



The Edgewater Service Station

by Phil Pezzaglia

In 1923 Lewis Ruble McKinnon had the idea to erect a service station on his property, just across from the Rio Vista Bridge. McKinnon hired Victor Kafenberg to construct the station. And a fine station it was, with the most modern equipment and architecture.

The idea for a service station was born out of necessity, for at that point in time, the only place that you could purchase gasoline in town was at one of the two garages. Mr. McKinnon's grandfather, Lewis Cass Ruble, had purchased the land on which the station was built in the late 1800s. Note that at this time, the old Rio Vista Bridge was located just to the south of the existing bridge.

The Edgewater Service Station started operations with Mr. McKinnon and Mr. Elliott running the business. After a short time, Mr. Elliott removed himself from the partnership. It was then that Mr. Campbell became involved in the operation. Campbell and McKinnon continued to operate the business until 1927, at which time it was purchased by Herman Fisher. Mr. Fisher purchased the business, but Mr. McKinnon retained ownership of the structure and the property.

During Mr. Fisher's years as proprietor of the Edgewater Service Station, there were some changes made. On the south side of the building a grease rack was added. Cars would drive onto the rack, which was level with the levee, while the mechanic worked on the vehicle from a platform approximately five feet below the rack.

On the north side of the building a porch was constructed with a canopy over the top. A large window was placed in the north wall of the Service Station, to be able to look onto the porch. While patrons waited for their cars to be worked on, they could purchase and enjoy a variety of refreshments such as soda pop, milkshakes, ice cream cones, gum and an assortment of candy. There were even times when a few slot machines were placed at the station, to entertain customers while they waited.

Mr. Fisher stocked both batteries and tires. This was a new convenience as the former proprietors would special order tires or batteries when requested by a customer, but they had not carried any inventory. Mr. Fisher would often be at work until midnight, if someone had an emergency. However, regular business hours were 6:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.



When the Antioch Bridge was constructed and the river road was experiencing more traffic, many people stopped in for directions to the Antioch Bridge. After a time, he made arrangements to place a sign above the soft drink stand which read: "ANTIOCH BRIDGE Straight Ahead." In appreciation of the Edgewater Service Station, Herman Fisher could cross the Antioch Bridge without having to pay any tolls.

In 1933 Elmer Bushnell purchased the service station from Mr. Fisher. Mr. Bushnell only operated the station for a very short time before selling it to Bob Bruce.

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The Edgewater Service Station, c. 1927-1933. Note the Antioch Bridge sign.

Artifact Spotlight

by Suzanne Goldberg

The Rio Vista Museum was founded in 1975 for the purpose of preserving the history and artifacts of Rio Vista for the people of Rio Vista and all visitors.

Hanging on the wall near the front door of the museum is a small framed program from a 1921 Ellison-White Chautauqua that visited the area in May of that year. Perhaps you have noticed it and wondered more about the traveling shows known as chautauquas.



PROGRAM FROM A 1921 CHAUTAUQUA

The origins of the “Chautauqua” date back to 1874, but the traveling assemblies reached their popularity in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Chautauqua brought entertainment and culture to small rural communities. They provided entertainment that the entire community could enjoy, with speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day.

Clarence H. White. Ellison had worked with Vawter before joining White. Their headquarters was in Portland, Oregon, and they provided chautauquas throughout the western United States and Canada.

It is difficult to overstate the role played by chautauquas in both educating millions of Americans and in shaping public opinion and a particularly American view of what an educated person is and what civic involvement should look like.

Look again at this 1921 program and notice the prominent placement of automobiles. Motor cars and the radio, as well as the Great Depression, are generally viewed as major causes of the demise of the circuit chautauquas. The booking bureaus tried to embrace the automobile and appealed directly to drivers. One

“Chautauqua is the most American thing in America.”

—Theodore Roosevelt

The Ellison-White Chautauqua that visited Rio Vista in 1921 was part of a movement that began near a lake in upstate New York almost fifty years earlier. In 1874, John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller rented a site near Lake Chautauqua to host a summer school for Sunday School teachers, an educational experience informed by a non-denominational Protestantism.

In just a few years, this Chautauqua Institution, as it came to be known, had become an important center for adult education in its broadest sense. Included were lectures, concerts, book clubs, and social activities. The Chautauqua idea spread, and “chautauquas” were established throughout the country but mainly in the Midwest.

The “circuit chautauquas,” of which Ellison-White was one, began in 1904, the brainchild of Keith Vawter. These traveling programs included lecturers, scientists, preachers, politicians, explorers, musicians, artists, magicians, and even plays and operas. By 1911, Vawter was providing programs to 68 towns in Iowa, Nebraska, and Wisconsin.

In 1912, the Ellison-White Chautauqua Bureau was formed by J.R. Ellison and

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New Display Honors Beloved Rio Vistan Harvey Felt

Harvey Adams Felt

May 27, 1923 – May 5, 2017

There is not enough space here to even begin to describe Harvey's life or the impact he had on this community. But here are a few tidbits.

