



FRED HENSTRIDGE PHOTOGRAPHY

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THE APERTURE

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The Mission Inn and Downtown Riverside

A few weeks ago Kathy and I took one of our day trips and visited downtown Riverside. We had heard that there was a new photographic museum on Main Street that was a part of the University of California at Riverside (UCR). We also wanted to have lunch at the [Historic Mission Inn](#) and see how the Main Street renovation project was coming along. Downtown Riverside is about 20 miles north of our house at the junction of Interstate 215, SR 60 and SR 91, a very easy drive for us so we decided to go.

Founded in 1870 by John North and a group of Easterners who wished to establish a colony dedicated to furthering education and culture, Riverside was built on land that was once a Spanish rancho. Investors from England and Canada transplanted traditions and activities adopted by prosperous citizens: the first golf course and polo field in Southern California were built in Riverside. The first orange trees were planted in 1871, but the citrus industry in Riverside began two years later when Eliza Tibbets received two Brazilian navel orange trees sent to her by a friend at the Department of Agriculture in Washington. The trees thrived in the Southern California climate and the navel orange industry grew rapidly. Within a few years, the successful cultivation of the newly discovered navel orange led to a California Gold Rush of a different kind: the establishment of the citrus industry, which is commemorated in the landscapes and exhibits of the [California Citrus State Historic Park](#) and the restored packing houses in the Downtown's Marketplace district. By 1882, there were more than half a million citrus trees in California, almost half of which were in Riverside. The development of refrigerated railroad cars and innovative irrigation systems established Riverside as the wealthiest city per capita by 1895. In other words the City of Riverside and the surrounding county were dominated by orange growers. There was only one problem and that was water. Orange trees need water to grow and produce and to get water the growers needed to build a system of canals and irrigation lines.

The early history of the City of Riverside is one of land divisions centered on agriculture and a well planned town of wide streets set amidst this agricultural backdrop. The City's founders realized that the success of the City and agriculture depended on water and worked to establish a network of canals and ditches that relied mostly on gravity to deliver the water from intakes and wells located along the Santa Ana River in the vicinity of Colton, San Bernardino and Loma Linda. To provide for gravity flow over these distances and within the local groves a precise and consistent vertical datum was required. After all, water does run downhill.

With this background and the desire to provide for the orderly expansion and improvement of streets the Board of Trustees of the City of Riverside on December 2, 1889 adopted Ordinance Number 105 setting the [vertical datum plane](#) for the City of Riverside at an Elevation of 841.771 feet at a metal bolt in the granite foundation course of the Loring Building adjacent to the City Hall entrance. The point is not evident today and the basis of the datum, while close to sea level, was not referenced to any particular datum. This would prove problematic for all future engineering projects that would cross the city boundary and was in direct conflict with the vertical datum of the Riverside County Flood Control.

To resolve this issue this City ordinance was superseded on July 23, 1929 by Ordinance 551, adopting the datum of the United States Department of the Interior Geological Survey adjustment entitled "Southern California Preliminary Adjustment of 1928". This being the initial release of what then was referred to as the "North American Vertical Datum of 1929" ([NAVD 29](#)). In 1993 this was superseded by the adoption of the National Geodetic Survey's (NGS) 1988, Vertical Adjustment now known as [NGVD 88](#). That adjustment combined existing and new precise levels, high precision GPS positioning, modernized computer analysis, and only one tidal benchmark to establish a new vertical framework. Since 1996 the NGS has carried this adjustment across the entire continental United States through a program entitled the National Height Modernization Program ([HTMOD](#)), something I was [instrumental](#) in securing congressional funding for, but, that's a story for another time, perhaps a large enough story for a book. In August, 2008 the Federal Emergency Management Agency FEMA released updated Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) referenced to this 1988 datum.



Looking southwesterly along Main Street from 9th Street



Looking northeasterly over the new Main Street rehabilitation project at Mission Inn Avenue

As the city prospered, a small guest hotel designed in the popular Mission Revival style grew to become the world famous Mission Inn, favored by presidents, royalty and movie stars. Postcards of lush orange groves, swimming pools, and magnificent homes have attracted vacationers and entrepreneurs throughout the years. Many relocated to the warm, dry climate for reasons of health and to escape Eastern winters. Victoria Avenue with its landmark homes serves as a reminder of European investors who settled here. Riverside's citizens are proud of the city's unique character born from a tradition of careful planning, from its carefully laid out historic Mile Square to its 1924 Civic Center designed by the same planner responsible for San Francisco's, [Charles Cheney](#). Through the City's Office of Historic Preservation, it is committed to preserving the past as a firm foundation for the future. Over 100 City Landmarks, 20 National Register Sites and 2 National Landmarks have been designated by the City Council, all offering enjoyment and education to city residents and visitors. Riverside is fortunate to have a wealth of sites and buildings that provide a link to the city's past and a strong sense of place.

