



**McHENRY
MUSEUM**
& Historical Society



Please call us at:
(209) 618-5387

Newsletter

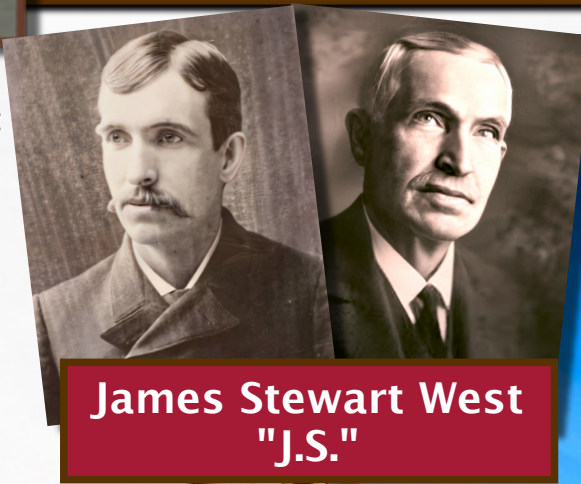
Dec 2022



A HISTORY...

Last month, confusion spread throughout Modesto, a fear that Modesto's oldest business, J.S. West, was closing entirely. The landmark Ninth Street feed mill operation has closed, but J.S. West as a company remains in business. J.S. West has closed their feedstore at 709 Ninth Street, a Modesto institution since 1958.

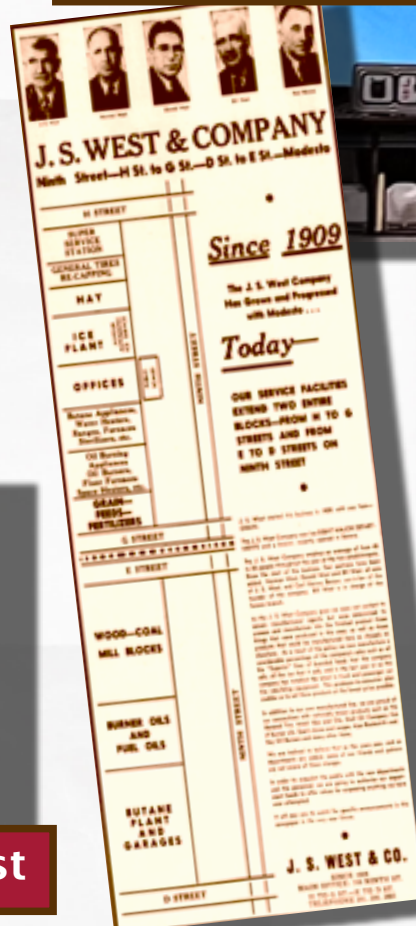
Modesto has learned of the closures of many local businesses lately, so for this edition the MM&HS Newsletter, we tell the story of a family that's number one concern is selling a much-needed product to the local community, and has also been successful in many areas over the past century. This is a history of J.S. West.



**James Stewart West
"J.S."**



Nona & J.S. West



James Stewart "J.S." West was born in Bentonville, Ohio, on February 20, 1856. As a young boy, the family relocated to Nebraska. It was there that James met his future wife Nona Lesh (1866-1954); they married on June 11, 1889. Together they would raise five children: Vera (1890-1971), Virgil "Bill" (1893-1955), Norman (1895-1957), Nona (1898-1981), and Donald (1908-2007). After a brief stay in Oklahoma, J.S. moved his family to the drier climate of California in 1908.

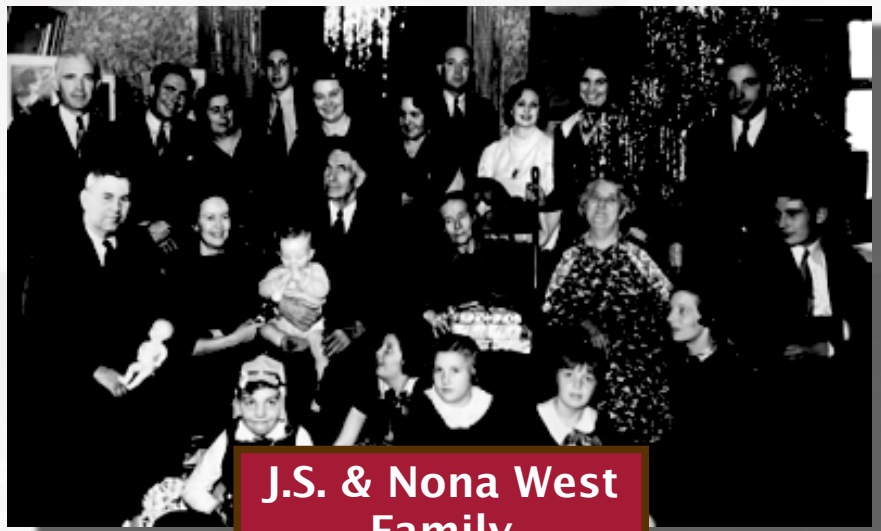
Continued on next page --->

*Painting by Jonathan Troxler displayed Summer of 2022 in the McHenry Museum, Purchased by the West Family, November 2022.

