

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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Looking Back to 2003

History Being Rebuilt and Restored

BY JOHN HUNNEMAN - STAFF WRITER -PRESS ENTERPRISE
NOV. 3, 2003 12 AM PT

TEMECULA -- It was the biggest building on one of the biggest cattle ranches in Southern California, and for most of the last century you could see it from wherever you stood in the valley.

When the 3,700-square-foot "implement barn," which housed tools and large machinery for the Vail family's operation for 75 years, was torn down several years ago, some who cared deeply about the history of the region feared other nearby buildings that served as headquarters and bunkhouses for generations of grizzled cowboys might come down with it to make way for a shopping center.

Now, thanks to the efforts of a local historical group and a shopping center developer, a full-scale replica of the barn is near completion. And with the pending agreement between Riverside County and the property owner, Price Legacy, the remaining buildings of the historic ranch, including the Wolf Store, will be restored and put back into use.

The barn building, located next to Kohl's department store in the Redhawk Towne Center on Highway 79 South, will contain several commercial shops, but will also house an 1,100-square-foot museum for the Vail Ranch Restoration Association, a nonprofit group formed in 1995 to save the buildings of the famed cattle ranch.

"We're just so happy to have this," association treasurer Sandy Helzer said. "These buildings could have been destroyed."

The original barn, which stood where Kohl's is now, was torn down by the property's previous owner in 1997.

"It was in a terrible state of disrepair," said Rhine Helzer, Sandy's husband and the group's vice president. "It was practically falling down all by itself."

Some of the wood from the old barn was stored in another building on the historic site. That wood has been used to line the walls of the restoration association's portion of the new building. In addition, the tin used on the roof of the new barn came from the Vail Ranch feedlot, which was located on the opposite side of the highway until it was torn down in the mid-1980s. Price Legacy, which bought the property in 1999, worked hand in hand with the historic group to re-create the barn.

"We showed them a lot of pictures," Rhine Helzer said.

(Continued on next page)

Bill Stone, Price Legacy's senior vice president of development, said the barn should be completed in the next couple of weeks.

"The decision to re-create the implement barn was a show of good faith on our part," Stone said recently. The company has donated the space in the barn to the restoration group, which will use the space for displays depicting ranch life and the period before the Vail family bought the land when Louis Wolf's store, which was built about 1868, served as a post office, stage stop and a main trading post for the region.

With its large wide-open bay doors -- which were necessary to get big machinery in and out of the barn -- the Helzers said many curious residents have stopped in to see what is being built.

"Most people think it's another Jiffy Lube," Sandy Helzer said. "They're happy when they learn what the building really is."

The Ranch Buildings

Riverside County and Price Legacy are finalizing an agreement that will restore the other five ranch buildings, which stand between Kohl's and a shoe store and are currently fenced off from the public.

"We're still working out the final details," Riverside County Supervisor Bob Buster said in a recent interview. "Hopefully, we will get it worked out soon."

The agreement calls for the county and the developer to share the restoration cost, estimated at about \$10 million.

When completed -- likely 2005 -- several of the buildings will likely be turned into restaurants, said Darrell Farnbach of the association. Another building may house a retail shop.

"We're not sure how the Wolf Store will be used," Farnbach said. "We'd like to see it used as an exhibit hall."

Like the other members of his group, which began efforts to keep the ranch buildings from being torn down in 1995, Farnbach is thankful their work has produced results.

"It isn't exactly the way we would have loved to have it," Farnbach said. "We would have liked to have seen the entire site used as an interpretative center, but we're lucky to have what we have."

The Previous Owners

In August 1876, Walter L. Vail arrived in Arizona looking for land to establish a cattle operation. Along with a partner, Vail purchased a 160-acre homestead near Tucson that was the center of what became the huge Empire Ranch. Vail continued to buy up homesteads until the ranch extended 60 miles north to south and 30 miles east to west.

