

Volume 4, No. 4

Antelope Valley Rural Museum

OCT 2020

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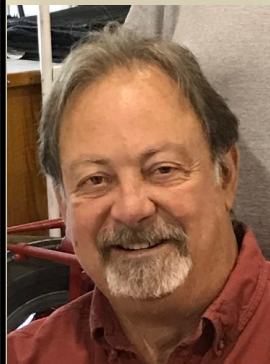
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**CHAIRMAN’S MESSAGE**



Your Board and Volunteers are making sure expenses are kept to a minimum with all of the volunteer work. As you can see from the photos in Rawlings Review we distressed and stained the cabinets for part of the building. Kristi Word and Lynn DuPratt did a fantastic job with whacking of the boards, and Pam Rawlings was the chief “stainer” for the day. The cabinets look fantastic! It is great to work with such dedicated volunteers.

With the building shell complete we will need more volunteers and funds to complete the electrical, plumbing, framing and drywall. Sooner or later we will return to somewhat normal and will be able to hold fundraisers and heaven forbid, socialize with people.

I also have to give my sincere thanks to Dayle DeBry for the incredible job on the AVR M newsletter. It is the best newsletter I have read, bar none. Dayle also brings her little shadow, Holley, who also works hard on the projects we do.

My thoughts and prayers go out to Barbara Sterk and Sheila Sola as they deal with their health issues. We miss you.



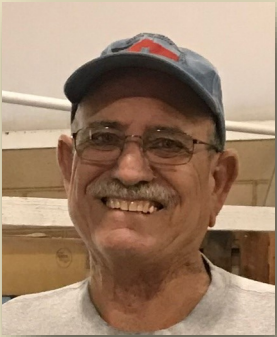
Stay safe,

*G Simi*

CEO AVR M



## RAWLINGS' REVIEW



*Doing What I Love* makes my volunteer hours for the AVRМ a pleasure. Doing what I love with my fellow volunteer friends is even more gratifying.

One day in mid-June we had a "Tea Party" (so named by Kristi Word). After building the new cabinets for our Break/Meeting Room, I made a jar of sun tea and a container of iron acetate by dissolving steel wool in vinegar for a couple of days. When the vinegar solution reacts with the tannin in the tea it will create a driftwood color grey stain on the wood. Masks were worn and Social Distancing was practiced, of course.



Above: Dayle & Holley DeBry, Pam Rawlings, Kristi Word, Lynn DuPratt (behind Kristi), G. & Janine Simi armed with beater boards filled with assorted shapes & sizes of nails & screws, take out their COVID-19 frustrations while distressing the cabinets.



Left: Pam applies iron acetate to one of the drawer fronts.

Above: Wallah...! Distressed and driftwood color stained sink cabinet.

Below: NEW BUILDING!



Above: John Calvert nails a rafter to the ridge board while framing the roof canopy portion of the new AVRМ Donor Wall on July 31<sup>st</sup>. We have been fortunate to have the Small Animal Barn next to our new building as an assembly area this year, though we would have preferred to vacate for the AV Fair. John has spent many days working on the new cabinets and new building with me.

**Validation for our Existence** happens when you become a member, volunteer, and/or donate. It tells us that what we are doing matters to others and helps us continue to expand. So please assist the preservation of our local history with your time, financial support and encouragement.

**Volunteers, Donors, & Members** made this new home for the AVRМ possible. This photo taken by our volunteer photographer Karl Peterson was taken on Oct. 2, 2020. Exterior shell is complete. With your help we will complete the interior walls, electrical, fire, HVAC, plumbing, and finishes, giving us triple the space of our existing building! (see photo at bottom left)



**Shopping & Giving** Many of you are buying gifts and other goodies online due to so many store closures and restrictions this crazy year...I hope you will consider going to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and choosing *Antelope Valley Rural Museum of History* as your charity. When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), Amazon donates a portion of your purchase price to your favorite charity. **It will cost you nothing** but a couple of minutes of your time.

*Bill Rawlings*  
Finance Officer

# THORVALD JOHNSON—LANCASTER’S “BLIKKENSLAGER MESTER”

By Dayle DeBry



1937 AV Fair parade with George Black, the blacksmith (left) and Thorvald Johnson, the tinsmith (right) colorized by D. DeBry.

