

# Oceanside Historical Society

Spring 2016 Newsletter

[www.OceansideHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.OceansideHistoricalSociety.org)

## Latino Americans, 500 Years of History

Thursday March 31 • 6:00 pm  
the Oceanside Public Library.  
Presentation by Victor Villasenor,  
author of Rain of Gold.



Friday, May 6th - Finale Unveiling of “Our History Revealed” at the Oceanside Library during the First Friday Art Walk 6:00 - 9:00 pm.

**The Historical Society is looking for old photos and family history of residents from the Eastside, Crown Heights and Mesa-Margarita neighborhoods.**

Come to our workshops on Saturday, April 2 and April 23 at 10:00 am at the Oceanside Public Library Community Rooms!



## History Walks start soon!

Our annual Downtown History Walk of the season will start soon. The walks are:

### Saturday, April 9 - Sept. 10

We start at 9:00 a.m. in front of the Oceanside Public Library at 300 North Coast Highway. Walks are moderately paced and take about two hours. Downtown walks are free (donations are always welcomed!) and open to everyone!

General Museum Information  
305 N. Nevada Street

Phone: (760) 722-4786

We are open Thursday & Friday from 10 am to 2pm & Saturdays by appointment.

North Coast Images

Photo by North Coast Images

# News of Interest

**If you haven't been to the Museum in a few months, we have beautiful new framed photos displayed.**

Stop by and say hi to Janice and Shelley and check out the new photo displays.  
Thursday and Friday 10:00 am - 2:00 pm or by appointment.

## **New Members:**

The Historical Society would like to welcome the new members:

Dave & Susan Higley  
Daniela Marshall  
Lisa & Gilbert Passin  
Thank You!

## **In memory of those who are no longer with us:**

Dr. Gabriel  
Dottie Bressi  
Forrie Rounds  
Alicia Bedwell  
Jerry Salyer  
Nels "Jake" Jakobsen

**We value your support!**

**Membership renewals are due! Please mail a check to:**

P.O. Box 125  
Oceanside, CA 92049-0125

## **Donations:**

Ken Woodward - photos, scrapbooks & news clippings

Monetary donations include:  
Shelley Combs  
Ernie Gobbi  
M U Inc.  
Kristi Hawthorne

Thank you!

Please renew your Oceanside Historical Society membership. If you are not a member, please consider joining. Forms are on the back of this newsletter. Membership dues enable us to continue preservation efforts and are our main source of income. Your support goes a long way to help us maintain and preserve Oceanside's precious history.

## **Board Members:**

President: Kristi Hawthorne  
Vice President: John Daley  
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## **Visit our website**

[OceansideHistoricalSociety.org](http://OceansideHistoricalSociety.org)

## **Visit Facebook page**

[Facebook.com/OceansideHistoricalSociety](https://Facebook.com/OceansideHistoricalSociety)  
(you do not need a Facebook account to see historical photos.)

# Young Keno: The Marshal gets his man

## by Jeff Smith, Nov. 26, 2014

“Stand back! Clear the way!” San Diego police cleared a path for John Murray, handcuffed and manacled, through an angry crowd to the courtroom. Many were armed, all were mad — hungry mad — to string Murray up. As he shuffled along, he saw death in every eye and begged the guards to keep the mob at bay.

Once inside, Murray noticed a man who stared at him and wouldn't blink. Taller than the rest, he was in his mid 20s, a good six-foot-three, thick mustache that dripped over his upper lip, coal-black hair parted down the middle: Keno Wilson, the new marshal of Oceanside.

Five days before, Murray shot Wilson's brother Charley in cold blood. Observers said the marshal shot Murray a look that could harrow hell.

As Murray huddled between his legal counsels, judge Benjamin Hayes, 74 and frail, called the hearing to order. When he read the complaint, Murray stood up and shouted “Guilty!” Hayes reminded him that this was a preliminary hearing. “Reserve your plea for Friday.” “I don't know the law,” Murray replied. “All I want is a fair shake.”

