



Prescriptions from the Past
The Camarillo Pharmacy

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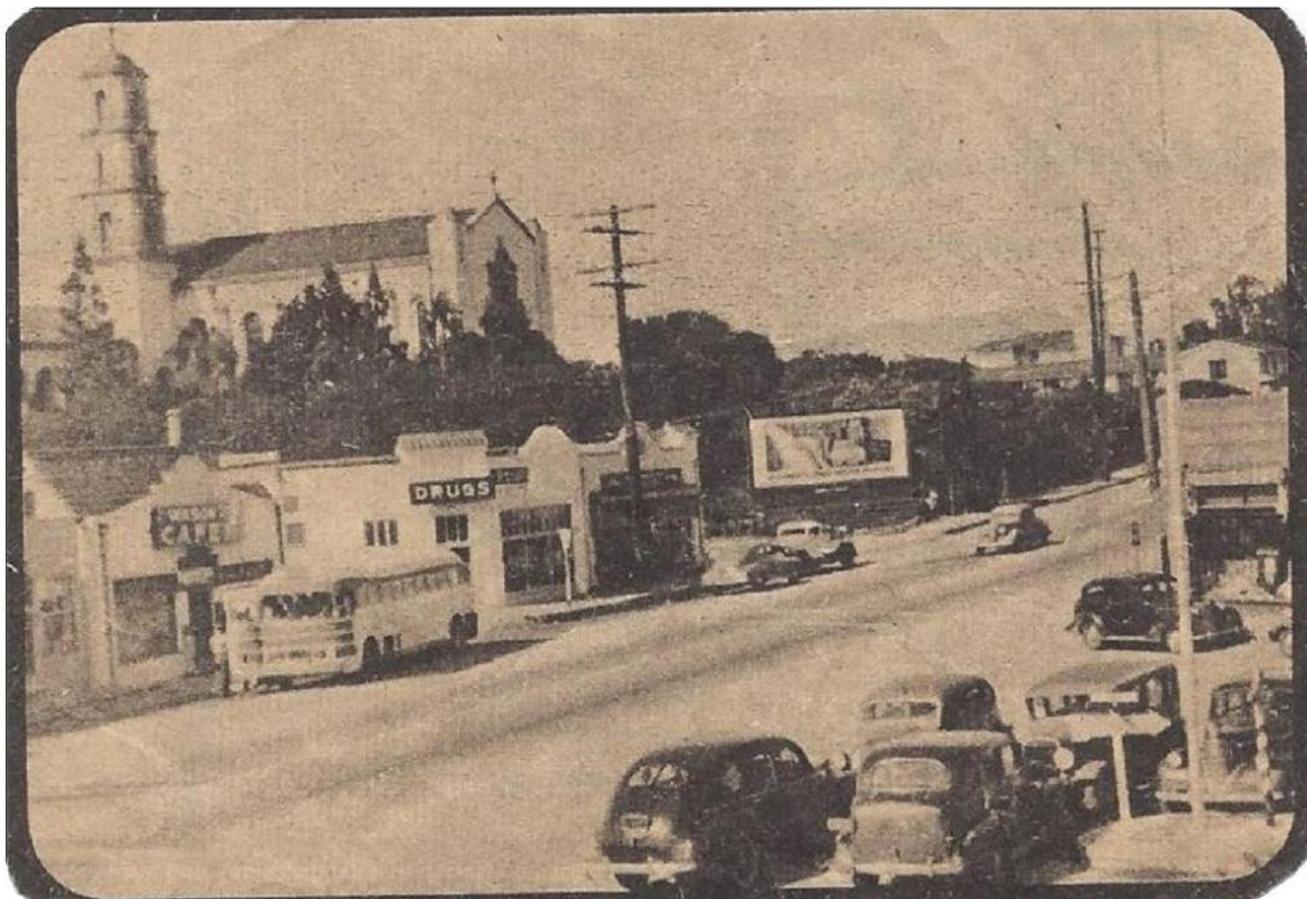
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and

Joe Fossati



Ventura Blvd. and Somis Road circa 1940

“This is how I remember it (drug store). That photo must have been taken shortly after my father bought the store. Incidentally, he handled Greyhound Bus tickets for Camarillo. I remember there was a Greyhound logo on the windows at the side of the store.

The store had a sign over the entrance that said ‘Drugs’. I think it was a neon sign.” (This location had a soda fountain.)

