



McHENRY MUSEUM & Historical Society

# Newsletter

December 2021

Please call us at: (209) 618-5387

## HISTORY LESSON

With the holiday season in full swing, it is the time of year when greeting cards are sent to friends and family to celebrate the festive occasion. While the advent of modern technology has made letter-writing and greeting card mailings now less in fashion, in the past a hand-written greeting card brought the personal touch. For the citizens of Modesto, for nearly ninety years there was one place to buy such a card, L.M. Morris Co. This company operated from 1904 to 1992 in downtown Modesto. As we approach thirty years without this business, we at the MM&HS would like to tell the story of L.M. Morris Co. and the man who ran it the longest, George Lucas Sr.

Modesto often celebrates its favorite son, filmmaker, George Lucas Jr. His name is well known for his films, including *American Graffiti* and the *Star Wars* franchise. In addition, his family has deep Modesto roots. Lucas' Father George Lucas Sr. (1913-1991) was the owner and proprietor of L.M. Morris Co. for many years. The MM&HS was fortunate to be granted an interview with Kate Lucas Nyegaard, daughter of George Sr. and sister of George Jr. to tell us about her father and his history with this 'note'-worthy former Modesto business.



George Walton Lucas Sr.

**The history of this local stationary store** dates to the Gilded Age of Modesto in the second half of the nineteenth century when a man named Philip Hamilton "P.H." Medley (1836-1917) opened a stationery and confectionary store in Downtown Modesto. In 1884, Medley sold out to Charles Perley (1835-1914). In 1904, brothers LeRoy Miller "L.M." Morris (1884-1949) and Edwin Hanson "E.H." Morris (1868-1945) purchased the store. The original store's home was on "H" Street, but "I" Street became its permanent home, placed first near Tenth Street, where The Gallo Center for the Arts is currently located. It eventually moved across the street to 1107 "I" Street, the current home of The Fox Pub.

Born in Laton, California on August 10, 1913, George Walton Lucas Sr. was the son of an oil field worker, who died when George Sr. was fourteen. His mother was a schoolteacher at one point and following the death of her husband Mrs. Lucas relied on her husband's pension and the income from a Gas Station her husband purchased in Merced. Not formally educated, George Sr. was simply a hardworking man with a great business sense. George Sr. came to Modesto at age sixteen. In 1933, he married his Modesto High School sweetheart Dorothy Bomberger (1913-1989), a native of Stockton. After his marriage George Sr. was hired in Fresno at H.S. Crocker Co., the largest stationary store in the state.

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In 1934, George Sr. and Dorothy moved back to Modesto when he accepted a job at L.M. Morris Co. The family grew with addition of daughters Ann (1934-2020) and Kathleen "Kate" (1936-). Younger children George Jr. (1944-) and Wendy (1947-) joined the family almost a decade later. L.M. Morris did not have a son of his own and took George Sr. under his wing. Dorothy was a dedicated stay-at-home mother, involved with the PTA and a Girl Scout troop leader. George Sr. became a partner in the store within his first few years of working, and bought Morris out just prior to his death in 1949, becoming the sole owner of L.M. Morris Co. The store began as more than simply an office supply company. It was initially Modesto's only bookstore and one of the primary carriers of Hallmark Greeting Cards. They also sold gifts like high-end crystal and children's toys. L.M. Morris Co. also became the top retailer for couples to register for their weddings.

As the 1950s approached, George Sr. focused more on the sale of office supplies. In 1952, Ann's husband Frank Dickason (1934-) joined the company. In 1956, George Sr. formed the George W. Lucas Co. which took most of his time. The business grew and Lucas Business Systems was founded to sell large-scale office equipment. George Sr. worked six days a week, but still enjoyed family time. His older daughters spent many a season working in the store, especially during the holidays. While not working, daughter, Kate Lucas Nyegaard most fondly remembers her father's ability to quote Shakespeare and to play the piano by ear, the latter being a past time which allowed her to sing with her father. George Sr. also loved to dance and play golf at the Del Rio Country Club.

Daughter and son-in-law Ann and Frank Dickason purchased George Sr.'s interest in the company in 1967 and continued to run the family business as George Sr.'s health declined. George Sr. developed Alzheimer's disease and spent the last eight years of his life in a nursing home. Due to his own health situation, he was unaware of his wife's death from heart problems in 1989. George Walton Lucas Sr. died on December 17, 1991. The following May, L.M. Morris Co. company closed its doors for good. Thirty years after his passing, the Lucas family remains a Modesto institution beyond that of filmmaking. For Modesto, the Lucas family has long been regarded as a hardworking business-minded family.



George  
&  
Dorothy  
Bomberger  
Lucas

The MM&HS would like to thank Kate Lucas Nyegaard for granting us this interview and a special thanks to Modesto Mayor Sue Zwahlen for arranging it.

\*Information for this article came from a November 17, 2021, interview with Kate Lucas Nyegaard and various Modesto Bee Articles (1884-1992).

# In Memoriam



*Diane Venturini*

Jun 11, 1932–Oct 23, 2021

The MM&HS would like to honor one of our own. On November 15th, the people of Modesto and the members of the MM&HS came together to honor Diane Venturini who passed away on October 23, 2021. A Michigan native, Diane attended Modesto City Schools and Modesto Junior College. A graduate of San Jose Star College, she obtained a provisional teaching credential and taught for Stanislaus Union School District. She eventually became principal of Chrysler Elementary School. She and her husband Joe were very active in the local community. Together, they designed and funded the Stanislaus War Memorial on the courthouse lawn. For the MM&HS, Diane was a major asset. Not only did she docent for many years, she served as president of the Museum Guild Society for two years. Joe and Diane also donated and set up the military display in the basement of the McHenry Museum. Our thoughts are with her husband Joe, sons Joel and Mark and her extended family. We will miss you Diane, thank you for your service to our community and our organization.

# Updates



Linda Cover & Family  
November 21, 2021

- On November 21, 2021, visitors came to see the last day of the artwork of Dorothy Cover (1904-1984). Organized by MM&HS Board Member, Linda Cover, the exhibit was placed in March 2020, prior to the shutdown. After 20 months, the exhibit ended, but we were delighted to display such beautiful artwork for twenty months.
- The McHenry Museum Store is now decorated and selling holiday items. Please come check out our Christmas and Hannukah displays.
- The McHenry Museum Store will be selling new ink works of Modesto images from Modesto Junior College Psychology Professor and local artist Erin Black.  
VIST "ErinBlackStudio" on Etsy to see more of her work.
- The first in-person meeting of the Board of Directors of the MM&HS took place on November 16, 2021.
- New changes are on the horizon for the MM&HS in the new year, stay tuned for more updates in January.
- We would like to thank all our volunteers for their efforts since our August opening. We also thank Laura Mesa for all she does for our beloved Museum.



The McHenry Museum by Erin Black Studio.

\*Masks are a requirement in the museum, masks were only removed for these momentary photos