Now that I have your attention with the unusual title...for those who don't speak Norwegian, a "Blikkenslager mester" is a "master tinsmith."

Thorvald Johannessen (son of Johannes) was born on November 18, 1865, and baptized on December 10, 1865 in Kristianssand, Vest-Agder, Norway, the son of Johannes Olsen (son of Ole) and Johanne Evensdatter (daughter of Even).

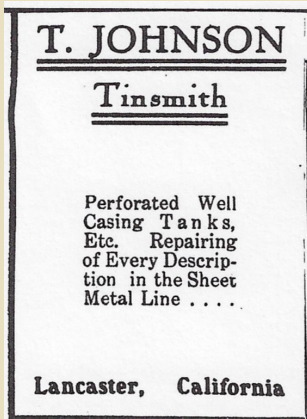
According to U.S. Census records, Thorvald first emigrated to the United States in 1886 and was naturalized in 1891. His older brother Theodore August arrived in 1879 and was naturalized in 1887 in Cook Co., Illinois. It is unknown how long Thorvald stayed in the U.S. at first as he was married in Norway after 1891 and his first child was born in Norway in 1897. He and his family were also listed on the census for Norway in 1900 with Thorvald's occupation as a master tinsmith.

In 1904, Thorvald would again make the long voyage from Norway to New York on the ship *Carpathia*, this time with his wife Johanna (Anna) and two children, Lillian, age eight, and Leif, infant son born July 1, 1903. Yes, the *Carpathia* is the same ship that rescued survivors from the *Titanic* in 1912!

Thorvald and his brother August owned a tinsmith business in the San Francisco/Oakland, California area before moving to Lancaster in 1908. I'm trying to imagine what brought them down to Los Angeles County from the Bay area. Perhaps it was the 7.9 San Francisco earthquake on April 18, 1906? I suppose we'll never know.

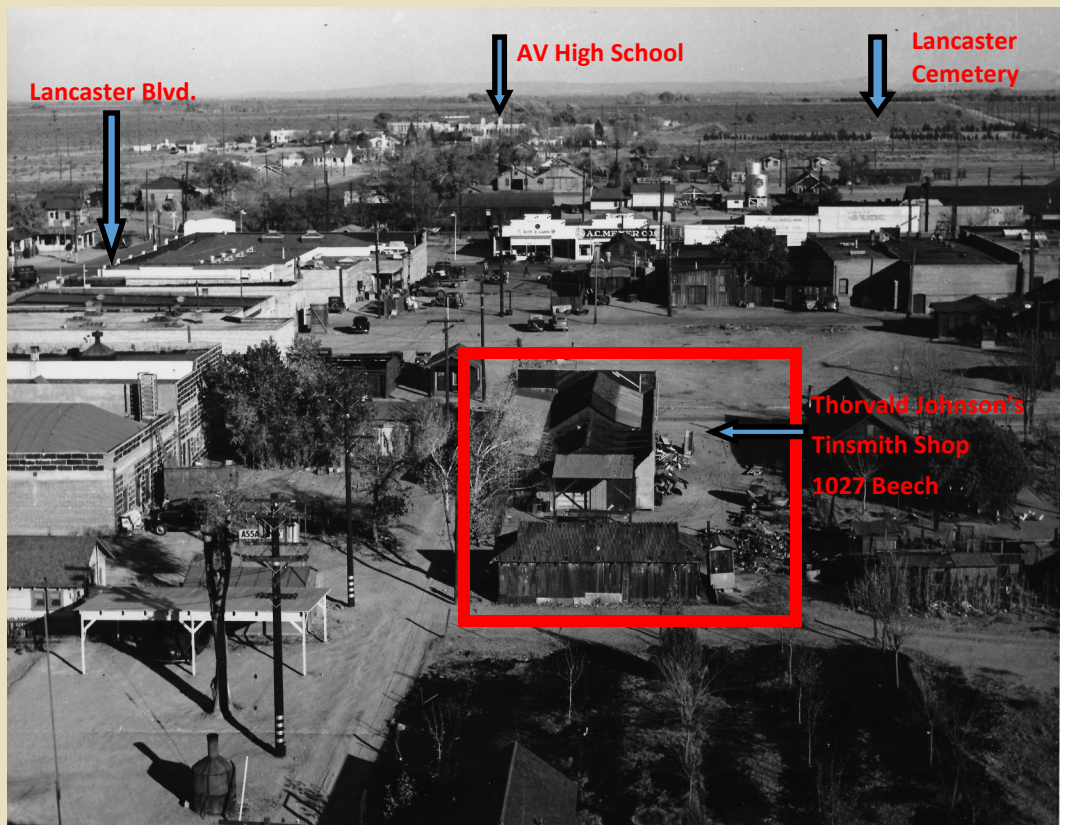
In 1923 there was a sheet metal shop owned by Mr. Spencer located on what was then 10th Street (now Lancaster Blvd.) just east of the Western Hotel. Mr. Johnson's shop was located at 1027 Beech Ave., (see photo below) but is long gone—a parking lot now.