At trial, Wilson tried not to flinch as the first witness, Dr. Henry Hildreth, described Charley's murder in cold, anatomical detail: “The shot was downward, must have lacerated the heart, both lungs, the left lung more seriously, and the left pulmonary artery, bronchial tube.”

Wilson took the stand. Asked his relation to the deceased, his eyes took dead aim at Murray. “He was my brother.”

Wilson recalled the incident. Shortly after midnight on July 4, 1889, he and Charley were on foot patrol in Oceanside. They heard rattling. “We went over to arrest these boys for breaking a glass lamp. Murray rode toward Charley, lamp and reins in his left hand, a pistol down his right side.

“Charley said, ‘Halt there! Throw up your hands! I will arrest you!’ Them was the words he said. Then [Murray] shot just over the horse and Charley fell.”

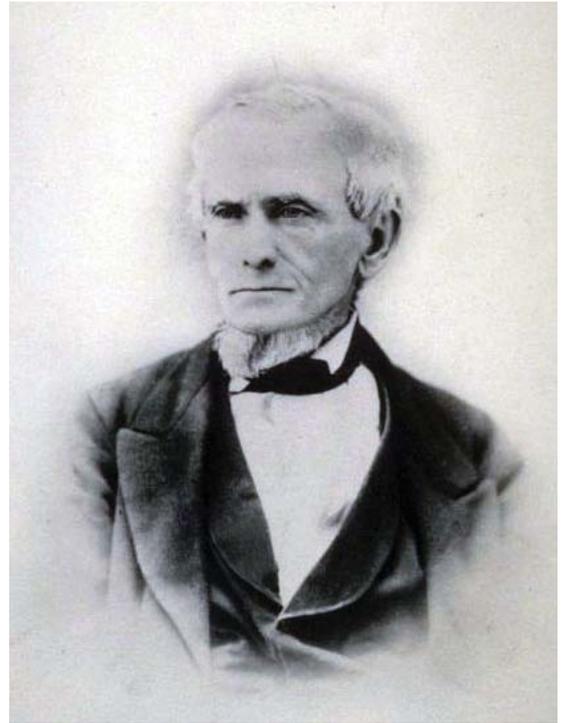
A year earlier, after Charley made him pay a \$20 fine for disturbing the peace, Murray swore to “get the drop” on the Wilsons, and get even. Keno, said to be “pleasant but outspoken,” griped that he didn't get even in turn.

After four hours of deliberation, the jury declared Murray guilty in the first degree. But his attorneys filed an appeal for tampering — the local newspaper influenced their decision — and Murray's trial turned into several.

On July 24, Wilson went after Sylvestro “Pedro” Morales, a desperado whose “deliberate coolness” when robbing or shooting someone “is probably without a parallel in the whole range of criminal annals” (Daily Alta California). To onlookers, Wilson's search became a crusade to complete unfinished business with Murray.

On July 23, a “half-breed” (South Oceanside Diamond) jumped from behind a bush on the main road near Oceanside. He aimed a .44 caliber revolver at a man on horseback and said “dismount!” The rider, obviously of some means, had a gold watch on a chain dangling from his vest.

The robber took the man's money, horse, and watch. As he rode off, he turned and fired, inflicting a flesh



Judge Benjamin Hayes

wound. Asked to describe him, the wounded man — who didn't want to be named — said he was about five-foot-ten, 135 pounds, "not exceedingly dark," early 30s. He had a pock-marked face, a black mustache, and a scar or birthmark over his left eye. And he shot left-handed.

On July 24, two riders came upon George W. Bunch bleeding in the dust near Mission San Luis Rey. He had at least two, maybe even three bullets in his gut. "Morales," he said, "Pedro Morales. Headed east!"

