



Photo taken in 1906. Courtesy Bob & Olivia Fulkerson

A Tour of Somis

Part 1

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Introduction

by Mary Goldberg

While driving through Somis to Moorpark and beyond, I've often wondered about the history of this little community. What is the Somis Thursday Club? Was the Somis School District, established in 1895 according to the sign, always in the same location? How long has the Fulkerson Hardware Store been in business? This article answers those questions and a few more.

Watch for "A Tour of Somis-Part 2" which continues the tour with the history and pictures of The Somis Thursday Club and The Somis School District.

A short history of Somis

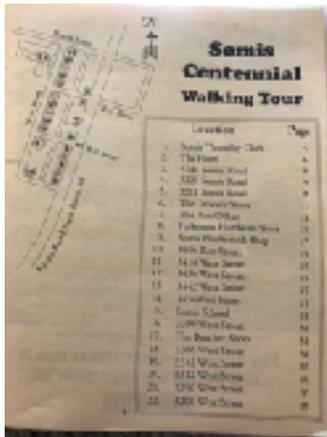
The Chumash Indians who originally lived in the area, named their settlement "Sohmus." The name was Americanized and is thought to be translated as "scrub oak." In 1834, the Rancho Las Posas Mexican Land Grant was given to Jose Carrillo by Mexican Governor Jose Figueroa. It passed to Joseph de la Guerra in 1864. The amount of the grant was 26,623 acres. It was later obtained by Thomas Bard who laid out the town site in 1892 on the site of the old Chumash Village. Water came from the nearby Calleguas Creek which contained artesian wells.

Original July, 1892 town map
with notes listing plot purchases.
Courtesy Bob & Olivia Fulkerson



In July, 1991, Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board named three Somis sites as Ventura County Historical Landmarks. They are: the Somis Thursday Club, Fulkerson Hardware, and the Somis School.

On October 11, 1992, the Pleasant Valley Historical Society celebrated the Somis Centennial with a program which featured a Walking Tour and a variety of exhibits. The Somis Post Office hand stamped a Somis Centennial first day cover designed by local artist Ray Ayers.



The original town remains somewhat isolated and has retained its charm throughout the years. Their population in 2000 was 2,946. By 2010, the population had only increased by 233 to a total of 3,179.

Fulkerson Hardware Store



Ventura County Historical Landmark #128

The most iconic business in Somis is the Fulkerson Hardware Store. Visiting the store is like going back in time. Rows and rows of everything a farmer or do-it-yourselfer could ever need without going into a cold big box store. Walk into the store and you are greeted warmly by fourth-generation Kyle who recently took over the business. Dad Bob still gives a hand with his knowledge of it's extensive inventory. An old roll-top desk is covered with ledgers, an old calendar with notes of important events, and other business items. "Jack's Museum" in the corner reminds us what life was like many, many years ago. The 1913 National cash register that was purchased new, still works and sits proudly on the counter. It is stamped with rows of delicate fleurs-de-lis on the brass housing.



Jack's Museum



Need a nail or two
or more?



1913 National Cash Register

The store began when Jonathan F. Fulkerson, built a wood-framed shop in 1912, the year electricity came to Somis. Unfortunately it burned down 13 months later. One story is that the fire started from a cigar tossed in a bin after a late night pinochle game. He rebuilt the store next to the original. In 1925 Jonathan built an addition on the foundation of the original store to house the growing collection of merchandise.

Since there were four J. F. Fulkerson's living in Somis at the same time, they decided how their mail should be addressed to make it easier for the Postmaster to deliver the mail to the correct person. Jonathan choose to abbreviate his name to Jno.



In 1892, Jonathan and his wife Frannie built their home behind the store on West Street. Though no longer owned by Fulkerson family, it is the oldest home in town. They built a new home in 1938 on the corner of West Street and Rice Street. After several owners, this home was purchased by Bob and Olivia in 1981.

