

Historical Ramblings

Lompoc's Early Business Climate

Lompoc's business community flourished from its humble beginnings in 1874, serving the needs of a small but vibrant agricultural town. Following is a list of businesses existing in 1880, just 6 years after the establishment the Lompoc Temperance Colony: A 50 horsepower steam flour mill, four general merchandise stores, one hardware and farm implement store, one drug store, one paint sop, two milliner stores, one barber shop and bath house, one tailor shop, one watchmaker-jeweler, three hotels, one harness makers shop, one shoe shop, two blacksmiths, one livery stable, one butcher shop, one variety shop, one fruit store, one pork and bacon curing establishment, one furniture, cabinetmaker and undertaker's establishment, one soap factory, one lumber yard, one book and stationery store, two billiard rooms, one general commission house, a public hall, public library, a Good Templars Library, a fire insurance agency and a newspaper and job printing office.

Five churches were active in the community and the town boasted an impressive two story schoolhouse. Two Justices of the Peace, Two Constables, a Notary Public, two Doctors and a real estate agency serviced the citizenry. Lompoc enjoyed a daily mail service and was home to a Wells-Fargo Express office and a Western Union Telegraph office. Fraternal organizations were represented by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, International Order of Good Templars and the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange). Considering that the population of the town numbered only 200, and a total valley population of 1,000, the number of businesses is impressive. What's more impressive is that these businesses were concentrated in a very small, two square block area, centered around H Street and Ocean Avenue, the historic center of town.

By the early 1900's, downtown had expanded to include a bank on the northeast and northwest corners of Ocean and H, a steam laundry, a shoe repair shop, drug store and several saloons. At least two cigar stores were established in Lompoc's early years, as well as the Bailey Sisters' Ladies Store. McAdam and Smith Hardware, on the northwest corner of I Street and Ocean Avenue, was the first automobile agency, displaying E.M.F. and Flanders cars on the sidewalk and across the street was a garage to service the newfangled horseless carriages. South H Street was home to a bakery and ice cream shop, a cleaning shop, meat market and the Opera House, Lompoc's cultural and social center. Several restaurants had appeared as well as a Chinese Laundry and a Japanese Market.

Local grocery stores offered free delivery to their customers as late as the 1960's. Individuals could simply telephone the grocer, place an order and have it delivered to their back doors within an hour. Free baskets of groceries were delivered to elderly customers at Christmas time. Charge accounts were common, with payment expected once a year, when local crops came in. Customers would often bring in fresh eggs and butter and sometimes livestock in partial settlement of their accounts. Charge accounts were established with a handshake and the belief that your neighbor was honest and

trustworthy. It was clearly a simpler, gentler time! The generosity of early businessmen was recalled some years ago by Lompoc pioneer Estelle Dickinson Ingamells. Her husband, Tom, was a farmer who paid his bill once a year. On one occasion, Frank Moore gave him a suit of clothes at the time of payment. Another time, the Moores gave Estelle a third jacket free for her son Lawrence, when she bought two jackets for husband Tom and son Howard.

Lompoc's "central business district," the area centered at H and Ocean and bounded by F Street on the east, J Street on the west, Walnut Avenue on the North and Cypress Avenue on the South, was comprised of a variety of buildings, ranging from impressive two story structures to modest false fronted wooden structures and elaborate Victorian homes. Seldom was there an empty storefront and never would you find a vacant piece of property. Many of downtown's two story buildings utilized an old concept being considered new again – "mixed use" - where the ground floor featured commercial ventures and the upper floor featured residential units, an efficient and economical use of space.

Downtown was the only place to shop and also served as the social center of town. Sometimes a trip to town was just an excuse to meet friends and neighbors and catch up on the latest news. This was just fine with local merchants. They too were your friends and neighbors.