



“Myrtie” Webber **Legendary Pioneer** **1867 - 1978**

Born in 1867, Myrtle “Myrtie” Eveline Gibson was brought up by her maternal grandparents, who both lived into their 100s. She married Ed Sullivan in 1885, when she was only eighteen, but was widowed after just a few years. Eventually, she and her young son Frank moved to Los Angeles, however she had a violent attack of pleurisy and was advised to move to the desert.

She arrived in Lancaster on the midnight train on August 31, 1908, and was directed to the Hotel up the street. When she reached the door of the Western Hotel, Myrtie could not have known that she was stepping foot inside her forever home. Very sick, she ended up spending the next two weeks in bed, under the care of hotel owner, George Webber. The pair were married two years later, in February 1910.

Once recovered, Myrtie began working at the hotel, with a primary job of taking care of the dining room and kitchen; under her management, she enforced strict “no fighting or drinking” rules. She supplied the kitchen with fresh vegetables that came from Lake Hughes and fruit from Littlerock, with meals costing twenty-five cents. She was always very busy, as outside help was hard to get, therefore she advertised the need for staff in Los Angeles and offered to help pay train fees. However, due to the long journey, people would not stay employed long.

Myrtie prepared meals on a four-hole stove using petrified Joshua tree wood, and was known around town for her apple pie. From 1979 to 1982, the “Myrtie Webber Apple Pie Baking Contest” was a major custom during the annual Lancaster Heritage Days; though the winning trophy for this was never awarded to Myrtie herself, it draws honor to the contributions she made in establishing long standing traditions within the Antelope Valley.





Around 1913, George transferred the title of the property to Myrtie and while the Webbers were associated with the Hotel, numerous events took place within its rooms. The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce was formed here in 1902, and the Hotel acted as the headquarters for aqueduct, electrical, gas, petroleum, and paving crews. The aqueduct, stretching from the Owens Valley into the Antelope Valley, helped the town recover from a decade-long drought, and in order to accommodate the numerous workers, a “tent city” was erected just west of the hotel. During this time, Myrtie and her staff housed and fed as many as 250 to 300 men per day; in a newspaper article that

dates back to 1955, Myrtie herself states that she had to, “rise two to three times a night to change linen in the tents and also two sleeping rooms in the water tower.”

Myrtie was described as a strong-willed and sturdy pioneer – slight of frame with twinkling blue eyes; she was known to be civic minded and always ready to assist those in need. During the influenza epidemic that hit the valley in 1918, the Hotel was turned into a hospital and Myrtie acted as a volunteer nurse along with Mom Evert and Dr. Arwine. In the 1930s, the Depression hurt the Hotel, as it did the rest of the nation. The Hotel could be full, but when kindhearted Myrtie went to collect the money (\$1.00 per night), she could not collect a cent from those she was providing room and board.

In the early part of the 20th century, Myrtie and eleven of her friends formed the Lancaster Woman’s Club, as they thought the town needed a little class and activities for social good works. At first they went about bringing arts to the High Desert, and water to the town’s dogs, however the Lancaster Woman’s Club is now the oldest of its type in the Antelope Valley.



The club formed in 1922, when Lancaster’s population numbered only several thousand, and downtown stretched from Sierra Highway (then Antelope Avenue), to Date Avenue. Club historian, Beverly Cornell, stated that the club was founded and held its meetings within the Western Hotel because Myrtie was unable to leave the gargantuan amount of work there.



In 1946, the club was asked by the Antelope Valley Fair to start the home economics department, and two years later they started the fair’s art department, which led to the start of the Allied Arts Association. The group also sold small bricks painted gold to raise money for the city’s first library, and to obtain land for what is now the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve.

Myrtie operated the Hotel until the late 1960s, though there were many real estate agents who wanted to buy her valuable downtown property. Myrtie once said, “I think every real estate broker in California has offered to buy the property. I’ve been offered \$125,000 for it but it’s my home and I intend to live here the rest of my life.” Her life was completely tied to the Hotel until old age forced her into a convalescent hospital in 1971. Myrtie died in 1978, at the age of 110; however, as Lancaster’s oldest resident and pioneer, her name lives on as it graces public locales including the Myrtle Webber Pool and the Western Hotel Museum.