Jonathan's son, Jonathan F. Fulkerson, Jr "Jack" took over the business in 1947. This was just one year after he married his wife Barbara. When Jack retired in 1977, both Jack and Barbara continued to be active in the community. He was known as the town's unofficial mayor and storyteller until his death in 2000 at age 86.



Second
generation
Jack
Photo courtesy
Bob & Olivia
Fulkerson.



Fourth and third
generations
Kyle and Bob

After Bob retired, his son Robert W. Fulkerson, “Bob” became the new owner. In addition to his extensive knowledge of the store, he is the unofficial historian of Somis. Have a question about who lived where and did what? Just ask Bob.

Kyle continues the family tradition of excellent customer service. He follows their unofficial motto of “If you can’t find it anywhere else, Fulkerson will have it.” Though they mainly sell to local farmers and ranch hands, visitors always find something they couldn’t find anywhere else.

Somis Blacksmith Shop



Photo taken in 1902 Courtesy Bob & Olivia Fulkerson



James F. Fulkerson
Blacksmith and Wagon Maker Ledger
Courtesy of Bob & Olivia Fulkerson

Long before there was a hardware store, a blacksmith shop was needed in the fledgling community. It was built in 1892 by James F. Fulkerson. The site is now occupied by offices next to the post office. Eight years later, his brother Jonathan, which he abbreviated to Jno., purchased the business when James decided to move to the new township of Oxnard where he also opened a blacksmith shop. Jonathan kept the shop

until he opened his hardware store across the street in 1912. The shop was sold to Arthur Humphrey, then to Robert Boaz.

In 1933, John C. Mahnken and William Miller purchased the business. In the late 1930's they moved it across Somis Road from the hardware store. The building was originally a mechanic's garage that was built in the late 1920's. The business was eventually operated by son John H. Mahnken, followed by his son, John B. Mahnken, Jr. John B. was known for his craftsmanship in producing branding irons.



It is currently the site of Chaney Welding which continues the metal working tradition. They provide services in welding, fabrication, custom windows and doors, repair, and structural metal work.

The Somis Post Office

Every community needs a post office. It is sometimes quicker to stop in the small Somis Post Office than the larger one in Camarillo. Horse and buggy riders from Springville brought the first mail to the new town. The first Post Office was located in Jonathan's home. From 1894-1899 it was housed in Unhrue's grocery store. This was followed to a move McLaughlin's grocery store. The story goes that whoever had the grocery store, became the Somis postmaster.

The current building was constructed in 1965 and operated by grocer Art Kitchen. The grocery part of the business closed in 1975 leaving the post office as the only occupant of the space.

The Life of the Grocery Store

Bev Taylor



In 1894, “Old Man” Unhrue opened the first grocery store in Somis at the corner of Somis Road and Rice Street. It was called the Somis West Market. It burned down in 1899 and a second grocery store, two stories high, was built by Tom Smith. Later Mr. John B. Gale obtained the grocery business. After Mr. Gale discontinued his store, Bob Compos used the building for a pool room and barber shop. In 1915 it was torn down.

A third grocery store was built in 1910 by F.W. Mc Lachlin on the corner of Bell Street and Somis Road. This third store was run by Ray Haddock and Mr. Weisihan. Five years later in 1915, W.L. Collier took over the store. In 1920, Louis Hantover was the groceryman. He sold out to Kyle K. McCleary in 1943. McCleary then build a new store next door to where the Somis Café currently stands. He operated the store for several years before it was converted to the Post Office and later to the Somis Café.

A fourth store was built for J.D. Willis by the Berylwood Investment Company about 1925 and operated by him until 1939. The next grocer was Louis Alameda and in 1944 he sold to Manuel Gill. Ownership later in 1949, went to Art Kitchen. He ran the store for the next 17 years. The building was torn down in 1965.

Now, the Somis General Store is at 3335 Somis Rd. It is the only standalone grocery store in Somis. It carries everything from paper plates, Madonna candles, toilet paper, beer, and food items.

