using as much water as he could until the owners of the Rancho Santa Margarita downstream noticed they weren't getting all the water they wanted. So around 1917 they filed a lawsuit against the Vail Company. That lawsuit was not settled until 1945. By then the US government had appropriated the Santa Margarita Rancho for the US Marine base - Camp Pendleton - in 1940. So the settlement agreement was made with the Marines.

In the settlement, the Vail Company was required to let a certain amount of water to go freely through the Santa Margarita River.

Mahlon Vail then knew how much water he could keep, so he built the Vail Dam which was the most expensive private dam built in the US at that time. It cost one million dollars to construct the Vail Dam. A pipe runs from the dam to the head of the Margarita Gorge to give Camp Pendleton the amount of water to fulfill the terms of the lawsuit.

When the Vail Company sold their holdings in the Temecula Valley in 1964 the Vail Dam and all the water infrastructure became the basis for the Rancho California Water Company. The first thing they did was to drill two 1,000-foot wells.



**Frank Cobb drinking from an artesian well about 1/2 mile east of the Vail Feed Lot. Cobb & Culver were leasing the Pauba circa 1890's — Photo courtesy Vail Ranch Restoration Assn.**

At some point Rancho Water joined with the Metropolitan Water District. I understand now the aquifer is constantly refilled with Colorado River water.

You can't talk about water without talking about weather. The Indonesian volcano Krakatoa erupted in the winter of 1883 - 84 triggering record rainstorms in the Temecula area that dropped 21 inches of rain in one day, causing major floods including the one in the Santa Margarita Canyon. It washed out the train tracks and ultimately the train route was abandoned.

Beginning in 1916 the Wolf Valley was flooded for a couple of years. In 1980 we had a 100-year-rain. In 1981 we had a second 100-year-rain.

The first time I went up Rancho California Road where Target is in 1981 it was a two lane road. In a ditch on one side was a car buried up to its top. The Wine Country had to have helicopters drop hay for animals cut off by floods. In 1937 and 1993 Old Town was flooded up to 2 feet.

With the re-dredging and widening of the Murrieta Creek through Old Town it is likely it will not flood again. And with the careful refilling of the aquifer from the Colorado River, it is not likely that we will run out of water in the Temecula Valley any time soon.



**View of Temecula Valley circa 1900 — Photo courtesy of Jack Roripaugh Collection**

# News



Bonnie Martland, as Elena Coutts Dear (shown above), will be performing on Sunday, March 3rd at 2:30 p.m. at the Little Temecula History Center (red barn). The program is free and open to the public.

## Future Presentations

Julie Gilbert, as Jean Bethell, will be performing for the American Association of University Women at Bailey's Winery on March 23rd.

Bill Veale, as Jose Estudillo, will be presenting at the Temecula Senior Center on Wednesday, March 27th at 1:00 p.m.

On Sunday, April 7th, at 2:30 p.m. at the Little Temecula History Center, Mindy Johnson, will present Annie Mendenhall Bergman, a well-known business owner, rancher, postmaster, and world traveler who lived most of her life in Aguanga.

## Make Reservations Now

# Special Music Event Set By Scholarship Committee

Mike Chamberlain will be performing at the Merc at the request of the TVHS Scholarship Committee. All proceeds will go to the scholarship fund. The performance will be held on Sunday, March 17 (Saint Patrick's Day) at the Merc from 7 to 9 P.M. Mr. Chamberlain will be doing a program of *World War II Love Songs*, and since the performance will be on St Paddy's Day, will add a few Irish tunes into the mix to help celebrate the day. Known as the "Singing TV Guy," Mike sang Rock N' Roll music in high school and signed a contract with a record label. A tour of duty in Viet Nam intervened, but after his military service he returned to his music career which led to a gig as a radio DJ and eventually into TV news anchoring and sports broadcasting. He has been performing professionally for over 50 years and says music has always been his first love.

