

Camarillo History in the 1940's and 1950's

Pleasant Valley Historical Society

Scholarship Award for 2016

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My historical research was obtained by a biographical interview with my grandparents, two 75-year residents of Camarillo. My great grandparents, Ed and Sadie Maurer and Herold and Helen Moody, came to Camarillo in the early 1930's and my maternal grandparents were born and raised here and currently reside in Somis. They raised two daughters, Becky Maurer Radwan (my mother) and Julie Maurer McCardell, who both remain in Camarillo. In recalling Camarillo in the 1940's and 1950's, their stories are numerous and full of historical events that shaped Camarillo into what it is today. I have divided my research into three topics: Geography, Education, and Community.

Geography

In the early 1930's, my orphaned paternal great grandfather, Ed Maurer, came to California from Oklahoma on a freight train and settled in the Conejo Valley where he was hoping to find a better life. He worked on the Pederson Ranch which was located in Thousand Oaks and resided in the water tower that still remains on the California Lutheran University campus. Eventually, Grandpa Ed obtained a job working in the dairy operation at the now closed Camarillo State Hospital. He worked there for decades. The abandoned dairy buildings are now a local destination for ghost hunters who refer to it as "Scary Dairy".

Grandpa Ed married Sadie Hudnall (Thousand Oaks) and moved to Camarillo where they lived in the "courts" on the east side of Arneill Road (so named due to the configuration of the buildings). Most of the residents of the "courts" were employees of either the Adohr Dairy on the outskirts of town, or Camarillo State Hospital. When my grandfather (my Papa) Ron Maurer was born in 1940, the family moved to a new housing development that was Camarillo's first set of tract homes. These were located south of the current freeway and just east of what is now Dawson Drive. These were built by a local real estate developer by the name of "Miss Wilson". My Papa lived there as a child and stayed until he graduated from high school and joined the Navy in 1958.

Camarillo was a very small town at that time. The primary area of the town was at the foot of Ventura Boulevard where the current Metro Link train station is located. In the 40's and 50's the Camarillo Train Depot served not only as a train stop, but it was also the

location of much community activity. A small group of retail stores sprang up on Ventura Blvd. near the depot. Among these stores was Irene's Dress Shop, where Irene Hernandez outfitted most of the Camarillo ladies. In the back of the dress shop, Tweedy Rouce (later to become Tweedy Camarillo) gave art classes to local children. Roy Fossati ran the pharmacy, which was located across the street from what is now Establos Meat Market, where locals could sit at the counter and have a "chocolate coke" while prescriptions were being filled. Many of the local youth would gather at Fossati's and spend hours perusing the comic book selection. There were two grocery stores in that same block—Howell & Hopkins and across the street, Higgins & Hill. Both were very small grocery stores by today's standards, but carried the essentials. Once a month, most families would venture to Oxnard where they would do their major grocery shopping at the A & P Market. Where Establos Meat Market is today at Lewis Rd. and Ventura Blvd, Mrs. Richmond had a store specializing in "dry goods" (non-perishable items and clothing). She was the primary supplier of work clothes for the men in the community.

Around 1937 my maternal great-grandfather, Hal Moody, was a newcomer to Camarillo after arriving from Denver, Colorado. He came to Camarillo for an employment opportunity and quickly became close friends with one of the most important families in local history, the Camarillo's. Adolfo Camarillo's son, "Pancho" offered my Grandpa Moody a room to rent in the Camarillo House. Grandpa Moody told many stories of life at the Camarillo Ranch: riding horses, hosting parties, and enjoying an exciting life. By 1939, my Grandpa Moody had purchased land and a house in Camarillo Heights above North Loop Drive. The purchase price of the 2.5 acres and house was \$2,500 and came with a view of the Channel Islands. He married Helen Brigham and eventually had my maternal grandmother (my Nana) Kathy Moody Maurer. My Nana lived there with her parents until she married my Papa. In the 40's and 50's there were only four houses between their house on North Loop Drive and the corner of East Loop Drive and Las Posas Road. Everything in between was orange and lemon orchards. My Nana remembers wishing her parents would move "downtown" so she would have other children with whom to play.

Education

In the early 40's, Pleasant Valley School was first through eighth grade. My great-grandmother, Helen Moody, and Mrs. Warren Chase decided they should have a kindergarten class for their children. They spearheaded a petition campaign which resulted in the establishment of the first kindergarten class in the Pleasant Valley School District. The class was created in 1945 and both my Papa and Nana were among its first students. The history book, *Camarillo* by Jeff Maulhardt, contains a photograph of a group of Pleasant Valley students. The picture was incorrectly identified as a 1942 photograph and

is actually a 1945 picture of the first ever kindergarten class with the teacher, Miss Geraldine McGrath.

Nana and Papa remember their eight years at Pleasant Valley School with nostalgia. They grew up playing dodge ball, tether ball, softball (baseballs were too dangerous), jump rope, and pick-up sticks. Everyone participated in the square dances that were held every other Friday night. There was a cafeteria where meals were available for students and where graham cracker and milk snacks were also provided to the students at mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Both grandparents graduated from Pleasant Valley School in 1954 and started as freshman that year at Oxnard High School.

Community

To provide a sense of the town's small size in the 40's, my Papa, Ron Maurer, was the only paper boy in Camarillo for The Oxnard Press Courier newspaper. He was able to deliver to the entire city using only his bike.

Grandpa, Herold (Hal) Moody, was the manager of the Bank of America in Camarillo. Banking back then was a much more personal interaction than it is today. Most people had never heard of a loan application or a credit score and everyone was much more trusting. All business transactions were finalized with a handshake. This backfired on one occasion when during the Christmas holiday, Grandpa Moody brought home a sailor he had met at the bank. He wanted the sailor to have a hot meal and friendship during the holidays. The sailor spent one night on the couch and when the family woke the next morning, the sailor was gone, along with my Grandpa Moody's wallet !

In the early days of Camarillo, sit-down restaurants were scarce. My grandparents only recall Mike's *El Tecolote* Mexican restaurant, which owner Mike Loza ran out of his house on Barry Street. *El Tecolote* was a community gathering place. On Friday nights, the line for seating inside the small house would extend outside and down the block, but you could always visit with friends while you waited. The food was good and the strong sense of community was evident. The community loyalty followed when Mike moved his restaurant, more than sixty years ago, to the corner of Barry Street and Lewis Road.

In conclusion, Camarillo was a wonderful place to grow up. My family's past, intertwined with local history, gives me great appreciation for even the simple landmarks around town. We cannot go back, but we can remember and preserve our past.