

Historical Ramblings

Lompoc's Centerpiece Flagpole

They were symbols of small-town America and one feature every town had in common. A flagpole was a source of pride. What better place to display your patriotism than the center of town, smack dab in the middle of the main intersection.

A dedicated group of ladies, organized as "The Civic Club" had been active for a number of years, raising funds for the archway at Ryon Park, electrification of the Cross at the south end of H Street and books for Lompoc's new 1911 library. In 1925, the group began an undertaking that resulted in their most visible community contribution. Money raised by the Civic Club provided for an imposing flagpole to be placed in the intersection of H Street and Ocean Avenue. The towering flagpole, mounted atop an attractive granite base, was erected as a memorial to the war veterans of World War I. Four large street lamps hung from the sides of the pole, illuminating the street.

The flagpole became an instant landmark. "Meet me at the flagpole" was shorthand for "Meet me at Ocean and H," and easier to follow, since the flagpole was more visible than the street signs. The pole became a source of community pride and the centerpiece for annual Christmas celebrations when Santa met local children at the flagpole to distribute Christmas gifts provided by community merchants. Parades and community gatherings often began or ended at the flagpole. This was a time before traffic lights and even before stop signs! Gatherings in the middle of the street were not in danger, since traffic was slow and at times almost non-existent.

In September of 1941, the flagpole was removed from the intersection and relocated to the Lompoc Library, now the site of the Lompoc Museum. Many long-time residents claim that the flagpole was still standing in the middle of the intersection when they arrived in the 1950's, however a Lompoc Record item from September 5, 1941, written by Ken Adam stated, "Early this morning before the sun's first rays sprang over the hill - 4 o'clock to be exact - a small group of persons began quietly working a miracle in the center of town. Two hours later the major part of the deed was done. An acetylene torch was applied near the concrete base while wires were used for steadying. And when the process of cutting was complete there was a gentle lowering to the ground. For years it had been there holding aloft the stars and bars, a memorial to the country's heroes of WWI.

The reason for the flagpole's relocation was the increasing military traffic rumbling through town toward Camp Cooke, where construction was underway at the new infantry training camp. There is another story, however, which is more colorful and more fun to relate. It seems that one of the City fathers, apparently driving home after having one too many adult beverages, was unable to successfully maneuver his auto around the flagpole and met it head-on. The next day, orders were issued from City Hall to remove the pole, as it posed a danger to public safety.

After 80 years, the local landmark was recently altered forever, with no fanfare and notice. The flagpole was lopped off at the top of its granite base by City staff. Apparently, the metal pole had rusted through and had become dangerously unstable. Once the pole was removed, it was replaced with an eagle atop the granite monument.

Flagpoles no longer grace city centers. Those still existing in small towns such as Los Alamos and Los Olivos are relics of the past and reminders of a time when a town's patriotism was proudly displayed in the middle of town.