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Local Historian Publishes Book on Perris Valley History

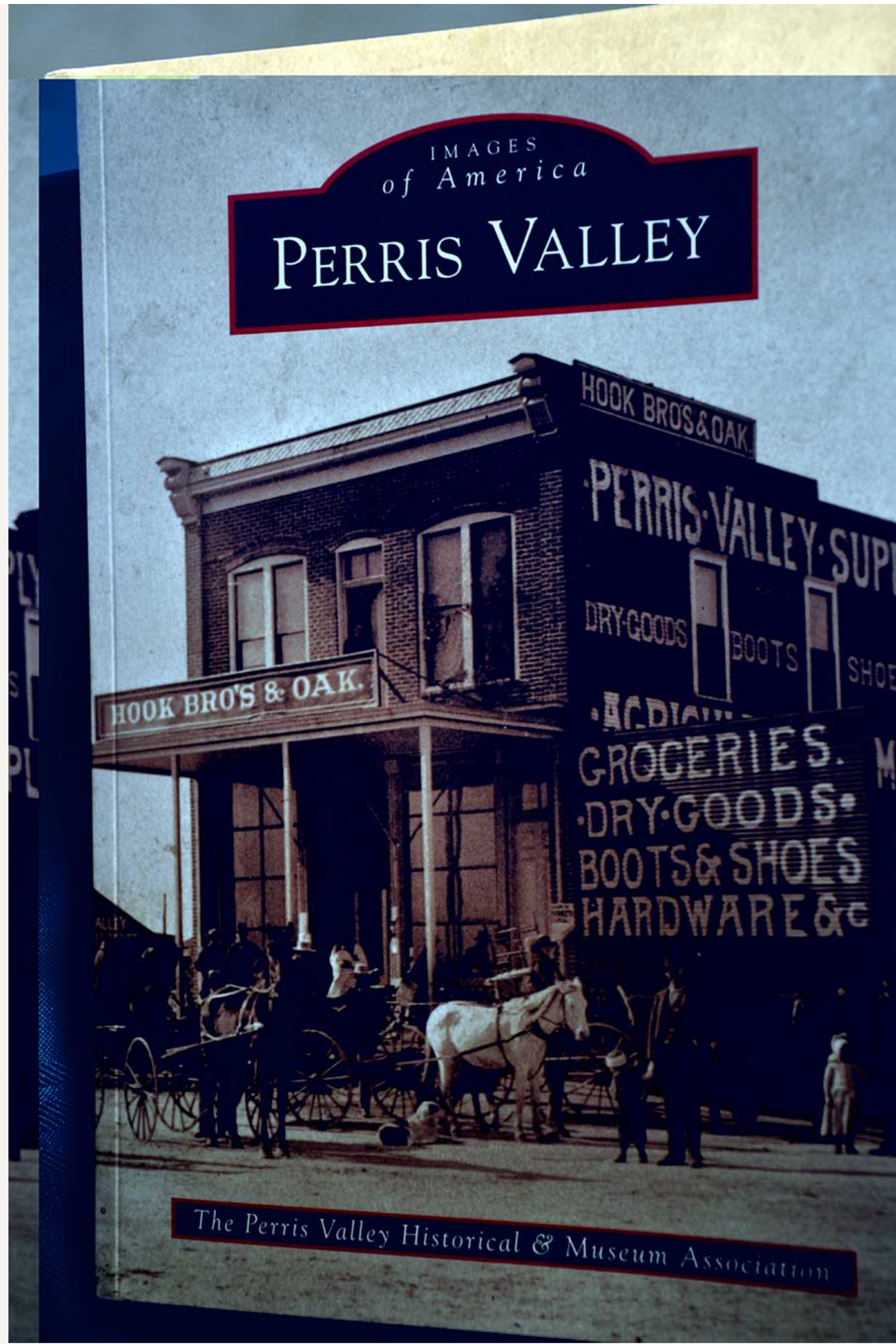
Call it a history of the Perris Valley in pictures and photo captions.

From pioneers to politicians, business owners to baseball players, innovators and immigrants, musicians to movie stars, the recently released 124-page book "Images of America: Perris Valley" contains it all. The people, famous and forgotten, who put their stamp on Perris and the surrounding valley are celebrated in the book, written by local historian Katie Keyes.