That night someone matching Morales's description robbed a man at gunpoint on the highway near Temecula. Keno Wilson got the information and a rap sheet: Sylvestro "Pedro" Morales: 1881, shot a Jewish merchant "over an alleged insult"; sentenced to San Quentin Prison for seven years (half in solitary confinement); released February, 1889; stabbed a man at Almaden quicksilver mine; horse thief.

Since lawmen from San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles counties had tracked down John Murray just weeks before, Wilson had no problem organizing search parties. But like California's most famous outlaws, Joaquin Murietta and Tiburcio Vasquez, Morales enjoyed the protection "of his own nationality freely" (Sacramento Bee). The search also took many weeks, a newspaper said, because "for reasons best known to themselves," those not in Wilson's party "generally hunted on safe ground."

On August 20, Morales rode up to José Morales's (no relation) ranch at San Dieguito, on the northern outskirts of today's Rancho Santa Fe. Sylvestro had been there before — his fight with George Bunch began at the nearby Juan Castro Saloon. He knew that José had a beautiful stepdaughter, Nymphia Brown.

José was in San Diego on business. Around noon, Sylvestro dismounted at the ranch house. He drew his revolver and aimed it at 17-year-old Nymphia, standing frozen on the porch. He "compelled her to mount his horse," writes the L.A. Times. Then he "leaped to the saddle in front of her" and they rode off. Newspapers said Nymphia, a "fair-complexioned Mexican girl," wore a black-and-white gingham dress with a white and blue nubia (a wrap) on her head, and that her shrieks echoed across the valley.

José Morales formed a search party. Near San Juan Capistrano, two of his men saw a black horse resembling Morales's hitched to a post at a friend's home. Sylvestro, Nymphia, and the friend were having a meal inside.

Sylvestro heard the horses approach. He got the drop on the men as they came through the door. "I'm a friend not an enemy," said the first. "I just need a light for my smoke." Morales gave him one, and they left, with Morales's horse. When they returned, Morales and the woman had crept out the back and hid in dense brush up a hill.

To cover their embarrassment at losing him, the pursuers said Morales used the woman as a shield to escape. The San Diego Union added that the two pursuers were "an expert posse."

The next day, August 25, Henry Charles was found dead. The wealthy San Juan Capistrano rancher heard noises in his corral. When he opened the gate to investigate, a pistol shot "took effect in the groin" (L.A. Herald). "Morales and his abducted girl, well mounted, rode over his prostrate body and away into the mountains." The murder intensified the search and the reward. José Morales offered \$400, the Charles estate \$600, and governor Robert Waterman added \$300.

For several weeks, Keno Wilson had been a posse of one. Shortly after the Charles murder, Wilson added a companion. Ignacio Castillo of Temescal was a former member of Morales's gang. Wilson tracked Castillo down and offered immunity from prosecution if he joined the search.

An unsubstantiated rumor claimed that Castillo also wanted revenge: ten days before, Morales allegedly shot a close friend named Ureta, a woodcutter. By the time Castillo and Wilson joined up, Morales had 20 warrants against him.

Castillo knew Morales's favorite haunts. After they searched Santiago and Trabuco, narrow, rocky canyons in Orange County, Castillo suggested the Los Alamitos Ranch, five miles south of Long Beach, on the coast. Morales's half-sister, Sylvia, lived there.

Los Alamos was a maze of inlets, sloughs, and estuaries from the San Gabriel River. Acres of swampland surrounded the placid bay, later to become a harbor. If Morales was holed up there, he had no outlet for escape: go north, Long Beach or Wilmington; turn inland, Los Angeles or Anaheim. In effect, he'd cut himself off.

Johnny McGarvin, a fisherman, had a house near the bay. While out hunting, one of his sons spotted footprints in the mud. They led to two strangers camping near the head of the bay, not far from where Morales's half-sister lived. McGarvin sent word to the authorities: might be your outlaw.