This is the result of the hard work and careful planning of the city's Historic Preservation Program. Created by the City Council in 1969, it identifies and advances the preservation of Riverside's historic neighborhoods, and civic and commercial resources. Examples include the Mission Inn, the Chinatown site, the [National Packing House](#), Citrus Experiment Station and engineering feats like the Gage Canal. Many of these landmarks are found in the Downtown's [Mission Inn Historic District](#). California's Mission Revival style, born in Riverside, can be seen throughout the City, most notably in the Mission Inn, the Municipal Auditorium, First Church of Christ Scientist, and the [Fox Theater](#), home of the Riverside Film Festival.

The [Mission Inn](#) was developed from the Glenwood Tavern, owned by Captain Christopher Columbus Miller, who moved to Riverside in 1874 to survey land for the Gage Canal, which brought water to Riverside. His son Frank developed a lasting interest in culture and the arts and took over the expansion of the Inn. Over the years he embellished and expanded it into a unique resort known all over the world. It has played host to numerous movie stars, musicians and heads of state. Ronald and Nancy Reagan honeymooned there, and Richard and Pat Nixon were married on its grounds.

Teddy Roosevelt planted a tree in its courtyard, and a special chair, built for President William Howard Taft when he visited, is still in the Inn's collection. Many of Riverside's historic buildings are open to the public including the Catherine Bettner home, restored and renamed the Heritage House, which is open for tours. The Riverside Art Museum was designed by America's most successful woman architect, Julia Morgan, famous for William Randolph Hearst's Castle in [San Simeon](#).

From its modest beginnings as a 12-room adobe boarding house to its current stature consisting of 239 guest rooms, the [Mission Inn Hotel & Spa](#) has been the keystone of Downtown Riverside since 1876. In the late 1800's wealthy easterners and Europeans flocked to Riverside in search of a warmer winter climate along with the desire to invest in the area's profitable citrus industry. By the 1890's Riverside was the richest city per capita in the United States. This consistent influx of tourists to Riverside made Frank Miller, the Master of the Inn, recognize the dire need for a grand resort hotel.

Frank Miller opened the first wing of his new hotel in 1903. The mission wing was built in Mission-Revival style architecture and sought to incorporate different structural elements of the 21 California Missions. Mr. Miller went onto add three more wings to his hotel: the Cloister, Spanish and completed it with the Rotunda wing in 1931. Over the years the hotel has served as host to numerous celebrities and dignitaries.

The Presidential Lounge pays homage to the 10 U.S. Presidents that have passed through the doors of the Mission Inn. The current bar stands where President Theodore Roosevelt once slept during his visit to the hotel in 1903 and the lounge is also the site of Richard Nixon's wedding to his wife Patricia. Whether it's the JFK Cosmopolitan or the Herbert Hoover lemon drop, the lounge's signature cocktails will leave you feeling very stately.

In the middle of the lobby sits a rather unique chair made especially for President Taft who weighed roughly 350lbs. and stood six-foot-five. Frank Miller heard the rumors of President Taft getting stuck in the White House bathtub, so he had a special chair commissioned for this very prestigious and retund guest for the banquet that was to be held in his honor. A prime example of arts & craft style furniture, the Taft chair has been a spacious photo spot for Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Robert Redford, couples and countless schoolchildren.

Frank Miller traveled extensively throughout Europe and Asia on family vacations. Mr. Miller would always return with more "stuff" than he went with. Whether it was antique furniture, paintings, statuary or a bell, Frank could never resist a great bargain. The Miller family bell collection once exceeded 800 and today 400 of the Miller family's' bells can be seen strewn throughout the exquisite grounds of the Mission Inn Hotel & Spa. Las Campanas, the hotel's authentic Mexican restaurant, is home to an array of [historic bells](#). The Nanking temple bell nicely adorns the Cantina section of the restaurant. This bell was one of the first items to leave China after the Boxer Rebellion in 1912 and Louis Comfort Tiffany once wrote Mr. Miller a blank check in an attempt to purchase this bell in which Frank ultimately declined. Another prized bell in the Miller family collection can be seen in its new location. The oldest dated bell in Christendom, A.D. 1247, is now being showcased right outside the Mission Inn Restaurant in the California lobby. On a trip to England, Mr. Miller purchased this bell and two others for around twenty-five dollars. When Mr. Miller returned to pick up the bells that he'd purchased, the shopkeeper only brought out two. The shopkeeper realized his mistake and told Frank that the bell wasn't for sale. Frank objected with a written receipt of purchase and returned proudly to the Mission Inn with the oldest dated bell in the world.