-Joe Fossati
Roy Fossati’s son

Prescriptions from the Past

The Camarillo Pharmacy

by

Beth Miller

Like much of Southern California, it had once been cattle grazing country. The land was blanketed with native grasses, cactus and wildflowers. But as Camarillo slowly grew, its soft rolling hills were covered with lima beans, alfalfa, corn, barley, walnut and citrus trees. The town was so small that just about everyone knew everybody. In 1939 the town population was only 300. Locals joked that the Camarillo State Hospital had more residents than the town of Camarillo. They were correct. In 1939 there were 2,094 people at the hospital.

The townsfolk visited at the post office, nodded and smiled to each other at church and wondered and worried about one another when they saw a neighbor holding a medicine bottle from the Camarillo Pharmacy.

Located at the bottom of the hill near the railroad tracks, it stood at the intersection of the old 101 Highway and Somis Road. (Today we would recognize the area as Ventura Boulevard and Lewis Road.) There was just one doctor in town, and certainly no national chain drug stores in Camarillo. The townspeople also knew where else to go for reliable health information. That was the Camarillo Pharmacy, though the sign (possibly neon) simply stated 'Drugs.' Some locals called it "the Drug Store." While others just called it "Fossati's."

Roy Fossati grew up in Ventura, studied pharmacy at the University of California and graduated in the 1930s. He had gained practical experience working in various stores in San Francisco and Ventura before seizing on an opportunity to purchase a business in Camarillo in 1940. It was just what Roy wanted. His own business in a small, friendly town. Though it was well established, the previous owner, "Arno Fink hadn't put much into the business," recalled Roy's son, Joe Fossati. His

parents continued living in Ventura for another two years before finally moving to Camarillo in 1942.

Roy was often asked to “counter prescribe.” In the backroom, he examined the customer and prescribed for an ailment, such as a sore throat. Joe recalled his father often said ‘I always made sure I was standing off to the side in case the person gagged on the applicator and threw up.’ “Counter prescribing,” was prescribing without a doctor’s authorization. It was a serious violation, but there was a serious need for more medical care and Roy filled it.

During World War II, Roy was given a deferment because he “was deemed essential to the wellbeing of the community.” Joe recalled that Spanish speaking members of the community called his father “El Doctor.” The war came to Camarillo in February 1942 “when a Japanese submarine surfaced off the coast of Goleta and fired several rounds from the deck gun to the shore,” explained Joe. A blackout of the entire West Coast was ordered. No civilians could travel at night. The Fossatis still lived in Ventura and with the road closed that meant Roy had to spend the night in Camarillo. There were no hotels. After closing the store, Roy walked across the street to the Buckhorn Café, enjoyed a leisurely drink and stayed there until closing. Then he went back to the pharmacy where he cut open some large cardboard boxes and spread them out for bedding. All night long, he heard the military convoys rumbling through the tiny town on their way north to Goleta. When the all-clear was signaled in the morning, Roy was finally able to get home. He told his son: ‘I shaved, had breakfast and went back to work.’ The war meant that Roy dealt with rationing and wartime priorities.

Besides fulfilling medical needs, the drugstore offered a variety of items. Did you need a birthday or anniversary gift? Fossati’s was sure to have just the right thing. There were perfumes and toiletries, and other small items, magazines, beer, wine and distilled liquor to name a few.

“It was part of the downtown shopping,” recalled Leonard Cruz. “They had a little of everything.” Leonard especially enjoyed the candy section and the ice cream. “Any kind of ice cream was my favorite. Talking about the old drug store made my day,” said Leonard. He added there were a few stools at the counter where customers sat and enjoyed their treats.

Townsfolk came for the medicines and stayed for the soda fountain.

Joe Fossati described the fountain:

“The fountain (we never referred to it as the soda fountain) was on the left wall of the store as you entered. It had a row of stools. Behind the counter were all the implements for running the fountain. I specifically remember two Hamilton Beach malt mixers. My favorite was the chocolate milk shakes. As I recall the dairy products he used came from Arden. I don’t think Adohr distributed in the Camarillo area. I think they mostly shipped to the Los Angeles area. I was too young to have worked at the old store. I worked at the new one from the time I was fourteen until I was seventeen.”

The Camarillo Pharmacy offered milk shakes, malts, Cokes in a variety of flavors and ice cream.