Thorvald owned property located about 3 1/2 miles east of his shop. Thorvald (under the Homestead Act) in January 1914, acquired 80 acres in Section 17, TWP 7N, Range 11W. In 1924 he purchased 240 acres in Section 20, TWP 9N, Range 10W.



Above: Ledger Gazette May 19, 1916 ad.

Right: 1936 photo of downtown when Lancaster Blvd. was 10th St. and Beech Ave. was sometimes known as Beach St. Johnson's shop was located at 1027 Beech.



The 240 acres was located near the Kern County line near where Edwards Air Force Base is located, in between Rosamond Lake and Rogers Lake. The family's main address was listed as 30th St. East and Ave. I-8.

Thorvald, along with his brother August and son Leif, served the Antelope Valley community for many years with their tin-smithing abilities. The tinsmith trade requires a knowledge of algebra, geometry and trigonometry, so it's not as easy as it may seem. A tinsmith would have to serve an apprenticeship with a master tinsmith for 4—6 years before he could take the title of "Master Tinsmith," so it was a title well-earned.

With the Antelope Valley well-drilling industry booming the tinsmith's days were busy making well casings, tanks and other sheet metal products, both large and small. Thorvald was a supporter of Antelope Valley High School with several ads over the years in the school yearbooks beginning in 1915. Neither child is named in any of the AVJUHS yearbooks. Both would have been of school age at some time during their lives here in the AV.

Daughter Lillian Laurencia Johnson married John H. Comstock on June 29, 1920. She passed away in 1981 and is buried at Forest Lawn in Hollywood Hills, CA. Son Leif Norman Johnson married Vera M. (Shultz) Grant August 29, 1943, and continued in the sheet metal business for many years. He died in 1980 in Ridgecrest, CA at the age of 77.

Thorvald's brother Theodore August Johnson passed away at age 70 on July 4, 1930 at San Fernando Hospital, CA. Thorvald's wife Anna passed away at age 66 at Palmdale Hospital on November 27, 1935. Thorvald would follow in death nearly 13 years later at age 82 on August 8, 1948 at his home in Lancaster. All are buried at Lancaster Cemetery, including August's two wives, Christine Nelson in 1916 at age 49, and Hilda Hvaal in 1964 at age 80.

Antelope Valley is a melting pot of all ethnicities from around the world who helped shape our cities into what they are today. We should be proud of these men and women who led the way during the early days of the AV.



Above right: 1925 AVJUHS yearbook ad.

Above: Thorvald Johnson 1937 AV Fair parade with tinsmith tools and products.

Right: World War II Draft registration card for Leif Norman Johnson, son of Thorvald.

<h1>T. JOHNSON</h1>	
<h2>The Pioneer Tinsmith of Antelope Valley</h2>	
All Kinds of Well Casing : Tanks : Etc.	
ANYTHING IN TIN	
LANCASTER	CALIFORNIA

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)			
SERIAL NUMBER <b>595</b>	1. NAME (Print) <b>LEIF</b> <b>NORMAN</b> <b>JOHNSON</b>	ORDER NUMBER <b>10,098</b>	
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) <b>LA 330</b> <b>SEC 12-TINSMITH LOS ANGELES CALIF</b>			
3. MAILING ADDRESS <b>P.O. Box 503 LANCASTER CALIF</b>			
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS <b>38</b>	6. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>CHRISTENSAAND</b>	
	DATE OF BIRTH <b>JULY 1 1903</b>	<b>NORWAY</b>	
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS <b>THORVALD JOHNSON LANCASTER CALIF.</b>			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS <b>THORVALD JOHNSON LANCASTER CALIF.</b>			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS <b>1027 BEECH ST LANCASTER LOS ANGELES CALIF</b>			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42)		★ GPO 16-21630-1 <i>Leif Norman Johnson</i> (Registrant's signature)	

## THE ELLISON FAMILY

By Kristi (Ellison) Word—AVRM Director, Student Field Trips



You never realize how many roots your tree has grown until Dayle DeBry asks you to write about yours for the AVRM Newsletter.