"It was an interesting exercise and I found some new things about this area that I did not know," said Keyes, who has lived in the Perris Valley for more than 70 years. "It was fun to learn about the history I didn't know."

Printed by the Charleston, S.C. Arcadia Publishing, Images of America: Perris Valley is for sale at \$23.50. Copies of the book are available at the restored Depot Building at Fourth and C streets, which is open Thursday through Sunday from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Buyers may also email Keyes at kkeyes42@yahoo.com.



"Images of America: Perris Valley" tells the story of Perris and environs in words and pictures.

Among the fascinating tidbits Keyes uncovered during her research and writing:

- Hay farmer/baler, miner and well-driller Frank Beatty became a hero when he found abundant water at March Air Force Base during its early existence. Shortly after World War I ended in 1918, March faced a water crisis and was faced with closure. Beatty used his expertise as a well driller to locate abundant sources of water for the fledgling base, which has been a mainstay in the nation's defense for almost a century.
- Boys met girls while enjoying swimming, sack races, horseshoes and singalongs at the Good Hope Gun and Country Club just west of Perris. "Nights are delightful at Good Hope," a flyer from the 1920s promised. Developed by J.O Walser in 1923, the site was partitioned into 5-acre parcels with cabins that were purchased by many Perris Valley bachelors. Walser even hosted banquets attended by single women who were encouraged to meet club property owners and marry them. The Good Hope Gun and Country Club ceased operations in 1944.
- Businessman looks out for No. 1. In 1891, J.W. Vance, owner of the Perris Brick Factory and a member of Perris Valley Irrigation District, used his connections to land a one million-brick order for the Bear Valley Irrigation Co., near Big Bear. Vance's brick-making business also supplied materials to several history City buildings, including the Depot, Perris Grammar School and Perris Indian School.
- Hollywood royalty and media legends once called Perris home. Actor Clarence Muse, a ground-breaking African-American actor who appeared in more than 100 movies, and Don Imus, the controversial radio host, both spent time in the City. Muse, one of the founders of the Screen Actors Guild and a supporting player in the early days of sound movies, began the City tradition of "Christmas Hollow," which involved giving gifts to Perris children. He also founded the Perris Valley Arts Festival. Imus, a radio "shock jock" known for his sometimes insensitive and offensive comments, is pictured as an elementary school boy in 1949 performing with the Perris Elementary Trumpet and Drum Corps.
- Fred T. Perris, chief engineer for the California Southern Railroad and the man who surveyed the City that bears his name, liked guns and gunfighters. In a photo taken in his later years, Perris stands beside members of the famous Earp clan, including legendary lawmen Wyatt Earp and his brother, Morgan Earp, both survivors of the 1881 "Gunfight at the OK Corral" in Tombstone, Ariz.



Perris Valley author Katie Keyes, who wrote "Images of America: Perris Valley" autographs a copy of the book at the Perris Depot.

Prominent Perris residents mentioned in photos and writings include members of the Bernasconi family, Swiss immigrants who arrived in the 1880s and built the Southern Hotel, which still stands on D Street. Others include the Motte brothers, who farmed the Perris Valley and later became land developers; the Ragsdales, who built the iconic Rock House across from City Hall; the Hooks, who established a thriving dry-good business; the Mapes, early grocers and Lung Sing, a Chinese immigrant who operate the Club Chop House, selling meals for 25 cents.

"It's nice to keep a record of your history alive so it's not forgotten," Keyes said. "It's nice to catalogue your history."

Keyes said the Perris Valley Historical and Museum Association is grateful the City of Perris values its history. In recent years, the City has renovated the Depot Building, the Bank of Perris and the City Hall Campus, buildings all at least 100 years old.

"They've done a first-rate job of preserving Perris history," Keyes said.

Midgie Parker, another member of the history association, said by partnering with Arcadia Publishing, "Images of America: Perris Valley" will reach a nationwide audience.

"Our story now goes out to a wide audience," Parker said. "It's a story we're proud of and a town we're proud of."

Parker said local history lovers would like the book as a legacy to new generations of people who call Perris home.

"This is a nice rich area that many people who live here do not know the history of," Parker said. "We hope to broaden the knowledge of people living here now."

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