So please save the date for what will be an entertaining evening and a great way to celebrate St. Paddy's Day and support our scholarship fund. A donation of \$20 will secure a seat for this event.

There will be a limit of 48 seats, so be sure to make your reservation by contacting directly Bonnie Martland at [bonnie@azteche.com](mailto:bonnie@azteche.com) or by phone at 951-775-6366.

###

## \* Attention \*

**Be sure to check the Calendar of Events for re-scheduled tour to John Rains House on March 20.**

# Children's Books Needed . . .

New or gently used children's books are needed for the Free Little Library at Vail HQ. If you would like to donate some books, please bring them to the Historical Society presentation on Feb. 25 or drop them off at the VaRRA antique store at Vail HQ any Sunday afternoon or Tuesday morning.

**We appreciate your donations of books!**



## ***Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve Remaining 2019 Spring Hikes Schedule***

The schedule for spring hikes in the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve has been released. A variety of educational and informative events are planned, that range from easy to strenuous.

A **New Short Hike** to introduce participants to the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve is a ¾ mile hike to an overview location of the Temecula Canyon. An optional additional ¾ mile hike down into the canyon will be available if desired. Available Saturday, April 27.

**PJ's Bird Walk** is a popular slow paced easy hike specifically geared to observe birds. Bring your binoculars. Sign up for Saturday April 13.

The **Chaparral Hike** is considered a moderate hike of 3 miles over uneven ground. Able to view the Temecula Gorge. Available Saturday, March 9 and Saturday, May 11.

The **Temecula Gorge Hike** is a challenging 6½ mile hike with a 1400' elevation grade change. This hike is available on Sunday April 7th.

The **Highlands Hike** is listed as strenuous and 6 miles in length, also with an elevation change of 1600'. Available on Saturday, March 23rd.

For all hikes it is necessary to RSVP to Beth Cobb at [smerdocenthikes@gmail.com](mailto:smerdocenthikes@gmail.com).

# **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

- Sunday, March 3** — 11 to 4 p.m. Sunday Funday with vendor market by Synergy Social SoCal. Train rides, lawn games for kids, and 25 local vendors.
- Sunday, March 3** — 2:30 p.m. Meet Elena Coutts Dear, a descendant of a prominent Californio family, who lived both at the Rancho Guajome Adobe, and later at Rancho Santa Rosa. Bonnie Martland will present Elena at the Little Temecula History Center (red barn) at time noted. These programs are free and open to the public.
- Saturday, March 9** — 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Vintage Soul Flea Market. 1960s - 1990s fashion & décor. Vintage Memorabilia, art, sweets trailer, retro-handmade Vendors, car show.
- Saturday, March 16** — 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Thistle & Sage Marketplace brings all your favorite vegan foods, makers, and more together in one place. Kombucha on tap, live music, artisan vendors, workshops & more.
- Sunday, March 17** — 11 to 4 p.m. Sunday Funday with vendor market by Synergy Social SoCal. Train rides, lawn games for kids, and local vendors.
- Wednesday, March 20** — Rescheduled tour to John Rains home in Cucamonga. Meet at Red Barn 8:45 am to carpool. Tour cost is \$4 per person. Call Phil Washum at 951-201-0020 to join tour.
- Monday, March 25** — 6:00 p.m. Regular monthly program of the Temecula Valley Historical Society, to be held at the Little Temecula History Center (red barn), Julie Farnbach to give presentation on "The U.S. Constitution". Join us at 5:30 for light refreshments and "Meet & Greet" before the program.
- Sunday, April 7th** — 2:30 p.m. at the Little Temecula History Center, Mindy Johnson, will present Annie Mendenhall Bergman, a well-known business owner, rancher, postmaster, and world traveler who lived most of her life in Aguanga.

## **— Membership News —**

***Please welcome new members:***

***Sandi Marasco***

***Dan Wyncott***

***Thank you for renewing your membership:***

***Arlie Bergman***

***Beth Cobb***