J.S. suffered from consumption (a descriptor for tuberculosis at the time) and felt the weather would benefit him greatly. He settled on Modesto as he found the public ownership of water and power appealing. In 1909, he purchased a small warehouse on Front Street, now Ninth, between "H" and "G" Streets, from Merced Milling Company. The location of the J.S. West has not moved from this location in one-hundred thirteen years, the family has expanded the business into numerous other areas.

Whether it was it was feed or hay for farmers, wood and coal in the winters, J.S. West looked for needs in the community and found a way to fill the void. J.S. opened an ice plant on Ninth Street early on which operated until 1950. The family has sold tires, cars, appliances, paint, and more. J.S. West retired in 1925, and left the business to his son, Norman, to run. In 1926, daughter Nona's husband C. Harvey Benson (1896-1986) was brought into the company and fuel oil was added to the coal and wood department. In 1930, a new feed mill was constructed to expand livestock and poultry feed. J.S. West died on August 5, 1942, when his Packard vehicle was struck by a train at the Ninth Street tracks, adjacent to where he began his business in Modesto.

Immediately following this tragic event, Norman, Benson, and son Donald, assumed ownership of the company. By the mid-1940s, the company was divided amongst them, and three corporations were formed for each of their main areas of operation, which now encompassed animal feed, ice, appliances, tires, propane sales, and a service station.



J.S. & Nona West Family



J.S. & Nona West



J.S. West Equipment & Service Truck c. 1925



J.S. West Plant 1923



J.S. West Service Station Facing "H" Street



The family further diversified with furniture store in 1951, including a bargain annex for used goods. A devastating fire in June 1957 destroyed most of the West property, but they soon re-built. The J.S. West Furniture and Appliance store expanded to the large headquarters on Ninth and "H" Street. The building remains standing, though the store closed in 2001. The West family also backed on Ethan Allen Furniture Store on Sisk Road in Modesto, and had a J.S. West Furniture Store in Sonora, where they also maintain a propane sales outlet today.

1951

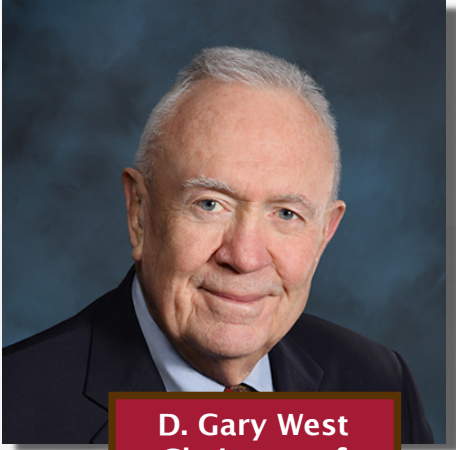


J.S. West Furniture & Appliances

1972



Donald West



D. Gary West Chairman of the Board



Mike West President

No matter the venture, J.S. West has remained a family business. Leadership further passed to grandsons Robert Benson (1928-2019), James S. West (1935-2016), and D. Gary West, and all in part lead the company. Donald West worked until two weeks before he passed away in 2007 at age 98. Donald's greatest legacy, his grandson Mike told us, was the expansion of the egg business. Mike's father, Gary, brought efficiencies to the egg business and helped form Nucal Foods, the largest distributor of shell eggs in the Western United States. The closing of the feed store on Ninth Street in Modesto is the end of an era, but the family business continues. There was simply no longer a need for the store downtown. Now as the largest privately owned propane company in the state, Mike West continues to see growth in the company and sees future generations of the family taking the reins.



Current Headquarters

Article by:
David Seymour
MMGHS

J.S.

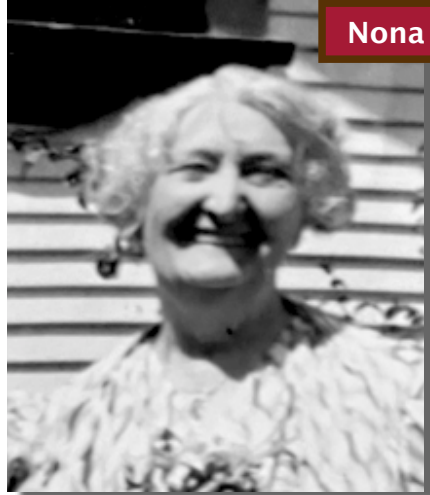


1915 Fire



Album

Nona



Mr. and Mrs. J. S. West, pictured above, celebrated their golden wedding anniversary Monday at a family gathering held in their home on Millinery Avenue. The couple got into their wedding at Boston.

