

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



Wolf Store

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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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At Hunting Camp near Vail Lake, Mahlon is seated, other person unknown. Mahlon typically stayed at the Hunting Camp when he was in the area.

Mahlon Vail's Story

He Led Ranch's Growth For Most of His Adult Life

By Rebecca Marshall Farnbach

When we tell someone's story, we start with mentioning their parents. In Mahlon's story, his father's remarkable success story set the scene for Mahlon's life in and love for Temecula.

You may know the story of Mahlon's father Walter who left his home and family in New Jersey on the day he turned twenty-one. With one hundred dollars in his pocket, he left to seek fame and fortune in the West. When Walter didn't strike it rich in the silver mines of Virginia City, Nevada, his Uncle Nathan in Los Angeles urged him to buy a ranch in Arizona to start a cattle business.

Walter and some partners developed a huge ranching enterprise south-east of Tucson and found silver on his land. With his growing success, he believed it was time to marry his longtime sweetheart. In 1881, Walter Vail married Margaret Newhall from New Jersey and brought her to their Empire Ranch home. He had made great improvements to make the bare adobe into a home for a civilized lady. From the adobe with dirt floors and no windows or doors, he eventually built a Victorian 22-room home with electricity and indoor plumbing and a bay window. It must have made a wonderful home for Walter and Margaret to raise their seven children.

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Mahlon was born here in 1890, the fifth of seven children, the fourth of five boys. The name Mahlon is a Bible name from the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. Mahlon Vail was named for his paternal grandfather.

Imagine the life Mahlon and his siblings enjoyed with a million acres and 40,000 cattle. They would have watched seasoned cowboys roping and branding. They may have tagged along as the men hunted and fished, repaired fences, and butchered meat. The boys would have had plenty of room for running and horseback riding. Life was hard work for the grownups but must have been wonderful for the Vail children.

When Mahlon was about eight years old, his Uncle Ed, who also lived at the Empire Ranch, managed a crew that drove 200 head of cattle from their ranch in Arizona to Warner Springs, California, a long and dusty trip to get the cattle to fresh pastureland. We see from Vail family photos that they spent time at the ranch property in Warner Springs, where, again, they enjoyed plenty of running room.

In 1904, when Mahlon's father Walter saw land for sale near Temecula, he bought 87,000 acres of grazing land. Temecula had a railroad station convenient for shipping of cattle to market.

By then, Walter and Margaret and their seven children lived in a prestigious neighborhood in Los Angeles on Mulholland Drive where it was convenient for Walter to manage his many businesses and the children had access to good schools. They depended on ranch foremen to take care of business at the Pauba Ranch as it was called in those days.

By the early 1900s the Vails owned and had developed much of Huntington Beach and many properties in downtown Los Angeles. They owned Santa Rosa Island west of Santa Barbara. They imported thousands of cattle from Mexico and took them to pastures and feed lots to fatten them for market. They would buy cattle at 200 lbs. and sell them at 1,200 lbs. The Vail Company leased the entire San Fernando Valley from Misters Lankersheim and Van Nuys.

While at the height of his success and shortly after purchasing the Temecula ranchos, Walter was crushed between two streetcars in Los Angeles and died at 54 years of age.

Not only did the family reel from the untimely death of their father, but they also had a huge company to manage. The question was who would take care of all of Vails' businesses.

Harry Hefner came from the Empire Ranch in Arizona to Temecula in 1905 to manage things until 1910 "when the boys took over", meaning Walter's sons. Mahlon was just 15 years old when Walter died.

Walter's widow Margaret and her seven children formed the Vail Corporation, and each was assigned an area

of responsibility. Listing them in order of their births, Nathan Russell was president of the Vail Company. Walter, Jr. managed their holdings in Argentina. Mary was a director, William Banning stayed in Arizona with the Empire Ranch. Mahlon was over the Pauba Ranch in Temecula. Edward was in charge of operations on Santa Rosa Island. And Margaret was a director.