In 1881, Vail married his longtime sweetheart, Margaret Newhall. The couple started their family, which eventually numbered seven children, at the Arizona ranch. Family members continued to live on Empire Ranch until it was sold in 1928.

Vail's influence grew along with his ranch. He was elected to the 10th Territorial Legislature and served for a brief period on the Pima County Board of Supervisors.

Vail's riches also grew. He and several partners operated the Total Wreck silver mine on the ranch. Vail invested his silver money in his cattle operation and those profits allowed him to look west to California where, in 1888, along with partner Carol W. Gates, Vail leased the Warner Ranch, east of Temecula, to expand the operation.

In July 1905, Vail and Gates bought the Temecula and Pauba ranchos -- about 38,000 acres -- from the San Francisco Savings Bank. In addition, they bought part of the Little Temecula Rancho, where the Wolf Store was located, and Rancho Santa Rosa, in the hills west of Murrieta. By the time they were through, the Vail family owned nearly 87,500 acres in and around Temecula.

Gates soon left the partnership and Walter Vail would not live to see his Temecula ranch prosper. In December 1906, he was crushed between two streetcars in Los Angeles.

Vail's sons took over the operation, with Mahlon Vail given responsibility for the Temecula property. The cattle ranch operated until Mahlon Vail sold the property to developers in December 1964 for \$21 million.

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."- Winston Churchill

Membership News

Welcome new lifetime members:

Roger & Carole Honberger
David & Anne Nanni.

Welcome new members:

Robert Christensen Jr.
Erica Russo.

Thanks to renewing members:

Terry Bracci
Kathleen Casas
Tom Frew
Ken & Bonnie Reed
Scott & Lynne Sanders
Bill & Elizabeth Veale

Monthly Presentation

On Monday, May 22 at 6 pm:

Rosalinda del Castillo will portray Ramona Wolf, wife of Louis Wolf who was once called the King of Temecula. Ramona served alongside her husband as the proprietress of the Wolf General Store and Post Office. She hosted the author Helen Hunt Jackson and was written into Jackson's book titled "Ramona", which is the basis of Hemet's Ramona Pageant which is celebrating its 100th year.

A Heartfelt Thanks.

We want to thank everyone for coming to Darell's memorial service and also give our heartfelt thanks to each of the friends and volunteers who helped with the service and reception.

It is difficult to find words to express how grateful we are. Please know we love and appreciate you.

Sincerely, Rebecca Farnbach and family

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Two months later, the new owners unveiled plans for a master-planned community they dubbed Rancho California. Several months later, Mahlon Vail died at the age of 74.

The buildings of the old ranch fell into disrepair over the next several decades and were often targets of vandalism and home to vagrants before the Vail Ranch Restoration Association began its efforts in 1995.

A Celebration in the Works

Local historical groups and the Temecula Valley Museum have begun meeting to plan a yearlong celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Vail Ranch.

"We're hoping to get organizations from all over the area involved," said Wendell Ott, the city-operated museum's director.

As envisioned, the celebration will begin on July, 2004, and last for an entire year.

"We plan to have monthly demonstrations, lectures, fiestas and exhibits both here at the museum and at the ranch site," Ott said. "We're hoping to identify relatives and people who are still here and worked on the ranch to record their history."

Meanwhile, with the implement barn nearing completion, association members are busy designing their displays and plan to offer the first tours of their new museum to a group of third-graders from Sparkman Elementary School in early February.

"We've already booked the date," Farnbach said. "So, we need to get moving."



100 Years Ago in Temecula

Selected items from the Lake Elsinore Valley Press, Temecula Gossip Column – May 1923

May 4, 1923

By Mrs. V.B. Sands

Temecula, May 2 – Messrs. Elmer Hansen and W.M. Friedemann are trout fishing at Boulder creek this week.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Knott, Mrs. W.M. Friedemann and Mrs. A.B. Barnett were initiated into the Royal Neighbors at Murrieta Monday evening.

