

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ALTA MESA GUN CLUB**

**REMEMBERED BY BOB SMITH, JOHN MAGGY, ROBERTA WEBB, CHARLOTTE MCCARTY, AND LARRY BACKERT - SEPTEMBER 1994**

**THE PLACE:** A small community located in the southeastern portion of Sacramento County known as Alta Mesa.

**THE TIME:** Early 1940's, the world at war, residents old enough fighting for our country in far away places, those too young or too old left at home keeping their homes and their community going. The area was sparsely populated. Agriculture was the main source of income. Turkey farms, chicken ranches, cattle, dry pasture, dairy farms, were most common in the area.

**THE LIFESTYLE:** The Alta Mesa Farm Bureau was the center for most residents. The peoples of Alta Mesa, Wilton, Herald and Galt met regularly. The Bureau provided farmers a united voice in business as well as fulfilling their social needs. The Farm Bureau was located on the North East Corner of Blake and Alta Mesa Road. The building was built by some of the same residents that would later help build the Gun Club. Later the center was purchased from the Farm Bureau by the Alta Mesa Community Club whose members had comprised the Farm Bureau. The community's biggest event of the year was the Alta Mesa Fair. The annual one day fair was held a total of 57 times beginning in 1922 and ending in 1982. The only exceptions were twice during World War II and one year when farm business did not leave enough time for fair planning. The hall burned in 1987 after which the Community Club disbanded, selling the land to Marion Miller. Additionally, the Community Club had purchased the five acres west of the Gun Club in the 60's or 70's. Upon disbandment of the Community Club in 1989 the Gun Club was given the Land as well as monies in its treasury. It is well known that it was the same people that were members of both the Community Club and the Gun Club. Many of the same families also enjoyed the Alta Mesa 4-H and many of the residents served on the Alta Mesa Fire Department. This lifestyle was typical throughout the United States where country life in rural communities was the same.

During wartime, those left at home were not only obligated to run the farms and businesses, they also had the responsibility of ensuring protection in case of an attack from the enemy. Local men were formally organized under the State Militia in the event of such an attack. Later, in peacetime the men were mustered out.

Out of this Militia came a group of fellows who continued to meet and enjoyed shooting. They gathered on Rising Road, West of Alta Mesa. The land was rolling and a good place to shoot their rifles. Bob Smith notes there was a good gully and nobody was around. As time progressed and more homes were built the fellows decided to organize a Gun Club. The club held its meetings at the Farm Bureau and paid rent in the amount of \$24.00 a year for the privilege. The first recorded entry in the journal was October 26, 1944. The club first paid dues to the (NRA) National Rifle Association of America on November 7, 1944 in the amount of \$81.00. This represented 27 members who had paid dues in the amount of \$5.00 each. Dues increased to \$7.00 in 1945, to \$8.00 in 1946, \$9.00 in 1947. The last dues entries in the journal are for 1956 showing the dues at \$9.00 and a total of 28 members.

The club was incorporated Oct 25, 1948. In Jan 1949 the Incorporation and Seal was issued by the State of California. The first Bank Account was with Bank of America in Lodi.

Charles Smith, father to Frank and Bob, sold the club five acres for \$20 an acre, for total sales price of \$100.00. The land was located where the club house now stands running west, a strip 110' wide and went in length to Rising Road. Later a lot line adjustment was done making the five acres square as we know it today. The ledger shows the club reimbursed Bob \$3.50 for a building permit in 1948. The property was not formally deeded over to the club until Jan 7, 1949, long after improvements had been started. The Smiths turned the money back to the club for an improvement loan. There is a 50 year reversionary clause in the deed in the event the club disbanded the Smiths could buy back the land and improvements for \$2500. Throughout the next 10 years the clubhouse was built, financed by loans from the members. From the ledgers construction most probably started in December of 1947. There is an entry for gravel in 1944, but most probably that was to improve the road and shooting area. The building was for the most part constructed during weekends and Bob credits Eddie Madsen working every weekend and organizing the work crews. The building was designed to have an upstairs that someday would house lockers for members to store their personal belongings; however that never developed. The bathrooms were added later, most probably sometime in the mid 1950's. The roof tiles were hand made by Raymond Gates for the amount of \$300. In 1950 the club paid its first SMUD bill in the amount of \$2.27. The first well is said to be hand dug by George Stamp and Marion Miller. It was located where the flag pole is now. The septic tank was about 15 feet from the well and the leach lines about 60 feet away. 1958 the Club purchased the additional ten acres east of the original five acres from the Holden family. The purchase price was \$1600 and financed by loans from the members of the club.

John Maggy remembers when the floor tile was added. Jack Simas designed the mosaic emblem in the hallway. Jack, aided by Hank Razzano, spent an endless amount of time on that piece of art work. John recalled the work that had to be done grinding and filling the concrete floors before the floor tiles could be laid. The kitchen cabinets were made by Cy Lotto and cost \$89.29. The 80's brought electrical updates, upgrading to a 200 amp service panel. This improvement enabled the outside lights to be installed. The building continues to be improved, this year the work crews have painted the outside of the clubhouse as well as the inside.