Soda fountains and pharmacies have a longtime association. In the early years, when the medicines were handcrafted, the remedies were often not palatable. The customer would take the medicine to the soda fountain side of the store and have it mixed with a sweet syrup and soda water. At first the pharmacists used sweetened soda water to conceal the bitter taste of drugs such as quinine and iron. Then they started adding other ingredients, including ice cream.

The soda fountain was at one time the equivalent to the saloon. In 1875, there was a soda counter in almost every American town. The soda jerk played a key role in the popularity of the soda fountain. It has been estimated one-half million soda jerks were employed at the tens of thousands soda fountains across the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. The job title comes from the skill of pulling or jerking the spigots or spindles on the drugstore soda fountain. Much like the busy modern-day barista, the soda jerk prepared several items and gave the orders to the correct customer. Often times it was the job of the soda jerk to also gift wrap perfume and other items that customers had purchased.

Adele Flynn Stuebing Walsh knows firsthand the complexities of the soda jerk job. “Mr. Fossati was desperate and asked Mother if I could fill in for a few days until he found a permanent employee. I think I was just in high school.” Before beginning, she was given some important instruction on making an ice cream float. “He told

me to tip the glass” and make certain there was a little open space or canal between the glass and ice cream. That’s where the bubbling flavored soda water is added. But pulling on the spindle, the soft drink hit the ice cream and exploded into a sweet eruption on the substitute soda jerk, the counter and customer, laughed Adele. She enjoyed the soda jerk experience calling it “a fun time.” A chocolate ice cream sundae continues to be her longtime favorite refreshment.

Genevieve Mason Peterson remembers her number one fountain treat at Fossati’s was the Vanilla Coke which remains her favorite today. Roy Fossati’s status in Camarillo was easily explained by Genevieve. “He was somewhat of an icon in the community,”

Running errands in Camarillo for the Mason family meant going to Max Riave’s general store (before he had the clothing store) and sometimes picking up medicines at Fossati’s and ending with an enjoyable Vanilla Coke. Genevieve recalled that perhaps the “fountain took up one whole side of the drug store.” Both Genevieve and Adele remember the mirror behind the fountain.

Signs of major changes came to Camarillo in the early 1950s. The soft rolling hills near the business district would be completely reshaped. Entire neighborhoods would vanish. Some businesses closed. Others would move. The freeway was coming to Camarillo.

The September-October 1953 California Highways and Public Works publication listed the reasons for the development of the U.S. 101 freeway:

“The elimination of this railroad grade, the unsnarling of the cross-traffic situation, the removal of the heavy congestion from the town’s main street, the resulting improved appearance of the town due to the routing of the freeway having removed portions of the more undesirable buildings, the attendant construction of new businesses along the frontage roads, and the inevitable growth of this community, all due largely to the new highway, add up to sizable benefits.”



"Looking easterly along U.S. 101 showing congestion while traffic is held up by the Southern Pacific Railroad." From California Highways and Public Works September-October 1953

Joe explained why his father moved the business to the other end of Ventura Boulevard:

"In the early fifties, the merchants in Camarillo received word that the state intended to alter the 101 Highway so that it would bypass the town. The two-lane stretch that went through Camarillo had become insufficient to handle the increase in post-war traffic. The heavily trafficked roadway that passed in front of Camarillo Pharmacy would become a dead end. The businessmen at the bottom of the hill, my father included, worried that without the trade which the highway brought, their part of town would stagnate. It was at that point that several of the business owners began to consider moving. Their planned relocation was to be at the top of the hill across from the fire station and the library. Earlier, my father had purchased a lot on the corner of Ventura Boulevard and Fir Street. In 1953, construction began on a new store. That summer with the help of several aunts and uncles, he moved from the old building, which was owned by the Catholic Church, to the new location. Significantly, he chose not to move the fountain to the new store."



Intersection of Ventura Boulevard at Arneill Road (looking southeast). The building at center of image (with archway and bell on top) is - on the left - the United States Post Office (with the flag pole in the center of the building) and - on the right - Max Riave's Clothier store. St. Mary Magdalen Memorial Chapel is seen in left rear of image.

Photo: The second location of the Camarillo Pharmacy was on the corner of Ventura Blvd. and Fir Street. Joe worked at this location. He stocked shelves, swept the floor and waited on customers. There was no soda fountain at this location. Later Roy sold the business to Richard Poggi, whose name is on the building.