Mrs. F. H. Hall attended the initiation ceremony of the Royal Neighbors at Murrieta Monday evening.

A.F. Nienke spent the weekend with his family at Riverside.

Mr. and Mrs. W.M. Friedemann and Mrs. F.H. Hall attended the dance at Fallbrook Saturday evening.

Messrs. Lynn Smith, A. Escallier, W.M. Friedemann, S.E. Veazey, V.B. Sands and H.E. Kneeshaw attended the Masonic lodge at Fallbrook last Friday evening.

Mr. and Mrs. V.B. Sands and son, Edward, were visiting relatives in San Bernardino Sunday.

Mrs. J.P. Kelly was called to Bakersfield last week on account of the death of her sister.

Mrs. W.M. Friedemann was a Riverside visitor last Wednesday.

Mr. Cockerline from Rainbow has taken the position just vacated by Ben Higgins.

W.T. Barton was a San Bernardino visitor Sunday.

W.M. Friedemann is installing a cold storage plant for storing his meats, also enlarging the slaughter house.

May 11, 1923

By Mrs. V.B. Sands

Temecula, May 9 - Mesdames W.M. Friedemann and

Lynn Smith attended the social club of the O.E.S. at the home of Mrs. Beach of Elsinore Tuesday afternoon.

Elmer Hansen and John McSweeney motored to Escondido last Friday evening to attend the Eastern Star dance.

Louis Otto and family of Los Angeles were weekend guests of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Otto.

Mr. and Mrs. Cottrell and daughter, Georgia, were weekend visitors in Los Angeles.

A.F. Nienke spent Sunday with his family at Riverside.

The Misses Cleo Patterson and Florence Crawford and Mrs. Pettrie of San Bernardino were weekend guests of Miss Ethel Burnham.

A.B. Barnett was an Elsinore visitor last Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Haynes were Elsinore visitors Tuesday.

Mr. and Mrs. M.A. Wolcott and daughter, Charlotte, of Perris, spent Sunday at the home of V.B. Sands.

A. Knott was fishing near Oceanside last Thursday evening.

May 18, 1923

By Mrs. V.B. Sands

Temecula, May 16 – Jack Adams shipped a car of cattle to Bagby, California, Monday.

Miss M. Welty spent several days last week with her sister in San Bernardino.

Miss Eula Fleshman spent the weekend with her parents at Fallbrook.

Henry Gray was a Los Angeles visitor last week.

Mr. and Mrs. Julius Marian of Arlington spent the weekend with Mrs. Z. Nicolas.

Mrs. W.T. Barton has returned from an extended visit to Los Angeles.

A. Escallier was a Riverside visitor last Tuesday.

Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Haynes and Mrs. V.B. Sands were San Bernardino visitors last Thursday.

May 25, 1923

By Mrs. V.B. Sands

Temecula, May 24 – Miss Prudence Brown of Puente and Mr. and Mrs. O.S. Smith of Elsinore were visitors at the home of W.H. Haynes Sunday.

James Nienke, of Los Angeles, Mrs. Hampton Watts and Miss Mable Nienke, of Riverside, spent Thursday here with their father, A.F. Nienke.

Mr. and Mrs. Vern Spivey and children spent Sunday with friends at Carlsbad.

Mr. and Mrs. V. B. Sands and son, Edward, and house guests, Mrs. E.M. Sands and Mrs. W.R. Brown, motored to Mecca via Palm Springs Sunday.

Mrs. E.M. Sands, of San Bernardino, was a weekend guest at the home of V.B. Sands. Joe Winkle was a Los Angeles visitor last week.

Ira C. Landis, county superintendent of schools, visited the school one day last week.

Mrs. Mabel F. Faulkner, of the rural school library department of the public library at Riverside, was a visitor at the school last week.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Wiggles and baby and Mr. and Mrs. Louis Alto and daughter, of Los Angeles, were weekend visitors at the Albert Otto home.

Charles Wood, librarian of the public library at Riverside, was visiting the school one day last week.