Harvey Felt was a native Californian, born in Berkeley and raised in Hayward. After his service in the U.S. Army, he graduated from San Jose State University before ending up in Rio Vista, where he taught Woodshop and Drafting at Rio Vista High School from 1948 to 1995. In the early years, he also drove the school bus before and after school. For decades, Harvey was the official timekeeper at Rio Vista Rams football and basketball games. He attended more than 60 RVHS class reunions. The 1990 yearbook was dedicated to him as well as a graduation after his retirement.

Harvey was involved in many local clubs and organizations, serving on the boards of several, including our own Museum Association.



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Through the years, the station was subject to a few robberies. These robberies were blamed partially on the fact that the station was so isolated. Since money was never left in the building over night, inventory such as tires and batteries were usually taken.

Because the location of the station was in direct line with the east end of the Rio Vista Bridge, there were several times when cars skidded on the ice and ran into the pumps. The station was also used by some of the local high school drivers to show off their driving precision, as they would race across the bridge, circle the pumps, and race back across the bridge.

A plan was being developed for both a new Rio Vista Bridge and a road to be constructed, which would go across Brannan Island, after the new Rio Vista Bridge was erected. The State of California contacted Mr. McKinnon regarding the property on which the Edgewater Service Station was situated, since he had retained ownership of the land, only leasing the station to the various owners.

On January 8, 1945, Lewis McKinnon's son Malcolm signed over a bill of sale, which conveyed the service station building and all the equipment therein, to the State of California. The station was torn down and a "new" Rio Vista Bridge was constructed.

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Vawter advertisement reads in part, "The Chautauqua and the Automobile are twin sisters when it comes to putting pep into human life. They both take you into the big out-of-doors. They go hand in hand increasing the joy of living, by ironing furrows from the brow of care."

Despite these efforts, the circuit chautauquas had ended by 1933. Their influence, however, lives on.

The following references were very useful in the writing of this article:

The Chautauqua Movement

<http://www.chautauquatrail.com/the-chautauqua-movement>

The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa, Vawter, Keith

<http://uipress.lib.uiowa.edu/bdi/DetailsPage.aspx?id=386>

Lush, Paige. Music in the Chautauqua Movement: From 1874 to the 1930s. McFarland, 2013.

***Joel Pomerantz to Speak at
Annual Membership Meeting
Monday, January 29, 2018
6:30 p.m.***

Come to the museum to enjoy a program of historical interest and to elect the 2018 officers and board members.

This year we are pleased to welcome Joel Pomerantz, San Francisco water and climate history researcher, who will present what he has learned about a little-understood extreme weather event from the 19th century. The Delta region and Sacramento City famously suffered severe storms in the 1850s and 1860s. But it wasn't just local areas that were hit. Learn about how the entire west was inundated, changing the ecology, culture and economics of America. Meteorology records don't tend to include this period due to a shortage of standardized measurements. As a result, many scientists describe 2017 as California's wettest year. Based on how few bridges stayed put in 1862, how rivers changed course, and how people and farms were washed away, it was definitely a contender. 1862's storms were possibly much bigger than recent extremes, and there's evidence of even worse in earlier times. What does this research indicate about future extremes? The presentation will include photos and a participatory discussion.

2018 Museum Dues

Please return your dues in the enclosed envelope or bring it with you to the Annual Meeting. Remember, the museum depends on these funds.

Memorials

On behalf of the Rio Vista Museum, we would like to thank those who have made a memorial donation in the past year in honor of their loved ones. The following were so honored in 2017:

Bob and Joy Augusto	Mickey Gregorski
Richard Brann	Harry Lira
Bob Bruce	Tim Maghoney
Harry Bruce	Virginia Pezzaglia
Richard Esperson	Norm Richardson
Harvey Felt	Everett Upham
Kevin Graham	Mary Ellen Williams
Mary Heath	

**Old Time Christmas Faire
Another Rousing Success**

Thank you to ALL who made this year's Christmas Faire so successful. So much goes into this type of event: decorating the museum for the season, soliciting the many talented vendor craftspeople, finding ways to fit those vendor tables into our crowded wonderful museum space, getting the word out in local papers and with posters in businesses, running our popular bake sale, selling raffle tickets, and, or course, cleaning up afterwards.

Thank you Nora Crane for organizing this wonderful event and to all who helped: Renee Tingey, Dana Lapp, Gail Machado, Jim and Joyce Metcalf, Jake Ricketts, Josiah Tingey, Janet Blegen, Carlos Zepeda, Suzanne Goldberg, Peter Hamilton, Beverly Bellows, Phil Pezzaglia, Kathy Meers, and Tammy Foord.

A special thanks to our vendors who donated items for the raffle, to all who baked items, and to all who bought them.