When Mahlon turned twenty, he took over the Vail Ranch from Hefner. When he was twenty-nine he married Irene Howard, a socialite from Los Angeles. He built Casa Loma, a beautiful adobe on the hill above the ranch headquarters for their home. Casa Loma had an airstrip and a golf course, which were great for entertaining.

Irene didn't like living in Temecula and didn't feel safe. Mahlon built a secret staircase in the house for Irene to escape to the roof when she was frightened, but she returned to live in Los Angeles. Ranch foreman Louie Roripaugh moved to Casa Loma with his wife and children. Whenever Mahlon was in town, he would stay at his "hunting camp", an adobe building at Vail Lake. This hunting lodge is still standing at Vail Lake and is now a bar. Mahlon often brought friends to hunt, camp and play. He and his buddies would stay at the hunting camp, called "the prison camp" by the family, referring to the use of the place in another era. He no doubt fondly remembered the freedom of his childhood on wide-open land of the Empire Ranch in Arizona and he continued to play well into his adulthood.

While Mahlon was in LA taking care of business, he left the day-to-day management of the Pauba Ranch to his foreman Louie Roripaugh and eventually to



Young Mahlon and wife Irene, perhaps wedding photo.

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his nephew Sandy Wilkinson. Sandy told me that Mahlon had no education but had business smarts like his father Walter.

Many photos show Mahlon as a jokester, and a guy who knew how to have fun. But he possessed the same strategic intelligence as his father. His partners in play, whether golfing, hunting or camping were military officers and luminaries from Hollywood and Los Angeles. His Temecula guests included General Omar Bradley, baseball great Ty Cobb, aviation pioneer Donald Douglas and Temecula author Erle Stanley Gardner.

Mahlon always had a good car. In the early days Mahlon drove Model A or Model T Ford Roadsters, then he graduated to Cadillacs and Oldsmobiles that got beat up on the poor roads of the area.

During Mahlon's leadership at the Pauba/Vail Ranch, the ranch was the major employer of the valley and the First National Bank of Temecula, now a restaurant called The Bank, was built to handle the Vail payroll.

Mahlon's leadership was at its best when he negotiated settlement of a longstanding lawsuit Camp Pendleton waged against the Vails for water rights. This culminated in 1948 with the construction of the Vail Dam for over a million dollars, at the time the largest privately financed dam in the world.

Mahlon oversaw construction of pumping stations and brought electricity and phone lines to the Vail Headquarters. There were small encampments throughout the ranch including Lower Camp, Upper Camp, the Dairy, Yoder Camp and the Santa Rosa.

Leo Roripaugh said Mahlon was an easy man to work for. Cowboy Lester Reed said Mahlon treated him better than any man had ever treated him.

In *A Thousand Years in Temecula Valley* Tom Hudson told a story that I believe was autobiographical. In 1956 the editor of the Lake Elsinore Valley Sun met with Mahlon at his hunting camp. Mahlon informed him that he wouldn't talk to a newspaperman without his lawyer present. Mahlon walked away and climbed to sit on the top rail of a corral fence. The interviewer climbed and sat next to him. Ignoring the newspaperman, Mahlon reached into his shirt pocket for his bag of Bull Durham and proceeded to roll and light a cigarette. The editor extended his hand for the Bull Durham bag and when Mahlon saw the newspaper man was capable of rolling a decent cigarette, Mahlon struck a match on the corral fence to light the cigarette for his guest and then they spoke. After the interview concluded, the editor dined with Mahlon and other guests including movie producer Hal Roach. They ate steak and beans in a barn-like structure and finished with spiked coffee.

1965 When the editor wrote about the interview, he said Vail was an agile man of average height. While he

maintained an office on the prestigious Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, but his ruddy complexion was proof that he spent much of his time on the big ranch he loved so well in Temecula. He moved among the big names of Los Angeles and Hollywood with ease and self-assurance, and he spoke their language. On the ranch in Temecula he moved with equal self-assurance among the men who worked for him – and he spoke *their* language.

