

Rural Center was Menifee's Original Town Hall

By Bill Zimmerman, Menifee Valley Historical Association

Have you driven past that lonely little building on Haun Road at Garbani Road and wondered what it is? Well, you were viewing a facility that served as Menifee's activity center that was built by local farm families, and it has a long, rich history.

The stucco building we see today, officially named the "Antelope-Menifee Rural Center", has been referred to by Menifee natives and local historians as the "new building". This is because in 1972 this new hall was built as a replacement to the first rural center that had served the area since 1948.

According to the President of the Menifee Valley Historical Association Elinor Evans Martin, who recently provided an informative discussion about the rural center's existence to members and guests of the Historical Association, the first hall was the result of enthusiastic efforts of a community working together.



It was 1947 when the ladies of the Home Department recommended that a local organization be formed with the purpose of cultivating the cultural, recreational and social interests of the community by providing a meeting place for those activities.

"Antelope-Menifee Rural Center" was chosen as the name for the organization, using the names of the two elementary schools in the area where all previous community meetings and gatherings had been held. The group began fund raising efforts and soon had enough money, about \$1,500, to purchase two surplus military buildings that were disassembled from the Camp Haan Military Base. One building had been an officer's mess hall with kitchen, the other used for additions to the main building.

A one-acre site was donated by the Charley Bailey family. On a cool January morning in 1948, a team of volunteers lowered the building onto its foundation. This original hall, which is now part of Louie's Nursery, proudly served our community for over 22 years.

Then, in 1971 the California State Department of Highways made plans to improve Highway 395 (today's I-215). The State purchased the rural center property, so the community group started plans and work on a "new building" fronting Haun Road, on one acre of land donated by Chester and Rosamond Morrison.

This new hall was dedicated on April 9, 1972. The activities over the years have included carnivals, dinners, school graduation ceremonies, talent shows, square dances, hobby shows, Farm Bureau, Home Department and 4-H meetings, weddings and showers, educational programs, Woman's Club meetings, pancake breakfasts and much more. The Rural Center building was constructed with donated time, money, materials and labor. It is still a do-it-yourself-project with support provided by members and community.



Our little building, now more than 40 years old, still serves as a meeting place for our local Scout troops, 4-H Clubs, Arts Council Menifee, Menifee Valley Historical Association, and even offers Sunday church services.

Recently, a new Board and officers were elected for this non-profit center in which this writer is proud to serve on. There are plans for improvements including new windows, a covered patio and landscaping upgrades, all being done as Eagle Scout projects with donated labor and materials.

The Rural Center is an inspiration and a testament to those who were here before us. Most of them were farmers who cared about their community. They organized and they worked together. They enjoyed the improved lifestyle and benefits that their own community hall offered them.

For more information on Menifee's storied past, please visit: www.menifeehistory.com