Located a floor above the lobby, the hotel's wedding chapels grace the Spanish-colonial inspired courtyard known as the Atrio. With its smooth travertine flagstones and Italian inspired bronze Bacchus fountain, the Atrio serves as a majestic backdrop for a timeless wedding. Part of the Rotunda wing, completed in 1931, the St. Francis of Assisi Chapel is embellished with priceless treasures from around the world. Precious Tiffany stained glass panels, which Mr. Miller acquired directly from Louis Comfort Tiffany, magnificently accent the grand walls of the chapel. The 18-karat-gold leafed Raya's altar dates back to the mid-eighteenth century and was commissioned for a family home in Guanajuato, Mexico. Gleaming with gold and meticulously gilded, allow this altar to make your wedding glow.

Frank Miller successfully ran the Mission Inn Hotel from its early stages as an adobe boarding house in 1876 into the destination hotel it became until his death in 1935. His ingenuity and keen hospitality knowledge made the Mission Inn an institution in Riverside and a destination for everyone. After the Miller family sold the hotel in 1956 it changed hands numerous times and was on the brink of being demolished. The legacy of private family ownership was renewed by Duane Roberts and the business principles of Frank Miller have been revived.

The famous American humorous Will Rodgers proclaimed of the Mission Inn - "*It is the most unique hotel in America. It's a monastery, a museum, a fine hotel, a home, a boardinghouse, a mission, an art gallery and an aviator's shrine. It combines the best features of all of the above. If you are ever in any part of California, don't miss the famous Mission Inn of Riverside.*"

There are five restaurants in the Mission Inn: Duane's Prime Steaks & Seafood, the Mission Inn Restaurant, Las Campanas Restaurant, [Bella Trattoria Italian Bistro](#) and the Presidential Lounge for light snacks. The Inn also has a museum, boutique shops, numerous banquet rooms and a [wonderful ambience](#). The Inn is a favorite location for [weddings](#) and it is booked well in advance. As a photographer I would love to shoot a wedding at the Mission Inn. There are so many great places to pose the bride and the lighting can be outstanding in late afternoons.

Kathy and I spent some time touring the Inn then we had a great lunch at the [Las Campanas Restaurant](#). We had the lunch special which offered any Combination of Two Items: Beef or Chicken Taco; Cheese Enchilada or Chile Relleno; Arroz and Choice of Frijoles; Choice of Dessert and Choice of Brewed Coffee, Decaffeinated Coffee or Iced Tea all for \$15.00. It was a great lunch with large portions, terrific service and very lovely setting. I would recommend this restaurant without reservation. [Click Here](#) to see a full menu.

After lunch we visited the [UCR/California Museum of Photography](#) located on [Main Street](#) just one short block from the Mission Inn. The [Museum](#) occupies three floors of the building it is in. There are many well exhibited photos internationally known and local photographers. The exhibits are segregated by themes ranging from nature to social issues. The exhibit that drew my attention was the room devoted to the history of photography with cases containing some great camera of the past, including an exhibit of [Kodak Brownie Cameras](#). If you plan to visit the Museum the hours are noon to 5:00 pm Tuesdays through Saturdays. They are closed on Sunday and Monday.

As I mentioned above the City of Riverside is dedicated to the preservation of its history and to making the downtown area into a [pedestrian friendly area](#). There is considerable [construction activity](#) along Main Street while we were there. The construction is scheduled to be completed by late November in time for the Riverside Festival of Lights. This is the time when the downtown area is all decked out for the Christmas season with lights, trees and the numerous shops lining Main Street offer Christmas goodies in a manner of the famous Christmas Markets of Germany. This is something we are planning to attend with our Granddaughters. It will no doubt be a great time with many more photo opportunities. I will make sure to bring my fastest lenses so I can capture the full depth of color. Look for a future edition of this newsletter covering that event.

To view a complete gallery of photos from the Mission Inn, Downtown Riverside and the California Museum of Photography [Click Here](#).

Control (Ctrl) Click on any Photo or Link to open a full-size image in a new window or tab.

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Looking northwesterly along Mission Inn Avenue towards the historic Fox Theater at Market Street.



Looking NE over the Main Street fountain towards University Ave



The Entrance to the historic Mission Inn



Mission bells at the Mission Inn



Interior of the Mission Inn from the main lobby



The entrance to the Las Campanas patio at the Mission Inn



A collection of Ikoflex twin lens reflex cameras at the UCR Museum of Photography