Roy did not move the fountain to the new store. Perhaps it was the cost of moving the large structure. Perhaps it wouldn't fit in the new location. Or maybe Roy saw a technical change coming about in Camarillo. With improvements in home refrigeration, customers could have ice cream at home. Businesses, such as the Food Locker (also on Ventura Blvd.), where customers stored meats and other items in commercial freezer storage units, were phasing out.

There were also changes in manufacturing of pharmaceutical drugs. Though compounding medicines would always be important, this process of combining and mixing or altering ingredients to create a medication tailored to the needs of an individual patient became a specialty. Commercially produced medicines, such as in pill form, eliminated the need to add sweetened soda water to make the medicine palatable. There was no longer a pharmaceutical need for the soda fountain.

Today the closeness of the small town shopping experience carries on as new businesses, shops and restaurants are added to the charm of Ventura Boulevard. Vibrant special events and programs, such as Fiesta, continue to energize Old Town.

Camarillo Pharmacy was sold to Richard Poggi in 1957. Roy maintained ownership of the building. Richard Poggi operated the business until 1977 when he sold it to Paul Dwork who brought a magical and entertaining touch to the pharmacy that harkened back to the days of the apothecary.

With the sale of the business, Roy had not finished learning or using his pharmacy skills. Sometime in 1959 or 1960, he became the chief pharmacist at Camarillo State Hospital. Roy had come full circle with the local Camarillo joke. There were more people at the hospital than in the town, locals would wisecrack. He had worked in the small town and then worked for years with the large patient population. Roy's friend at the facility, Dr. Louis Nash, one of the chief physicians told him of the job opening.

In 1972, Roy finally retired from his second career. He died in December 1988. Roy Fossati was 78.

Remembering Roy

Sharon Taylor Hosier:

"I don't remember this drug store ever having a fountain. (Probably a good thing or I'd be barrel-sized!). It was on the corner across from PV School on Ventura Blvd. Mom and Dad always had a monthly running account with Mr. Fossati, and I can remember often being the "shopper/delivery person" for family...meds, household items and whatever. Most times I enjoyed the walk back and forth from home — except when there was a need to bring home the always necessary big box of Kotex—too big to fit in their shopping bags. (They were wrapped in plain wrap, but it felt like the whole world knew what I was carrying.) Mom's favorite perfume was Yardley's April Violets...and Dad's Old Spice lived forever; and we probably kept cycling the store's supply of hosiery (way before panty hose!) especially as we girls

grew older. Candy and magazines were also a favorite temptation, much to Daddy's chagrin when he went in to settle up on payday!

When Mr. Fosatti sold the store to the Poggis, our family lost a good friend/pharmacist, but learned Mr. Poggi was also a very fine pharmacist and friend, too. The summer I graduated from ACHS, I worked there—endless dusting, stocking shelves, gift wrapping, cashiering, etc., and supervising the counter where the candy and cigarettes were. (In a family of non-smokers, I was amazed when people bought them by the cartons!) Once summer was over, I began working for Dr. McCullough part time where he trained me as a dental assistant while I attended VJC.”

Mayor Emeritus Stan Daily:

From his 2007 memoir Camarillo and Other Remembrances

“At the most westerly portion of the block, Roy Fossati, who has long since retired, moved from down below the Catholic Church, into his new quarters across from the Pleasant Valley Church. I miss Fossati's great sense of humor and especially his great soda fountain. In the old days, you could virtually get anything in town at his Drug Store.

Many times my Dad and I would stop in at the old store for something, usually an ice cream soda. He made real malts, or milkshakes, whichever you preferred. His place was where I learned my love of malts. Roy would always banter back and forth with us on how easy a life of farming was, as evidenced by our being there in the early afternoon. We would banter back, how nice it would be to be able to go home after closing time, without worrying about changing irrigation pipes late at night, or turning on the wind machines at 2:00 a.m. for fear of losing a crop.

In all that time, I can remember, this jovial banter was a “sure” thing if you walked into Mr. Fossati's Drug Store. To this day, I love to go into a drug store and order an ice cream.”

Rob Frost:

"I remember the Fossati family--a great family. He was known by everyone in Camarillo.

Roy's drugstore was originally down at the end of Ventura Blvd. Next to Roy's was Higgins and Hill Market. West of the drug store was Tweedy Camarillo's art studio. Across the boulevard was Howell and Hopkins grocery store. The Buckhorn Saloon was next to the store and east of the Buckhorn was Mr. Goldberg's clothing store.