On December 4, 1964, after running the ranch for 60 years, the Vail Company made the difficult decision to sell the ranch holdings. They sold the 87,500 acres to Macco Realty, Kaiser Industries and Kaiser Aluminum and Mahlon retired.

He died six months later at the age of 74 doing something he loved. He suffered a heart attack while playing a round of golf in Borrego Springs. The June 10, issue of the Riverside *Daily Enterprise* ironically carried two death announcements related to the Vail Ranch: Mahlon's and Harry Heffner's, the man who ran the ranch until Mahlon came of age after his father's death. Heffner was 91. The same newspaper edition carried an announcement that David March, the son of the maid for the Roripaughs at Casa Loma was named co-valedictorian of his graduating class.

The *Daily Enterprise* minimized Mahlon's importance to the ranch in the headline of his death announcement "Mahlon Vail, son of ranch's founder, dies". Walter made the purchase of the ranch, but did not live long enough to oversee it. Mahlon was involved for the entire 60 years of the ranch, but he was identified as the "son of the founder".

It occurs to me that Mahlon was a man who kept his promises. He was a person shouldered his responsibilities and had the dogged determination to do what he needed to do. He also knew how to have fun and he formed a lot of friends and did manly things with them.

As I've met children of the ranch workers, I ask about Mahlon. They have nothing but good to say about him. He provided each family with a vehicle and a place to live. The children always received Christmas gifts. Also, Mahlon's family members say he was an upstanding man. If you read between the lines, that means he was honest.

Mahlon Vail ran a historic ranch headquarters, once the seat of financial power and influence in the Temecula Valley. We will be nominating the site in January 2022 for recognition as a National Historic Site.

There are two Mahlon Vails living today and each of them have visited Vail Headquarters. "Mahlie" Vail Lawton, a granddaughter of Walter Vail lives in the Palm Springs area, and the other is a great grandson of Walter Vail associated with Cal Tech in Pasadena.

*** President's Message ***
To Members and Friends of the
Temecula Valley Historical Society

Hello everyone!

Do these last few months feel like forever to you? or has it passed quickly? When I think of all that has happened in our country over the last month, it feels momentous.

We were able to call many of our members this last month and see how they were doing. We were happy to hear good reports and kudos for this beautiful newsletter put together by editor, Dick Fox, every month. We found that most had not been able to join our monthly presentations through our Facebook page or Zoom. We are hopeful our next presentation, on July 27, will be in person.

Our board member, Bill Veale, will present one of Temecula's notable men, Jose' Estudillo, from the outdoor stage located at the Vail Ranch headquarters. Bring your own chairs, space yourselves out, and wear your face coverings, and we will see one another by the whites of our eyes.

We are also reopening the Vail Ranch headquarter properties on June 28. We have created the required written specific plan, oriented our volunteers, purchased hand sanitizer, wipes and face coverings.

Our June presentation was on Public health advocate and first woman state senator in America, Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, elected in Utah in 1896. She advocated for clean water, pure food, small pox vaccines, and quarantines for tuberculosis, small pox and the 1918 flu. She would be right at home in our time and would urge us forward.

Please go safely and wisely that we might all meet again soon in good health.

— Shari

Membership News

Thank you for your membership:

- Richard Beck**
- Cheryl Cady**
- Betsy Domanski**
- Arnie & Nancy Frick**
- Forrest & Marti Greenwood**
- Diane LaTulippe**
- Aimee Verloop**

CALENDAR
OF EVENTS

Tuesday, July 7 — Every Tuesday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Farmer's Market at Vail HQ. Come get fresh veggies.

Saturday, July 18 — 3 p.m. Thistle & Sage at Vail HQ.

Saturday, July 25 — 6 p.m. VW Club Car Show at Vail HQ.

Sunday, July 26 — 4 p.m. Synergy vendors at Vail HQ.