My Ellison roots began in Norway, then traveled up the St. Lawrence Seaway and over land to Lemoure, North Dakota. That is where my father was born. His father passed away when he was just three. My grandmother, who had her teaching credential decided to travel west to plant new roots. She was hired to teach English at Antelope Valley High School starting in 1924. Using the life insurance policy from her husband, she had a home built on the corner of Oldfield and Fig Avenue, in Lancaster. That is where she raised my dad, Charles and his brother Robert, as a single mom.

My father graduated from AVHS with the class of 1938. He continued through Antelope Valley Junior College which, at that time, was part of the high school campus. His first job was at the soda counter of Westcott and Plummer Drug Store. My mother, Shirley, came in for a root beer soda and always said she fell for the “soda jerk” behind the counter on that first day.

In 1941 Dad went down to the draft board and enlisted. World War II was looming. Mom and Dad got married and moved in with Mom’s parents so she would have a place to live when Dad left for his military duty.

During the war, Lancaster’s population was very small. As the men began to return businesses boomed, families grew and so did organizations, both fraternal and recreational. Mom and Dad were active in the Elks Club. During the Antelope Valley Fair each year, Dad could always be found at the Beer Garden and Mom always worked in the popular Emblem Club Taco Booth. Mom joined a dance club and tap danced on the Community Stage each year. Then she had me take tap lessons and I also tap danced on the Community Stage. When I was 13 years old I entered my grandmother’s oatmeal cookies in the youth baking section and won a blue ribbon.

There was a huge boom of babies born during those years and these “boomers” became my social life and lifelong friends. Organizations popped up for all of us “baby boomers”. I was active in so many: Brownies, Camp Fire Girls, YMCA, Rainbow Girls. The first Saturday morning after the Fair opened there was always a Pet Parade down Lancaster Boulevard. I remember so fondly decorating my wagon, my roller skates or my bike and my pets for that parade. As we got older the Fair Parade itself was another fun event, always decorating floats or truck beds for our group to ride on with lots of crepe paper and Kleenex flowers!

The Rainbow Girls were the official usherettes for all the grandstand events. Of course, there was a rush to be on the schedule for the day of the Rural Olympics.

The Fair activities carried on through my early married years as my husband and I were part of the Young Republicans who built the Gazebo where there was always a free drink of cold Sparklett’s water offered by whichever candidate was running for office at that time. Many long shifts of working that booth with our kids running to and from the amusements in the midway were part of our end of summer activities.



*L to R: Grandmother Anne (Barrett) Ellison, father and mother Charles and Shirley Ellison*

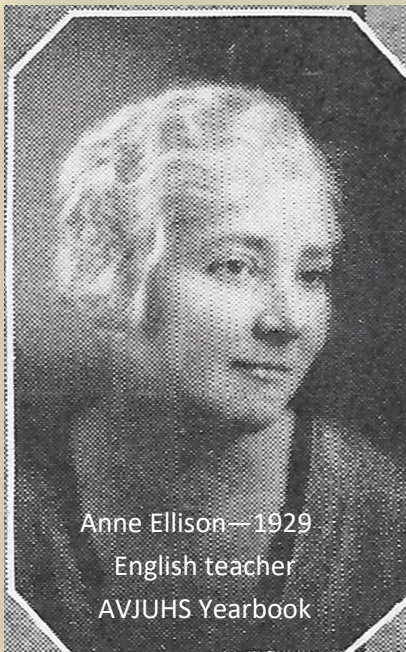
Fair time became the signal that school was about to start!