Bill Isom was the delivery man for Howell & Hopkins. We used to get a ride to P.V. School with Bill from the corner of Anacapa and Las Posas. If we missed him, we could catch a ride with Warren Chase or Dr. Muff. (What a deal--that would never be permitted today.)

Roy and Margaret Fossati were great people. Roy took us on a hike once over the Camarillo Heights overlooking the Las Posas Valley.

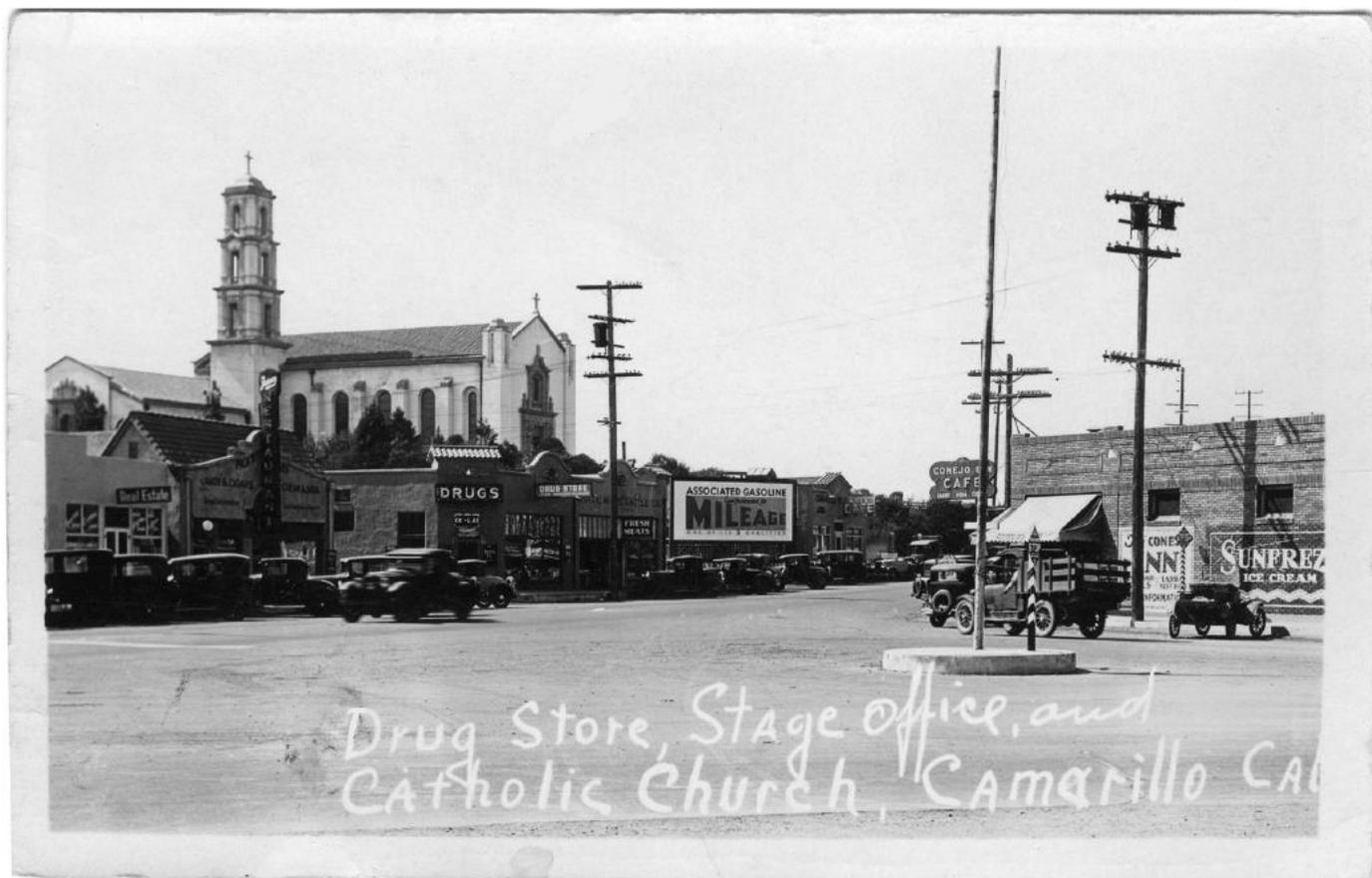
He was an easy mark for our pastor on Sunday. He would get communion wine (free) from Roy.

