



Newsletter

April
2021

Please call us at:
(209) 618-5387

History Lesson



Pete Hischier



Peter & Shirley Hischier



Doug Nutson & Pete Hischier

It's Springtime, and flowers are in bloom. It seems fitting to celebrate the season by documenting the story of the most prolific nursery in Modesto, Hischier Nursery. On January 13, 2021 the McHenry Museum & Historical Society (MM&HS), the McHenry Mansion Foundation and the City of Modesto lost one of our dearest friends and advocates, Peter "Pete" Hischier. On March 5, 2021, Pete's widow Shirley graciously agreed to an interview to help the MM&HS document the life and legacy of her late husband and the history of Hischier Nursery.

Pete was born in Modesto on February 4, 1936 to Peter Hischier Sr. and his wife Irma. His family lived in Ripon for a few years, but due to the Great Depression, they moved to Niles, CA. His father, Peter Sr., worked for California Nursery Company. "In those days plants were not grown in cans they were all field grown", Shirley explained, the plants were first grown in the fields where they then had to be dug up and the roots bound with burlap and hauled off to different nurseries up and down the state. Pete's son Jim fondly recalls how his grandfather was so proud to have put one million miles on a Ford Model T making his deliveries.

Peter Sr. and Irma first opened Hischier Nursery at 310 West Granger Avenue in Modesto in the mid 1940s. The property was eventually sold by Pete and Shirley to Doctors Hospital. They settled the nursery to its permanent location at 1520 Stadiford Avenue in the early 1980s. In 1992, the family sold it to Thomas and Debbie Chaplin upon Pete's retirement. After more than six decades, Hischier Nursery closed for good in the first decades of the new millennium.

Pete's parents Peter Sr. and Irma were deeply loved by their community. Shirley explained how Peter Sr. was best of friends with Lawrence Robinson of Robinson Seed Company family. Lawrence Robinson and Peter Sr. shared an enthusiasm for camellias.

Peter Sr. and Irma Hischier had tended the gardens of many prominent Modesto families. Jim Hischier remembers Aileen Gallo showing him all the work his late father and grandfather did in her garden. Peter Sr. and Irma worked for several years with the Alfred Matthews family on Sycamore and Orangeburg, as well as many projects with the Mensingers of Mensinger Ranch. Sadly, in 1962, Peter Hischier Sr. died of a heart ailment, and three years later his wife Irma passed from Leukemia.

The Hischier story transcends more than simply the running of a Modesto business, which Pete would run for several decades following his parent's death. He was a family man and a pillar of the community. Shirley Hischier believes it was destiny which brought her and Pete together. She fondly thinks of them as two ships, passing in the night who were destined to meet each other. After a brief first marriage and the births of his son Jim and daughter Pamela, Pete Hischier met Shirley Humphrey, his destined wife would begin a relationship which would last almost six decades. Shirley's first job after graduating at 16 was at a satellite of California Nursery at the "Y" at Crows Landing Road. Prior to that, she had a friendship with the owners of a small nursery where Pete and his father frequently visited, she may have known him then. They finally met when she was a legal secretary at a local firm and Pete's attorney was one of the partners. The love birds married on July 29, 1961 and had an instant family; with the addition of their son Paul in 1968 their family tree was complete.

The two enjoyed traveling, especially to Europe, having made more than ten tours to view exquisite gardens, which would serve as inspiration for their home-grown passions for gardening. They shared a particular passion for antiquities as well, nurtured by their love of history. This brought them to their work with the MM&HS and the Mansion Foundation. Pete served on the Mansion Foundation Board where he loved to work with MM&HS Board Member and close friend, Doug Nutson, on handy work for both buildings. Both men were notorious tending bar at most Mansion and Museum functions. We owe both men a debt of gratitude for running a lot of wiring in both buildings. Peter Hischier Jr. was also a Graffiti man from way back and was assisting with the new Graffiti Museum at the time of his passing. He was honored by former Mayor Ted Brandvold in early March and a cruise of more than 100 vintage cars cruised Modesto on February 20, 2021 in his honor. The man shared a lot of passions from parenting, to Gardens, to cars, and even bartending, however his greatest legacy is the love he shared with Shirley. As she said, "It was just a wonderful life...we were always in love from day one...I was one of the lucky ones and he felt the same way about me."

*Information taken from March 5, 2021 phone interview with Shirley and Jim Hischier.

Updates

- The Museum still remains closed due to COVID-19, Follow the MM&HS on Instagram and Facebook for updates.
 - Our domain of mchenrymuseum.org has been returned to us following a minor glitch.
 - Our website has been recently updated and can now accept donations.
 - We are working on the membership submission forms on the website.
 - We ARE accepting local sales from our bookstore via pick up at the museum. (Please arrange by calling the MM&HS phone number).
 - In this trying time, we did make five book sales in March, two copies of *Stanislaus Indian Wars* was sold to Gavin Bruce of *Opportunity Stanislaus* and three copies of *Touchstones: Life and Times of Modesto* was sold to Reverend Jeremiah Williams.
- MM&HS Board President, David Seymour presented his March Newsletter findings to the Merced College History Club for their March 25, 2021 Women's History Panel.



Gavin Bruce Purchasing his copy of "Stanislaus Indian Wars" on March 5, 2021 on the steps of the Museum.



MYRTLE LANGDON
Funeral services will be held tomorrow for Mrs. Myrtle Langdon of 424 Hurlingame avenue, San Mateo, who died this morning in Peninsula hospital, after a long illness.

A native of Modesto, she had lived here for the past 15 years. She was the wife of the late William H. Langdon.

She is survived by three children--Meryl McHenry of San Mateo, Lawton W. Langdon of San Francisco, and Mrs. Louis L. Marr of Pasadena; a sister, Mrs. Lena C. Nelson of San Mateo; eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Services will be held at 1 p.m. tomorrow from . Patterson and O'Connell chapel, and will be followed by private interment.



Myrtle McHenry & son Merl.



Historical Update

In 1902, Oramil McHenry (1861–1906) married Myrtle "Myrtie" Conneau (1878–1959), his second marriage. Together they had one son, Merl (1903–1994). Upon Oramil's death in 1906, Myrtie, after re-marrying to Judge William Langdon in 1908, was instrumental in building the McHenry Library and remained active within the organization for many years. March 2021 saw the addition of Mrs. McHenry Langdon's photo to our website in front of her husband, now we at the MM&HS can honor a lesser known McHenry.