It's been a few years now that our 5<sup>th</sup> generation, my grandchildren, have been a part of the Fair activities. Although our most recent effort to instill Fair memories began when they were very small. Three of our older grandkids have always participated in the Fair Parade as part of their school band or Color Guard groups. We lived near the Boulevard and loved waking up to the sounds of the drummers and horns tuning up from all the marching bands. Our kids would bring their kids over and we'd load the wagons with donuts and milk and the little ones, pull the wagon down the street ... our own little parade ... claiming a good spot with our lawn chairs to view the fancy horses, old-time cars, Shriners in their go-carts, clowns, Community Queens waving and the marching bands.

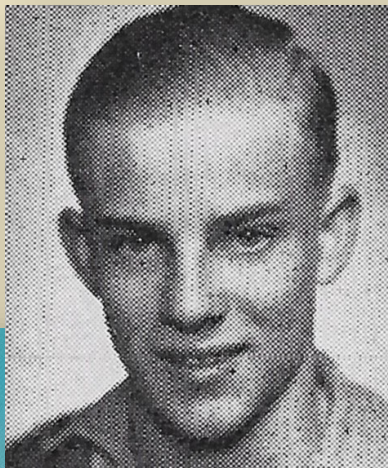


*Kristi Ellison, far left, ready to dance—circa 1953, colorized.*

The roots attached to my family tree in Lancaster grow very deep. Many from my family, as well as two of my children have left Lancaster. Several of my grandchildren would like to leave when they are grown. These are their decisions, of course, but my hope is they will realize that no one ever leaves behind the town where they grew up ... even if they go.



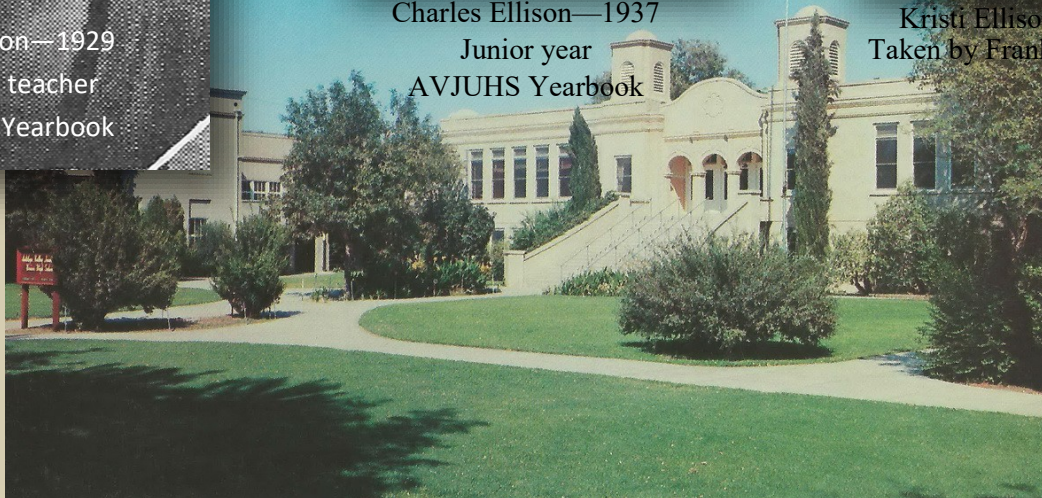
Anne Ellison—1929  
English teacher  
AVJUHS Yearbook



Charles Ellison—1937  
Junior year  
AVJUHS Yearbook



Kristi Ellison - 1965  
Taken by Frank Stubbings



## PEAR PIE WILL OUST PUMPKIN PIE!

*Los Angeles Times* Newspaper—November 23, 1924

The pumpkin pie has a rival! There is a section in California which is celebrating Thanksgiving this year with a different sort of pie, and the frost on the pumpkin song will not be sung there on the national holiday for giving thanks.

In the Antelope Valley the pear tree is mightier than the pumpkin vine and at Palmdale Great-grandmother Moore and Great-grandmother Nagel are preparing a pear pie festival for four generations of the Nagels, Moores and Ritters, who will celebrate their first Thanksgiving in over thirty years in a private home.

For nearly thirty-two years the Moores and Nagels have been running the little hotel known as the Palmdale Inn. Less than a month ago they sold it and have bought homes; and the pears, which will come from their own orchards, will celebrate and symbolize their giving of thanks for many things.

