



THEY MADE THEIR WAY TO MENIFEE

Chester Morrison Escaped the Dust Bowl and Headed for Menifee

Folks in Menifee may recognize the name Chester Morrison. In 1990 the elementary school on Bradley road was named in his honor. He wove himself into the fabric of the Menifee farming community beginning in the 1930's and continued with a spirit of "service" for over fifty years.

Chester W. Morrison was born in 1919 in Crawford County, Kansas. He was second to the oldest of ten children. It was 1929 when 11-year-old Chester and his family took the long caravan road trip to New Mexico. His mother drove the family Chevrolet sedan, brother Marvin drove the Model T pickup, and dad in a larger truck loaded with everything his truck could carry. In New Mexico, during the great depression years, the family lost everything to the dust bowl. With his father struggling to feed the family, teen-aged Chester left home and headed for California.

He came to stay with his uncle Charlie Bailey who had a farm in Menifee on the northwest corner of Scott and Haun Road. He worked for his uncle for a year, then headed back to Kansas to finish his last year of high school. After graduating, he returned to Menifee in 1938 and worked for Walter Zeiders who lived on the south side of Scott road and was farming most of the Menifee Valley. Morrison's wages were \$2/day plus room and board.

Morrison soon realized that farming suited him well, and decided he would make Menifee his home. In those days, fun-seeking locals in the area would gather for dances, usually held at a local schoolhouse. Every Wednesday evening there was a square dance or round dance held at the original 1918 Romoland School. It was there that Chester met



Rosamond Brown. The couple danced together, and soon they were in love. Three years later in July 1941 they were married.

Morrison's younger sister Ina May also came to Menifee and stayed with Chester and Rosamond. It was at a BBQ fundraiser at the Antelope-Menifee Rural Center that Ina May met her future husband Merle Zeiders. The two couples helped each other on their farms, and enjoyed many weekend get-aways together.

Rosamond's father Mr. William Brown, who lived on the southeast corner of Antelope and Garbani road, needed help on his farm. Morrison went to work with his father-in-law and soon took over the Brown farming operation.

In the fall of 1943 Morrison was harvesting out in the field when he saw someone coming out to greet him on his tractor. It was Menifee farmer Louis Krubsack who told Morrison that the school district needed another trustee, and asked if he was willing to serve. Morrison said yes, and thus began his 53-year commitment as school board member with the Menifee district.

In the early 1960's Morrison joined with Herk Bouris and Louis Krubsack to form a farming partnership called "BKM Ranchers". Together the trio farmed 14,000 acres sharing equipment to till, plant and harvest. From 1974 until his retirement in 1986, Morrison farmed in partnership with his nephew David Zeiders.

The Morrisons belonged to the First Congregational Church of Perris, which was the oldest church in the area. Chester served as moderator and Rosamond served as deaconess. Chester was a director of the Perris Farm Bureau Center and Rosamond was a member of the Home Department Woman's Auxiliary.

The couple dedicated much of their time to the Antelope-Menifee Rural Center, which was the only place in Menifee in those years for gatherings and events. The first rural center was built in 1948 on land donated by Chester's uncle Charlie Bailey. Local farmers served along side the Morrisons as board members. In 1972 the original rural center was notified by the State that the building was within the right-of-way for the widening of Route 395. So Chester and Rosamond dedicated an acre of their own property on Haun Road for a new rural center to be constructed, which still serves the community today.

Merle Zeiders contributed the following about his friend Chester Morrison:

"He was solid as a gold brick, had great common sense, was honest, reliable and a real gentleman. Being a school board trustee meant a great deal to him. Most of all, he enjoyed the children and did everything in his power to see to their good education".

We appreciate the input and narrative provided by Mr. Merle Zeiders and his wife Ina May (Chester's sister) to compose this article. For more information about Chester Morrison and other pioneer settlers, please visit the Menifee History Museum, which is open Sundays from 1 to 4pm. Admission is free. Also visit menifeehistory.com