Monday, July 27 — 6:00 p.m. Bill Veale will give a portrayal of José Antonio Estudillo, husband and Father of twelve, who was an amansador (horse trainer), later a rancher and well-known politician. This event will be held at Vail HQ on outdoor stage. Bring blanket, cushions, come early buy eats from vendors.

Friday, July 31 — 6 p.m. Starlight Bazaar at Vail HQ.

Saturday, August 1 — 6 p.m. Ramble On Car Show at Vail HQ.



Bill Veale portrays José Antonio Estudillo

100 Years Ago in Temecula

Selected items from Lake Elsinore Valley Press, Temecula Gossip Column –

EDITOR'S NOTE: No gossip column items available for July 1920, since a large Fiesta occurred in August 1920, have chosen that to reproduce below.

Issue of August 27, 1920

Temecula's Big Fiesta All kinds of races are pulled off Big crowds attend All night dance popular

By Mrs. Vance B. Sands

Temecula's most successful annual fiesta came to a close Sunday night, after having three days of wonderful cowboy sports, including horse races, potato races, novelty races, bronco busting, etc.

The main event, which was a 500-yard free-for-all horse race, attracted the attention of all the racehorse owners. Fine racehorses were brought here and entered in the big race, but were beaten by a local horse owned by James Freeman.

The potato race was one of the most attractive races and everybody came out to see it. This is played by four good riders mounted on their horses, each one having a long stick with a sharp point. In the center of the field a small box is sunk in the ground and at least 12 potatoes placed in it these must be picked up from the box on the point of the stick and taken to their goal where they will meet with the resistance of the opposing guard, if they succeed in placing the potato in their goal it counts one point, the side getting the most points winning the race. This race was won by Carl Swanguen.

The relay race was very exciting. Four good riders started as fast as they could go to a 200-yard goal, exchanged riders and back again to the starting point, exchanged riders again and then came back to the finish. Jack McCoy won this race.

Then came the wild horse race, which took the crowd. Harry Kolb, a young Temecula boy volunteered to ride a wild horse that never had a blanket on its back. He decorated up with a pair of goatskin chaps; a pair of high-heeled boots and a pair of silver plated spurs and said, "Bring on your horse." The saddle and blanket was put on the horse and Harry mounted. One hundred yards was his goal and this was some long race. It was for Harry, because just as he crossed the line his horse piled him on his head. Harry got up out of the soft dirt, brushed himself and was awarded the prize and cheers from the crowd.

Bronco riding was next and some classy riding was done. Three wild horses were saddled and then who is going to ride them? "Fearless" Billy Goodman, who always says, "I am not afraid of any horse," "Poison" Chaqua, who al-

ways says, "get away and let me get on," and reckless Harry Kolb who always says "can't no more than get my neck broke," decorated themselves with high-heeled boots, chaps and spurs and came out and said "we will ride them," and the show started. Some real bucking for a short while, but the boys stuck to their saddles and won the purses.

The dancing in the evenings in the open-air dance hall was well attended. Everyone that heard the colored jazz orchestra play had to come in and dance. Sunday at midnight the fiesta came to a close when the "Home Sweet Home" dance was played. Everyone grabbed his or her hats and coats and starting out, saying, "my, didn't we have a good time, and wasn't that music simply swell?" They cranked their flivvers and started in different directions to their respective homes well pleased.

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Local JDS Creative Academy Receives "Telly Award" for Notable Women Film Work

JDS Creative Academy (JDSCA), is a local non-profit performing, visual, and digital arts organization! The mission of JDSCA is to advance education and training in the visual, performing, and digital arts. They give students the expertise needed to advance to higher arts education and enrich workforce development in a competitive high-tech marketplace.

Recently they received word that for the current award year they had received multiple "Telly Awards" as part of the 41st Annual Telly Awards recognition, and one of their awards was for a news feature filming of the Notable Women of Temecula, presented by the Temecula Valley Historical Society. To view the presentation that they prepared and presented as an award entry, copy & paste this link into your browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aq5ycfXXDyE>