

The Historian

A Quarterly Publication of the Fallbrook Historical Society

Winter 2025

Harrison's Pharmacy



1950s. Harrison's Pharmacy where it began in 1945 on the NE corner of Alvarado & Main when Leighton Harrison bought Keller's Rexall Drugstore. Years later, in 1962, Harrison moved the business into a larger building that he built across the street on the SW corner.

Leighton Harrison received his pharmaceutical degree from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, where he met and married Florine Davis in 1942. ⁽¹⁾

After graduation in 1942, they moved west to Escondido, Calif. where Leighton worked as a pharmacist and Florine became head librarian of the Carnegie Library. They saved their money towards their dream of buying their own store. ⁽²⁾

In 1945, Dan Keller was ready to sell his Rexall Drugstore that had been on the NE corner of Main & Alvarado since 1928. ⁽³⁾ The Harrison's, including Leighton's younger brother James and his James' wife Mary Jo Harrison pooled their funds to buy the old Fallbrook Rexall. It was a solid investment. Centrally located on a busy corner, it was the only pharmacy in Fallbrook. Harrison's Rexall Pharmacy opened on October 1st, 1945.

Harrison Drugstore employed many local people over the years, but it was truly a family business. Leighton was the head pharmacist and Florine managed the bookkeeping. Their three children worked in the store at various jobs when they were old enough. Oldest son Kermit Harrison would go on to college to earn his degree as a pharmacist. Kermit would eventually succeed his father. Leighton's younger brother James and his wife Mary Jo were involved co-owners from the beginning. Also from Oklahoma, James and Mary Jo settled permanently in Fallbrook to raise their family. Leighton's youngest brother Eddie came to Fallbrook as a teen and worked as a soda jerk in the drugstore for years before becoming a Fallbrook firefighter and realtor. (4)

The family's efforts were successful. However, the days of being the only pharmacy in town came to an end in 1949 when Sutton Pharmacy (later called Fallbrook Pharmacy) opened a store just one block away on N. Main. Leighton and Florine decided to meet the competition by building a bigger store. The Harrisons purchased from Charles Lamb the corner lot on the southwest corner across Main Avenue. They also purchased vacant lots behind Lamb's store that had once belonged to the Ellis/Naples Hotel. The Harrisons built a much larger, more attractive drugstore with plenty of parking. The new Harrisons Drugstore opened in May 1962.



1960s. Harrison's Rexall Pharmacy on the SW corner of Alvarado & Main. Today the Fallbrook Art Center is here.

Harrison's new building allowed them to have more inventory on display, ample parking, and good service with as many as 20 full or part-time employees.

The Harrison fountain and lunch counter in the center of Fallbrook was a busy gathering place. Morning regulars met for coffee that was still 5 cents a cup. At midday, the lunch crowd ambled in for hot food specials of meat loaf or beef stew, spaghetti or tamale pie, meals that ranged from 75 cents to one dollar 50 cents. Lunch was served until they ran out of food. (5) After school teens took over the counter to order real Coke or Pepsi that was prepared at the fountain by mixing syrup with carbonated water. The store was thriving.

Then, ten years later in 1973, Thrifty Drug Stores opened a bigger store just a few blocks south at the corner of Clemmens Lane and Mission Rd. Alpha Beta (later Lucky's) opened a nearby grocery store with a pharmacy that also sold alcohol. Alpha Beta was located in between Thrifty Drug and the Harrison store. (6)



1960s. Harrison's popular lunch counter. Pharmacy is at the right. Customers were offered a free soda drink while waiting for a prescription. Notice the ashtrays.

Leighton Harrison passed away in 1988 after a short illness. Florine and her son Kermit continued running the business. Then, more competition arrived when Village Medical Pharmacy opened across from Fallbrook Hospital on Elder Street. In 1992, Bonsall Pharmacy opened a store at River Village. The following year, in 1993, Fallbrook Pharmacy moved from its longtime Main location to 343 E. Alvarado and opened a drive thru window, the first drive thru pharmacy in Fallbrook. In 1995 the Harrisons accepted an offer to sell the prescription part of their business to Sav-On (which later became CVS). After 50 years at the intersection of Main and Alvarado, Harrison Drugstore closed in September 1995. (7)

--- Tom Frew



1960s. Interior Harrison's Drug Store. Looking from front to rear doors.
Lunch counter is right rear, pharmacy is in left rear corner below office space.

Footnotes

- 1) Wedding announcement, *The Daily Oklahoman*, January 4, 1942.
- 2) Drug Store Changes Hands, *Fallbrook Enterprise*, October 12, 1945.
- 3) Fallbrook Historic Resources Inventory for San Diego County, Sept 1991, by Susan Carrico & Kathy Flannigan
- 4) Eddie Harrison obituary, *Village News*, Nov 6, 2025.
- 5) The Way We Were by J. Ann Bryant, *Union Tribune*, May 22, 2005.
- 6) Telephone book and newspaper archives at Fallbrook Historical Society.
- 7) Harrison's to close landmark pharmacy, *Fallbrook Enterprise*, September 28, 1995.