When Dorothea Nagel and Eliza Moore went to Antelope Valley decades ago there were no prolific pear orchards there then. There were sage-brush and sand, jackrabbits and coyotes; little water and no roads. There was not an electric light or a telephone or a water faucet in seventy miles. Great gray herds of antelope browsed on the hillsides and in the valley mountain lions and bears and bandits prowled about by night.

### EARLY HARDSHIPS

That notorious highwayman, Vasquez, the mysterious disappearing bandit, dodged the sheriffs of five counties in the grim gray canyons, leaving murder, theft, holdups, and terrorized settlers in his zigzag path of crime.

Fire, drought and famine were added dangers they had to face, and the hardships and deprivations of these early pioneer women, who had to draw water from wells, cook on wood stoves, burn tallow candles and travel in oxcarts, were conditions which the housewife of today can scarcely conceive.

But these sturdy settlers saw 640,000 acres of level land flooded by sunshine and surrounded by mountains. They saw all the land, lighted as if for a fiesta, by white candelabra of 10,000 blooming yucca palms. They saw the great white pillars of rainclouds march in majestic procession around the horizon and they watched magnificent rainbows which stretched in promise over the desert. Now they are celebrating the reality for which they so long hoped and dreamed.

The children who went with them there now have children of their own and these two great-grandmothers who lived in board shanties and had not the barest of necessities or conveniences of life, now have their own automobiles, and radios and live in houses electrically lighted and heated.

### MIRACLES TO THEM

“We are the ones who appreciate and understand the miracles of today,” said Great-grandmother Moore, the champion pear pie baker of the world. “In the span of my life there have come the telegraph and telephone, the automobile, motion pictures, the airship and the radio, each one as wonderful as the magic of a fairy tale, and there is not a single household article from a pin to a cooking stove and sewing machine but has been improved 1000 percent.

“I think if they would have a showing of pioneer household utensils, implements and furnishings at county fairs and would exhibit them side by side with the modern equipment that the housewife of today has, many young women would grumble less at the things they have to do. If they could see the old-fashioned scrub broom, made

### *They Saw Desert Transformed*



*Two Great-Grandmothers*

*Because they believe the pear is more representative of their district in which they have seen marvelous changes during their 30+ years residence there, Mrs. Eliza J. Moore (left) and Mrs. Dorothea Nagel (right) will substitute pear pie for pumpkin at the Thanksgiving celebration of their family.*

out of narrow strips of bark peeled and cut and tied by hand, beside their chemically treated, dustless mops, and their patent self-wringing ones, and see the primitive brooms of home-grown broom corn beside their vacuum cleaners, they would value their household blessings more.”

### WOMAN’S TRAGEDY

“In the years that we have been running the hotel here we have seen many humorous and many tragic things, sometimes they are all mixed up together. One time a woman came down from Los Angeles and took a room for a few days. She looked very sad and there was an air of mystery about her. She scarcely spoke to anyone and she just sat gazing off into space with a queer look in her eyes.

“When I asked her what seemed to be the trouble she said: ‘I’ve failed in everything I ever tried to do.’ I guess she told the truth for that night she tore up one of my best sheets and went out and tried to hang herself in a sagebrush that wasn’t strong enough to bear the weight of a cat.

“And one time such a nice, pleasant, handsome young man came for a while. How he did liven things up with the tales of his travels in Africa. But one night while he was in the midst of a wonderful story, and we were all sitting around the fire, in walked two officers and put handcuffs on him. He had just escaped from the penitentiary and he had never been out of California!”

### PIES FOR THOUSANDS

“I have made all the pies for the hotel for the last twenty years. At the completion of the State highway through here, about three years ago, I made 500 pies in three days. We had expected about 3000 people, and I had figured that with cutting a pie into six pieces we could serve that number, but when 4000 came, we had to let 1000 of them go pie-less.

“I think each section and community ought to make an annual practice of featuring its own products for the Thanksgiving festival. In Tennessee they have sweet potato pies at Thanksgiving. In Georgia many have damson-plum pies, and cranberry pie is the North Carolina pastry for that occasion. Rhubarb and mince pies vie with the pumpkin, even in New England. Dried apple pies, highly spiced, are a Thanksgiving favorite in Maine, and walnut cream pie is a Maryland Thanksgiving concoction. Different sections of California could have their prune, or apricot or raisin pies, all delicious, but the one better than them all is the pear pie of Antelope Valley pears.”