Joe's mother, Margaret, was our cub scout leader at one time. She was a lovely lady. My wife and I along with Dutch and Pat Wucherpennig saw them at the Dutch Inn many years after school. Roy and Margaret greeted us with profound excitement."



“I’m guessing that this photo was taken from the steeple of St. Mary Magdalen Church. The only part of my father’s store visible is a sort of arch arrangement at the roof line. His store was located in the building adjacent to the parking lot shown. The building housed his drug store and a grocery store. A partition divided the two businesses. But that’s the area where his (first) store was located.” *(This location had the soda fountain.)*

-Joe Fossati



Corner of Ventura Boulevard and Somis Road (view is looking west). Camera position is at the "triangle" (the flag pole is seen at center right). At upper center right (to the left of the Conejo Inn Cafe), a fence can be seen where several automobiles are parked on the property of St. Mary Magdalen Memorial Chapel. From left to right, the business signs read: "Real Estate" - "[Jenny?] Restaurant - Candy & Cigars - Cream & Soda" - "Drugs - Ex-Lax" - "Drug Store" - "Riave Mercantile Co. - Fresh Meats" - "Associated Gasoline - ... Mileage - one of the 5 qualities" - "Camarillo ... Cafe" - "Conejo Inn Cafe - Candy - Soda - Cigars [?]" - "The Conejo Inn - Home Cooked Meals [?]" - "Ladies Rest Room - Road Information" - "Sunfreze Ice Cream."

The Camarillo Mercantile Company, a Riave business, was also located here. This was before Max Riave opened his clothing store in 1946 in a new building on Ventura Boulevard (at the intersection of Arneill Road and Ventura Boulevard.)

Some Soda Fountain History

Ice Cream Sodas and Ice Cream Sundaes



The ice cream float was invented in 1874 by Robert McCay Green who, on a hot day, had run out of ice for the flavored drinks he was selling. He substituted vanilla ice cream and invented a new drink. There are many stories about the invention of the sundae. According to one report, the sale of soda was prohibited on Sundays in Illinois because they were too “frilly.” It’s said that clergy preached against “sucking soda” on the Sabbath.

Other stories just focus on the novelty of the treat and make no mention of the legalities. The ice cream sundae became the weekend semi-official soda fountain treat at the beginning of the 1900s and quickly gained popularity. The spelling of the word “sundae” is often explained as an attempt to avoid offending the sensibilities of the devoutly religious who may take a dim view of a confection of ice cream and syrup being named after the Sabbath.

A Spoonful of Sugar



Pharmacists quickly learned that customers would more easily take unpalatable medicine if it was mixed with sweetened and flavored soda water. Here is a brief clip of the song made famous in Disney's Mary Poppins film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKdJ0wPZpBQ>

Vanilla Coke

A Fountain Favorite

(non alcoholic)

Recipe from: Food.com

- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1 ½ cups water
- ¼ – ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoon vanilla extract

Mix sugar, water and salt in a small saucepan. Heat to boil, then boil gently for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla extract. Use one shot per can of coke over ice for vanilla coke. Refrigerate leftovers.

**Doctor Muff
and
Other Physicians from the Early Days of Camarillo**

From the Oxnard Press Courier
July 15, 1971

SADIE NEWELL, long time resident of Springville and now living in Oxnard, informs us apropos the story on Dr. **Anthony Muff** last week that in the early days of Camarillo, a Dr. Edgar Sizer conducted a medical practice from his home on Fulton Street which still stands between Lomita and Barry streets. Mrs. Newell remembers very well that Dr. Sizer preceded Dr. A. E. Allen who sold his practice to Dr. **Anthony L. Muff** 25 years ago. Both Sadie and her mother were patients of Dr. Sizer until he was called to military service. She describes him as a tall, thin man who didn't seem overly concerned about money for he never sent bills to his patients and waited until they got around to paying him. A Dr. Cutler filled in for a short time before Dr. Allen settled in the then small community. There isn't much about the history of the Camarillo-Springfield area Mrs. Newell can't recall.

“Dr. Muff bought Dr. Richard Allen’s practice and his house in 1946. He had graduated from Loma Linda and then was in the Air Force for three years.”

-Pleasant Valley History Society



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

Please contact Karin Farrin.

Thank you!

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