The Butcher Shop of Two Doors

Bev Taylor

I remember my grandmother would go to the butcher shop, HI's on Park Blvd. in San Diego, twice a week. She had a running tab which she paid monthly. Now, we buy almost everything in one store. We surely don't have a running tab. The original Somis butcher shop was located on Somis Road, near Rice Street next to Somis General Merchandise Store. The building had two front doors: one to the butcher shop and the other to the owner's residence. The Somis Centennial reports that Mrs. Jonathan Fulkerson purchased the butcher shop and moved it to West Street just down from Rice Street.

A Small Green Building

Bev Taylor



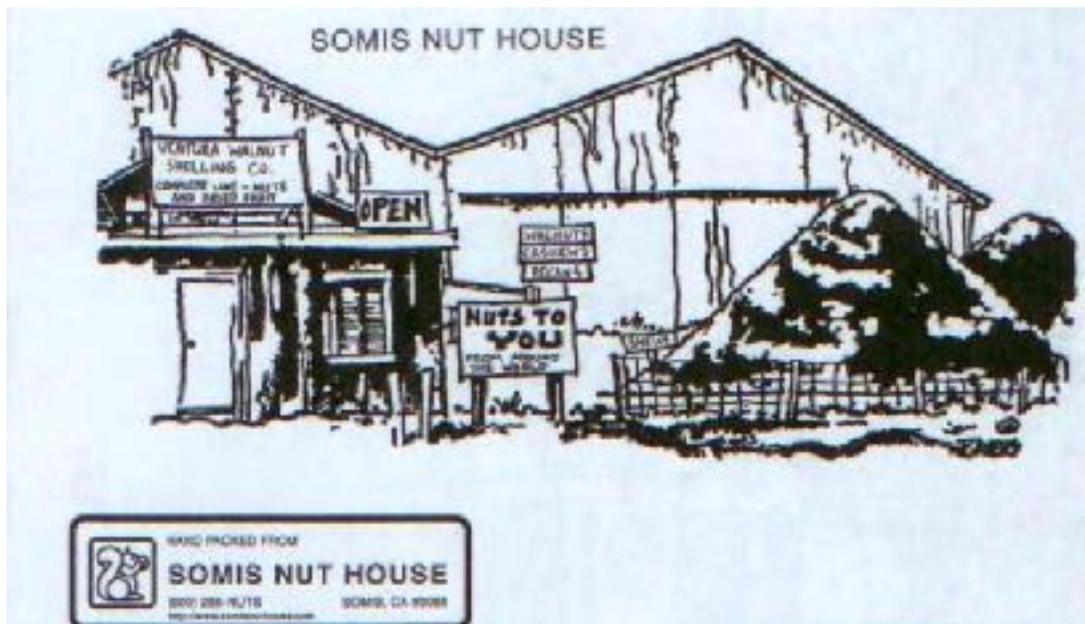
A small green building at 3319 Somis Rd, Somis, is a very unique part of this mostly agrarian community. The little green building is the Somis Café & Market. I am not sure how long it has been there, but I have been in Camarillo since 1970 and it was here then. Maybe you know when it first opened. Today it is owned by Maria Angeles and her sister Maria de la Cruz. Both of these ladies are experienced cooks of the unique Mexican food served at the café.

The café serves a real variety of customers. There are farm workers from the surrounding agricultural area, truck drivers who stop each time they come through Somis off of HWY 118 for their favorite menu item, and many from Camarillo or Ventura or Saticoy stop there for a take out on their way to another destination. It is a must when you are in the area. And, you may stop at Fulkerson's Hardware Store too. Anything you can think of is there, I am sure.

I have a vague memory of a special birthday party being held at the Somis Café & Market many, many years ago. It was a group of ladies who lived around the county with various interest. But have one thing is common. They all come to the Somis Café & Market to enjoy the family atmosphere, good Mexican food and service. It was a birthday party, I think. There were lace table cloths, candelabras and real silverware. Happy, happy birthday.

The current health issues have made it difficult to do business as the owners would like. The Marias still prepare the favorites of many: Huevos Rancheros and Burritos Verde and much more. But they can't have the café open only the small market. They are open only for takeout. The many families who shared dinner with their neighbors from all around the area isn't happening right now. The café is looking forward to the time they can open up again and have families share part of their lives in the cafe. Keep it on your To Do List when COVID-19 has passed.

