

The Historian

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About 1918. Horseshoe court on Main Ave in vacant lot next to Mercantile store.
Jack Janzen Collection photo

HORSESHOES IN OLD FALLBROOK

Main Ave was still a dirt road in the 1910s. In a vacant lot on the east side of Main, next to Reader's Mercantile store, a horseshoe court was set up between some tree stumps and a small shop. The Fallbrook Horseshoe Club was in existence as early as 1914 to organize local games, obtain equipment, and assign referee duties to someone they trusted.

Composed of local merchants and nearby residents, the Fallbrook Horseshoe Club included Bob Bailey who operated the telephone exchange, Luther Maze who had an automobile garage, and Postmaster Bert Woodbury. These were a few of the regulars often mentioned who spent many daylight hours here on the horseshoe court. Dignitaries occasionally stopped by to pitch horseshoes here, including in 1921, the future 25th governor of California.

Fallbrook took the game of horseshoes seriously. In 1916, the Whittler's Club, the Josher's Union, and the Horseshoe Pitching Gang were teams who honed their skills here to prepare for the horseshoe tournaments hosted elsewhere at the North County Farm Bureau annual picnic, the San Diego County Fair, and the Fallbrook Methodist Church annual picnic at Live Oak Park.

The bench warmers at the Main Ave horseshoe court warned challengers that the men to beat in those days was Moro Calac and the young Harry Smelser, proprietor of the furniture store on the NW corner of Main and Ivy. Two decades in the future, Harry would be elected judge of the Fallbrook Judicial court.

SDG&E brought electricity to Fallbrook in March 1917 and a small number of streetlights were installed. Electric poles and wires are seen in these pictures. However, these lights were not bright enough for a sporting event. Horseshoe pitching stopped when the sun went down.

The United States was fighting in World War One in 1917-18. In one of the pictures here, we notice one young man on the bench wearing an army uniform. By June 1918, the Fallbrook Enterprise newspaper Roll of Honor listed 54 Fallbrook men and 1 woman in uniform. This number would increase before the November 1918 Armistice.



About 1918. Another view of horseshoe court. The old Baptist church spire on Hawthorne St., built in 1888, towers in the background. White building on right is Woodbury home behind his newsstand. Electrical wires strung in 1917 run along Main Ave. Sitting on the bench, the 2nd man to the left appears to be in an army uniform. Many young Fallbrook men were serving in the military in 1918.

Jack Janzen Collection photo.

Philip Calac, a relative of Moro Calac, was lost in battle in France. Several other Fallbrook servicemen would be victims of the 1918 flu pandemic that began and spread through the army camps. In late 1918 the flu arrived in Fallbrook. Harry Smelser became ill, but survived. However, Harry's first wife Dot, age 23, succumbed to the virus.

In the early to mid-1920s, young Geno Somacal became the local champion, leading the Fallbrook horseshoe pitching teams to bring home top honors in tournaments from San Diego to Escondido. Geno grew up working with his father making Olive Oil at Pratt's Loma Ranch. As an older man, Geno would marry Rex Reader's daughter Babs.

Fallbrook was growing, and vacant lots along Main Ave were disappearing. The old horseshoe court was built over in 1927 when Rex Reader moved his Mercantile store one lot north so that he could build Fallbrook's 1st Safeway store on his old lot. Today the Blue Heron Gallery on Main sits about where Fallbrook's horseshoe court was one hundred years ago.

The Fallbrook Horseshoe Club for a time moved across the street to an empty lot immediately south of the C.E. Lamb's building. Apparently, the horseshoe court did not thrive in this new location as there is no further mention of it in local accounts.

-Tom Frew

Acknowledgements:

Jack Janzen Collection of historic Fallbrook photos.
Fallbrook Enterprise newspaper 1911-1930 editions.
Smelser, Calac, and Somacal Family Histories by Fallbrook Historical Society.



Harry Horatio Smelser circa 1920



Babs Reader & Geno Somacal, 1944

*“Whistle Stop Christmas”
Images*



Top L to R:

Mrs. Clause and Santa arrive at The Barn

Family making Christmas Stockings

Enjoying the Train Display in the
Museum

Candy Canes from Santa and Mrs. Clause

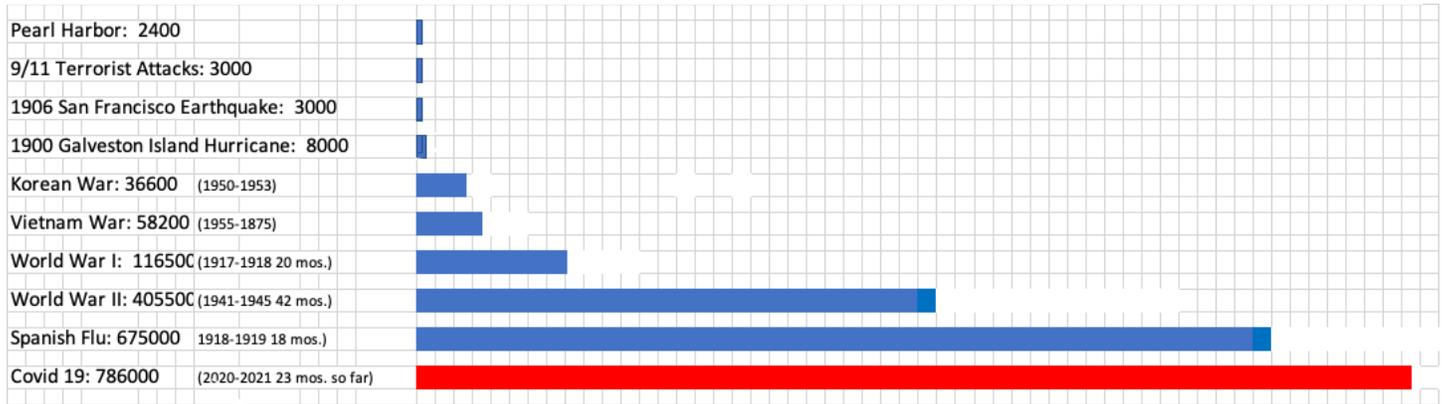


Top L to R:
The Madrigals caroling at The Barn
Family on tour of the Museum
Enjoying the food from Chef Pete Coleman
The McLean Family with Santa

An update from the May 2020 edition of Time Again:

U.S. WARS, EPIDEMICS & DISASTERS

NUMBER OF U.S. DEATHS



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For more information and to join the FHS docent pool, contact our

Docent Coordinator, Jeff Duhachek

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The Fallbrook Historical Society's mission is to bring history to life by educating the community and others about Fallbrook's rich heritage



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