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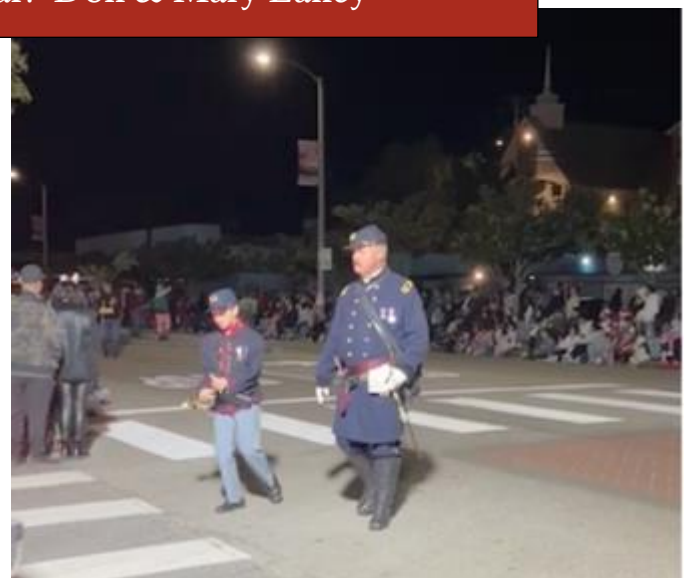


FALLBROOK CHRISTMAS PARADE

2025 Pioneer of the Year: Scott Atkins

2025 Business of the Year: Fallbrook Woman's Club

2025 Members of the Year: Don & Mary Lahey

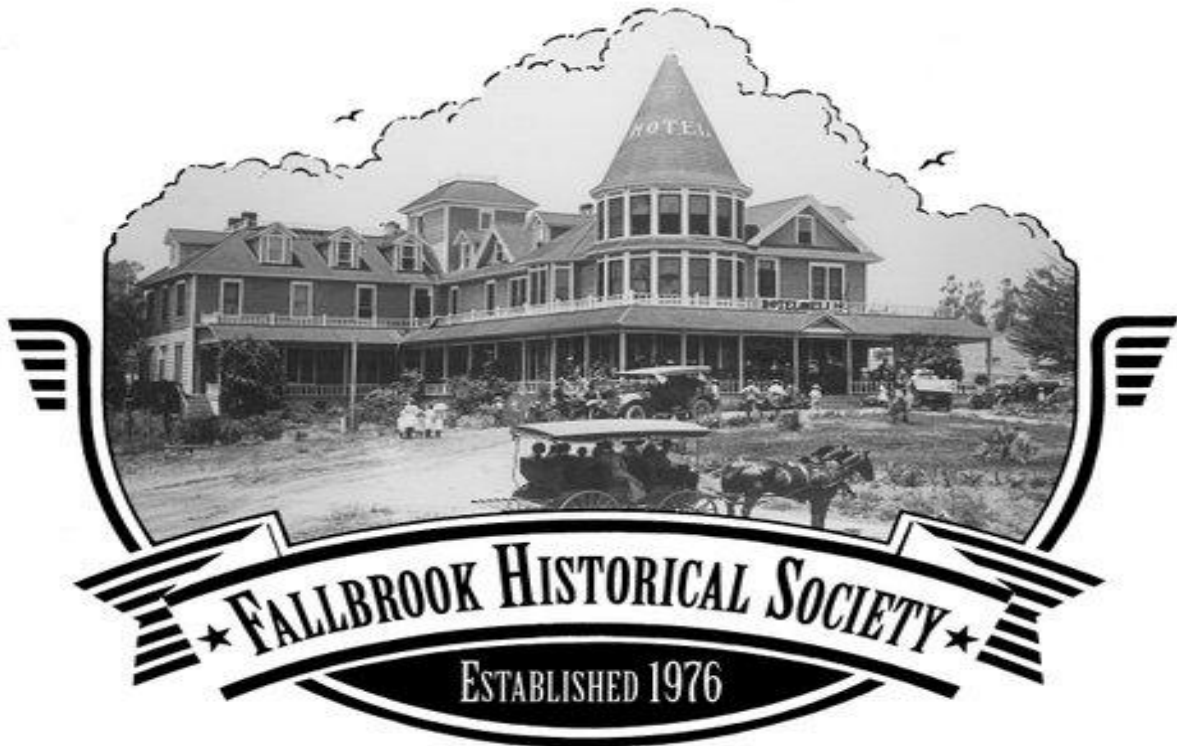


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The Fallbrook Historical Society's mission is to bring history to life by educating the community and others about Fallbrook's rich heritage



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