Somis Nut House



Article and pictures by

Rebecca Pecsok

In 1959, Stephen Resnik and his parents, Morris and Annette, established a walnut shelling plant in Somis on the corner of Bradley Road and Highway 118 (LA Avenue). Morris had been in a partnership with his sister in a walnut shelling plant in Canoga Park and he decided that Ventura County would be a good place to build a new plant based on the large acreage of walnuts being grown there. They called the business the Ventura Walnut Shelling Co. Stephen had recently graduated from Stanford University and began a career as a teacher, but it was soon evident that teaching was not his forte, so he joined his parents in this new endeavor. Morris and Annette moved to Camarillo in 1960 from the San Fernando Valley, and Stephen and his wife, Joyce, followed in 1961. He and his father reached out to the many local walnut farmers and forged long term relationships with them to purchase and process the walnut crop, which at the time in the early 1960s, was one of the largest walnut growing regions in California.

The processing of walnuts entailed dumping the newly picked and de-husked walnuts into giant hoppers which then distributed the nuts into the cracking apparatus. The nuts were forced between two large steel rollers that cracked the shells and then deposited the

cracked nuts onto a conveyer belt where they ran under a hood which sucked up most of the lightweight shells to be discarded as a by-product. The heavier nut meats remained on the belt and were transported into an area where a crew of about a dozen women sat on both sides to remove any remaining shells and any bad nuts by hand. The nut meats then continued along the belt and were deposited into 25lb. boxes, which were then sealed and palletized for shipment to wholesale distributors around the US.



Morris and Annette Resnik, approximately 1965



Morris Resnik 1965-ish



Assembly line ladies 1965ish

For the first few years of the business, it was strictly a wholesale walnut packing house. However, Morris and Stephen decided to try adding a small retail store to sell the walnuts to local consumers. They bought a small, prefabricated, building and attached it

to the walnut warehouse fronting the highway and opened the store. Because they had been doing business with the Los Angeles nut distributors, they were able to purchase other nuts, such as pecans, filberts, pistachios, and brazil nuts for the new store. Later, they began selling dried fruits and candies. The Resniks hand-packed and weighed every package themselves and they established a rapport with the residents of the surrounding area. Annette started designing variety packs to sell and that was when things really took off. Morris passed away in 1971, but Stephen and his mother continued their partnership.



STEVE + DAUGHTER REBECCA AT THE XMAS DISPLAY

Steve & Daughter Rebecca at the Xmas display



Current owners Jeremy Resnik and Rebecca Pecsok

It became evident that the little store up front was not large enough for the growing business, so the family decided to convert part of the walnut warehouse into a larger retail space. Employees were hired to do some of the packaging and the store expanded with more products and a larger variety of gift packs. In the early to mid-1980s, many of the walnut farmers decided to pull out their trees and plant row crops or citrus fruit instead. With decreasing product available to process, the retail store became more important to the livelihood of the Resnik family. By this time, most people were referring to the store as the “Nut House” in Somis, so the business began advertising itself as the Somis Nut House. Stephen’s daughter, Rebecca, began working at the store after graduating from college in 1984. She learned all about running a business from her grandmother and father. Rebecca’s brother, Jeremy, joined them a few years later. By this time, the walnut business was completely gone and all efforts were put into the retail store, which was now fully stocked with nuts, dried fruit, candies, honey, olives, salsas, and so much more. They were also shipping gift packs all over the country. Many loyal customers have been shopping at the Somis Nut House for over 50 years! Sadly, Stephen passed away in 2009 from melanoma and Annette left us in 2017 (aged 103!). Rebecca and Jeremy became business partners and continue to operate the store. Most customers have no idea why a nut store would be located in a small agricultural town in the middle of nowhere. Now you know why!



Current selection



Stephen Resnik 1991

Do you have a comment, story or photo you'd like to share?

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