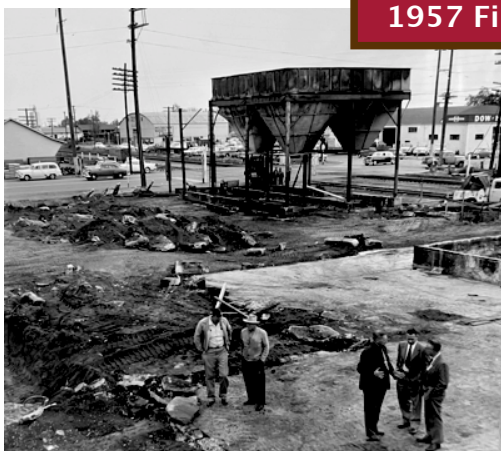
Mr. And Mrs. J. S. West Have Golden Wedding Anniversary

Fifty years ago on June 11th, J. S. West, a native of Boston, came to Modesto to work for the Modesto Flouring Company. He was a hard worker and a fine character. He was married to Mrs. J. S. West, a native of Boston, on June 11th, 1868. They have five children, Mr. J. S. West, Jr., Mr. J. S. West, III, Mr. J. S. West, IV, Mr. J. S. West, V, and Mrs. J. S. West. They are all living in Modesto, California.

1932



1957 Fire

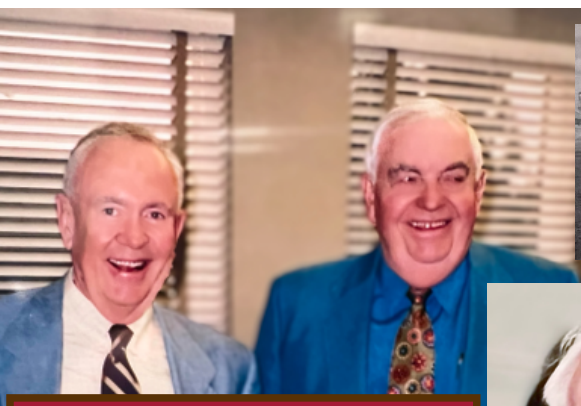


L to R: Jim Sorenson, Harvey Benson, George Beard, & Don West

New Mill Groundbreaking, 1958



Chamber of Commerce Delegation—L to R: Harvey Benson, Joe Nesler, George Beard, Harold Pederson, Bob Stonum, Dale Smith, Joe Tremain, Don West, Bob Benson, Tom Reneau, Ray Whitgrove, Don Hammond, Tom Beard, & Ted Brandt



Gary West & Bob Benson



Donald West

Fuel Department



*Information for this article came from a November 8, 2022, interview with Mike West & Kelly Monk, as well as various Modesto Bee Articles and Touchstones: Life and Times of Modesto, ed. Ken White, 2017

In Memoriam



Joseph Venturini
March 10, 1930–September 12, 2022

As we honored Diane Venturini last December, the MM&HS would like to acknowledge the passing of her husband, Joseph Venturini on September 12, 2022. Joe and Diane were our volunteers for many years. Joe, a Modesto native, took great pride in his military service with the United States Navy, so much so, In the McHenry Museum basement, it is the Naval Uniform of Joseph Venturini on display, he and Diane set up the military exhibit. We are the vast tapestry of local history because of our volunteers like Joe and Diane Venturini.

Updates

- The McHenry Museum will host “The Children’s Holiday Craft Faire” on December 3, 2022 from 11am-12pm, free to the public. We could use volunteers to help us run the event, if you are interested, please e-mail Executive Director David Seymour at david@mchenrymuseum.org
- Our Soup Supper for MM&HS Members will be held on December 11, 2022 please make sure members that you RSVP to your invitations by December 5, 2022.
- Our Second Saturday talk on November 12, 2022 by State Theater Historian Randy Siefkin brought an audience of twenty people, we will have more Second Saturday Lectures in 2023.
- Our latest books in the Museum store include “The Wilms Ranch: A Family Saga” which is a history of the Wilms family ranch in Knights Ferry and a children’s book “Gracie and the Radar Girls” which is a history of a local woman in the Women’s Air Raid Defense during World War II, illustrated for young readers.
- The Board of the MM&HS met on November 22, 2022 for the last official meeting of the year.
- We could not run without our volunteers, we would like to thank all of our docents as well as our Museum Store Volunteers, Janice Lane, Leslie Thompson, Nancy Norton, Christopher Nunes, Sergio Chevalier, and Jennifer Aoyama for all of their help.



**The Museum Store
is Ready for the Holiday's**

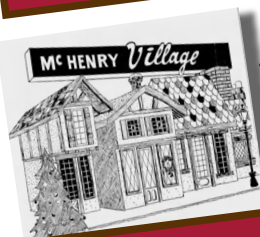


It Happened in Modesto...



100 Years Ago

On December 9, 1922, Modesto Mayor Sol P. Elias began a task force to protect Modesto women from a string of “mashers” accosting women on the streets of Modesto after dark, Mayor Elias wanted the city to rest assured that the safety of the women of Modesto was his priority.



50 Years Ago

On December 9, 1972, McHenry Village offered free sleigh rides and photos with Santa to ensure a cherished holiday memory and tradition for the people over Modesto during the holiday season. A polaroid photo with Santa cost \$1.00.