



# Perris Press Release

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## Riverside Historical Society Selects Perris for Annual Symposium

Historians and history-lovers descended on Perris for a symposium about the region's past and while in the City learned first-hand about its commitment to preserving its own origins by restoring many classic and one-of-a-kind buildings.

The Riverside Historical Society selected the City for its annual symposium on April 6, which included a discussion about drive-in movie theatres and their impact on culture and entertainment.

Following a morning of lectures, questions and answer sessions and exchanges between speakers and audience members, the crowd took a walk down memory lane along Perris' D Street.

The City has taken great care to restore many of the structures that date to the early days of Perris and in some cases pre-date the 1911 incorporation by decades.

Those include the City Council Chambers, the art deco Perris Theatre, the Bank of Perris, Southern Hotel, Depot Building and other commercial buildings dating back to before World War II. "We had a great time explaining the City's wonderful history and the commitment by Perris elected officials to maintain it," said local historian Katie Keyes. "We heard a lot of great compliments.

People said the City of Perris is doing things right and that made us feel good." Perris Mayor Daryl Busch welcomed the 80 symposium participants who gathered early on April 6 at the Bob Glass Gym. Busch said the City adopted a straight-forward approach to preserving its architecturally and historically significant buildings: Make a plan and keep to it. "History means a lot to our City Council," Busch said. "We spent a great deal of time, effort and money to preserve it. We're real proud of what we've done and we're not done yet." For instance, he said, the City is exploring ways to renovate the 1930s Perris Theatre and turn it into an entertainment showcase.

Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez said much of the City's history been and continues to be archived. Those records include photos, land deeds, maps, newspaper accounts and high school yearbooks. Many photos and other personal accounts were documented on a series of panels made in 2011 for the City's centennial which now encompass a traveling exhibit around the Perris Valley. "It is wonderful that our history is being archived," he said, noting that Perris is a community of young residents with an average age of less than 30.

"We need to know where our City was in the past, where we are now and where we will be in the future. Having this work archived is just wonderful." The symposium began with a discussion of drive-in movie theatres, which rose to popularity in the 1930s, peaked in the 1960s and while their numbers have greatly plunged, still remain a viable alternative to traditional sit-down movie venues.

Historian Kim Jarrell Johnson said drive-ins offered something for the entire family—including a play area for kids featuring amusement-park type rides and a "snack 'n' view room" where patrons could munch popcorn and sip soda without messing up their vehicles. Typical admission prices were 65-cents for adults and 9 cents for children but some patrons still tried to sneak kids into the show in the trunks of their cars. Jarrell-Johnson said drive-ins faded away as the land they were built upon become more valuable as urban development took off in the 1970s and 1980s. "Land just got too expensive," she said.

A highlight for many of the attendees took place during a stroll down D Street after a morning of talks and lectures. Riverside County historian Steve Lech commended Perris for keeping "a close tie to its history." "Perris is taking care of its Downtown by revitalizing its old buildings that make the area unique," Lech said. "What maintains a town's integrity is its old buildings." Glenn and Nancy Wenzel, other members of the Riverside Historical Society, also came away impressed.

"People in Perris obviously care about their history," Nancy Wenzel said. "Everything looks spruced up. The craftsmanship and hand-work in old buildings provide the Downtown with character. The (Centennial) history panels are incredibly well-done in a way that is easy to share the City's history. I am incredibly impressed."

Asked to give the City a grade for its preservation efforts, Nancy Wenzel said: "A+" Dave Stuart, a member of the Perris Planning Commission who worked on the history panels and helped restore several Downtown buildings, led the D Street walk.

The group met John and Ann Motte at the Southern Hotel, which the family has restored and converted into a museum and office building. The hotel was built in 1886 as luxury accommodations for travelers through the Perris Valley. At the 1910-era Bank of Perris, now used as a City archive, the tour was met by none other than Christina Perris, the great granddaughter of Fred T. Perris, the City's namesake. She regaled the visitors with a talk about her famous ancestor—the former chief engineer for the California Southern Railroad—who map the rail line through the City. At the 1892 Depot Building, the group saw a comprehensive look at Perris, from the days of the Good Hope Mine, through its agricultural boom years to City pioneers who carved a vibrant community out of the Perris Valley.

"History helps people connect with their community," Stuart said. "Our historic anchors are part of our Downtown fabric. Perris has genuine historic buildings that give a flavor to its Downtown area that not many other cities in this area have."



Glenn and Nancy Wenzel and Steve Lech outside the Perris City Council Chambers, which were restored to their original 1930s look by the City. The three are members of the Riverside Historical Society who attended a symposium in Perris.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch addresses the crowd of more than 80 historians and history lovers: "History means a lot to our City Council."



Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez chats with Cindy Chambers at the historical society symposium.



Panels from the 2011 Perris Centennial also were part of the historical display.