Two generations of this Thanksgiving gathering, Mrs. Dora Ritter and her little daughter, Loreene Ritter, were born in Antelope Valley and this will be their very first big, home-grown Thanksgiving Day.



*Palmdale Inn postcard, undated. The Inn opened in 1914 at the northeast corner of what is now Palmdale Blvd. and Sierra Hwy. It was demolished in 1966. Colorized by D. DeBry.*





# THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE AVRМ!

## Membership Application for the Antelope Valley Rural Museum

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Annual Dues \$20/person \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interest as a volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_

Tax deductible Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Bronze = \$100 Silver = \$1,000 Gold = \$10,000*

**Please make checks payable to:** AV Rural Museum

**Mail to:** AVRМ P.O. Box 1316, Lancaster, CA 93538

Donate and pay dues via **PayPal** on our website: [www.avmuseum.org](http://www.avmuseum.org)

### GHOST SIGNS AND MURALS IN THE ANTELOPE VALLEY

*A ghost sign is a faded, painted sign, at least 50 years old, on an exterior building wall heralding an obsolete product, an outdated trademark or a clue to the building's occupancy.*

*They are "ghosts" because they often reappear after a rainstorm or following the demolition of a neighboring building.*

Society for Commercial Archeology



Historian and author Norma Gurba-Kleit brought up this interesting subject on Facebook with a question about "ghost signs" in the Antelope Valley:

"Years ago, most little agricultural communities often some barns/brick buildings painted with large outdoor advertisements such as Bull Durham Tobacco as shown in the example at the left, which WAS NOT LOCATED IN THE AV."

Did any such large advertisements ever exist on any Antelope Valley structures? Well, according to Palmdale pioneer, L.W. Sadler, the old Schneckenberger place in New/West Palmdale on 6th Street East had a barn built circa 1901. This barn 'had a large Bull Durham advertisement painted on its side and one could see the more than life-size bull from all over town as there weren't many buildings then.'

Has anyone ever heard of similar painted advertising buildings in the old AV?"

There certainly must have been others, but I have looked through all of the photographs I have and nothing turned up. Please contact the AVRМ Newsletter Editor (Dayle DeBry) if you have any recollection of, or any photos of any "ghost signs" from the Antelope Valley!

Website: [www.avmuseum.org](http://www.avmuseum.org)  
[www.facebook.com/Antelope Valley Rural Museum](https://www.facebook.com/AntelopeValleyRuralMuseum)

Mailing address:

AVRM  
P.O. Box 1316  
Lancaster, CA 93584



Contact us:  
[avmuseum@verizon.net](mailto:avmuseum@verizon.net)

*Donate and pay dues via PayPal and credit card on our website*

## ANTELOPE VALLEY RURAL MUSEUM GIFT STORE

Annual membership dues	\$20.00
Hats—all baseball hats (Members)	\$10.00
Hats—all baseball hats (Non-members)	\$15.00
Lancaster, CA Through Time	\$25.00
History books—all books are priced at:	
Images of America “Lancaster”	\$20.00
Images of America “Palmdale”	
Legendary Locals of the AV	
(Above AV history books signed by Norma Gurba)	
P-38 Lightning	
Images of America “Edwards Air Force Base”	
DVDs Listed DVDs are priced at:	\$20.00
Jane Pinheiro Wildflowers NEW!	
Yester Years—AV History 1876—1942	
1987 Rural Olympics (narrated)	
Evolution of the Rural Olympics book	
(On DVD—Excel & Word Doc format)	

The AVRM is a 501(c)(3) public charity  
EIN: 27-1002922

**MISSION STATEMENT:** The AVRM will honor the history of the Antelope Valley with documentation, preservation, exhibition, and education.

### DONATIONS

Pickus Challenge 2020—2021 Building Fund	\$1,000
Honor the Past Plaques and Display Sponsorship (Custom laser cut wood plaques with Personal memorial or message)	\$1,500
Bronze Sponsorship Donor	\$100
Silver Sponsorship Donor	\$1000
Gold Sponsorship Donor	\$10,000

Antelope Valley Rural Museum  
P.O. Box 1316  
Lancaster, CA 93584



### UPCOMING EVENTS IN 2020

Museum is closed until further notice due to the COVID—19. We appreciate your understanding and hope you are all doing well.