In the early days the shoots were real Turkey Shoots. The turkeys were purchased from nearby turkey farmers including Richard Maggy, Bob and Frank Smith. The turkeys were brought to the club alive and the winners of the shoots chose his turkey and it was killed and dressed there on the spot. From the journal we find that the first recorded shoot entered December 8, 1944. It is entered as "Turkey Whist Party of December 13th". The journal shows an \$87.00 credit to the club for that event. No shoot was recorded in 1945. The next shoot entry is November 24, 1946, showing a \$70.50 credit. This followed by two shoots in 1947. The November 1947 shoot shows a gross of \$341.00 and the December shoot a gross of \$477.00. This pattern of shoots continued. Other entries show special shoots, one on Feb 16, 1951 showing a \$97.25 deposit as well as a credit of \$55.95 from food and roulette. In 1955 we find the first entry for ham and bacon shoot on April 5th and a credit of \$427.44 was entered. March 11, 1956, another entry for a ham shoot shows an entry of \$217.45 and an entry of \$250.30 for a dance of same date. We know that monthly shoots evolved but the actual date of the traditional 4th Sunday of the month shoot has not been obtained. Also, since the installation of the outside lights in the 80's night shooting has become a popular event for the members.

There was one hand operated trap. There was a piece of culvert pipe that served for protection of the trap boy. Bob recalls George Stamp took the job of trap boy and would sit there all day. He just liked to do it. The early shoots found the guys shooting towards Rising Road where they had mounded dirt and added a backstop. After the lot line adjustment the mound was leveled and the backboard was taken down eliminating the rifle range. The original number 1 trap was positioned where it remains today. The second trap was added about 1962.

Bob and John could recall only two minor accidents. Once a gun discharged premature and the victim was taken to the doctor returning the same day with a broken nose and some powder burns. Another incident at a practice shoot a gun discharged before it was locked. Though it shook up the victim he did not need any medical attention.

The club has been used for social functions. We see entries from the ledger as far back as Feb 4, 1947 for a card party and gun raffle. The journal reflects \$233.40 from that and a Dance profit on March 6, 1947 for an amount of \$29.45. We know that the club has been used for wedding receptions, funeral receptions and birthday parties. It has been a meeting place for 4-H and Scouts. Hunter safety courses have been taught there. In the late 70's and 80's the Community Club held its annual Fair at the site as they had outgrown the Alta Mesa Hall. The building was used during Operation Desert Storm as Cookie headquarters where local residents dropped off cookies that were packed and flown over to the bases by a local Air Force pilot. Troops were enjoying cookies in as little as 48 hours after leaving the club. The club is currently being used for voting.

Throughout the last fifty years the one thing that remains steadfast is the spirit of the volunteers and the fellowship of those that have participated in the club. In the early days, the women donated their labor cooking chili and beans and running the kitchens during the shoots. Members would lend the club money to make improvements. The largest loan was made by Charles Smith in July of 1953 in the amount of \$800.00. A 1950 entry shows \$200.00 from George Stamp. There were many that gave improvement loans in smaller amounts. Many more over the years that have given their time. The Smith family, Eddie Madsen, George Stamp, the Maggy family, the Liebig family, Bud Webb, the Monseth family, Marion Miller, and many more. These were the pioneers. They were later followed by Ernie Wares, Edie Thompson, Ray Allinger, George Reese, John Patterson and many more that have and continue to support the club. Today the club has 129 paid members who continue in the original spirit giving their time and continuing to maintain the property and make improvements.

In closing, this organization has become the invisible link that forms together through fellowship and creates a community that will sustain the test of time and form its history.

Carol Backert  
October 13, 1994

## **ALTA MESA**

(I came across this while looking for pictures of the Alta Mesa Hall in old Country Sentinel files. I cannot remember who gave this to us. I checked with Liz Bailey, (she and I published the paper) and she could not remember either. We know it was written in about 1981. This has such historical value, it needed to be included in this book.)

Carol Backert  
October 27, 1994

Alta Mesa was originally called the Don Ray Colony which was established in 1903. In 1910 the railroad came through the area and the station at Blake and Colony was named Blake's Crossing and for fifty cents you could ride to Sacramento and back. The name Alta Mesa came from a cooperative packing plant to pack and ship grapes from the area commercially. They picked the name Alta Mesa for their Tokays which were being shipped. The name was Spanish for "High and Dry" and that certainly described the area.

In 1913 Mr. T. Winey donated some land at Blake and Alta Mesa and the members of the community all pitched in and built the present hall. Herbert King, along with Charles Smith, Charles Partel, Charles Blake and Mrs. Sara Green organized the Don Ray Colony Central Improvement Center in 1917. The Alta Mesa Farm Bureau was organized and they paid \$50.00 to the owners of the hall so they could have a meeting place.

In 1922 Benjamin Taylor reported on an article he had read in the Country Gentleman about one day fairs held back east. The members decided to try one and the first Alta Mesa Community Fair was held in August 1922. It is the oldest continuous fair in Sacramento County.

It was also the first community fair. It has been held every year with the exception of 1942, 1943 and 1956 when there was too much farm work to be done. All the ladies in the community prepared and served all the food.

Alta Mesa was the home of the first 4-H Club in Sacramento County in 1920. It was called the Corn and Calf Club - later it was the Boys and Girls Agricultural Club - but was called 4-H in 1925.

On October 14, 1936 a bad fire all but destroyed all of Alta Mesa. The whole community banded together to build homes and buildings that were destroyed on 17 ranches. They built barns, chicken coops, tank houses, windmills and houses and very soon all was back to normal.

Author Unknown