Wilson and Castillo joined McGarvin. They made a slow, muddy tromp through dense thickets. When they neared the campsite, they snuck up to a barn overlooking the ranch house. From the cupola, they could watch with field glasses. If it was Morales, he'd be heavily armed and was a crack shot. The woman he abducted would probably be there — with other desperadoes? Rather than risk a shootout, they chose caution and the element of surprise.

For three days they watched a woman — Sylvia? — carry food into a fortress of tall tules. Judging from its size, the basket only had enough for two. On Friday, September 6, around four in the afternoon, the three men devised a plan. They would crawl on their bellies, approach the campsite from three directions, and nab Morales red-handed. So, they split up, Wilson with a Winchester; McGarvin, a shotgun; Castillo, a revolver.

Before they reached the camp, they had to cross a ditch. As they approached, a man rose, shaking water from his long black hair. He had his back to them but fit the description. Wilson signaled to the others: it's him! Wilson stood up. He aimed the Winchester at Morales and shouted, "Throw up your hands!" Morales raised his right hand and turned to see where the voice came from.

Wilson noticed the birthmark over the eye. He also noticed Morales's left hand inching toward his holster. "Both hands or I'll put a bullet clear through you!" "I hate to do it," said Morales, waving ten fingers at the sky, "but you got the dead cinch on me." Wilson snatched a heavy ten-inch knife and a .44 caliber pistol from Morales's belt and clasped irons around his wrists. Castillo came through the brush. In Spanish he said "Horse thief! Killer!" "No thief," Morales replied with a wry smile. "Horses just like to follow me."

Wilson asked about his crimes, but Morales refused to answer. He did say he was sorry he didn't have his Winchester at the time, "so I might have killed Castillo and died with my boots on."

They found Nymphia Brown at a makeshift campsite, their only possession a soiled bed-comforter. Like Morales, she was badly tanned from overexposure to the elements. "I left home against my will," she told Castillo in Spanish, "and stayed because of constant threats and fear." Then, surprisingly, she asked to stay at Morales's side.

Wilson took his prisoner to the Santa Ana depot, where they awaited the next train to Oceanside. A crowd gathered. According to a reporter, Morales and Nymphia sat side-by-side and "presented a most dejected appearance." While he chain-smoked cigarettes, they "quietly chatted" with each other and wouldn't answer questions. "No sabe ingles," said Nymphia. A Spanish-speaking reporter mentioned names associated with Morales.

"You may speak English. I understand the language," said Morales. "If the officers had not taken me unawares I could have drawn my pistola. I would not fear two guns, but they gave me no chance at all.

"I have no hope of escaping the penalty from all these charges, but as to abducting the girl, shooting Bunch, murdering Henry Charles, and stealing numerous horses, there isn't sufficient proof to convict me. But I should not have carried the watch and chain with me. If it were not for that article, I could stand a fair show of escaping entirely. And as for abducting the girl, it is a lie. I never forced her to go."

The reporter asked Nymphia if she would return home. "No, sir," she replied in English. "I not like my stepfather. I not go with Morales because of gun. I go because I like Morales. I now go with Morales wherever he go, even if to die."

When other reporters saw the pair doing an interview they came over with questions. “No sabe ingles,” Morales replied. By the time the train left for Oceanside, an estimated 6000 people wanted to see the desperado who terrorized three counties and whose hands, wrote the Los Angeles Herald, “are crimsoned with the blood of three or four men.”

John Murray, who “got even” with Charley Wilson by murdering him, died in county jail on April 13, 1892. He “Cheated the Gallows,” wrote the San Diego Union. His hanging was two weeks away. Often during his trial, Sylvestro Morales swore to get even with Wilson and Castillo. “I will never rest,” he shouted, “until I have squared accounts!”

Morales got a life sentence at San Quentin. But in 1909, the governor of California pardoned him. “The good behavior he feigned in prison was just a sham,” writes Claudine Burnett. “It was revenge that consumed him.”

On October 14, 1910, Morales hid in the trees of a ranch near San Diego, where Castillo punched cattle. Morales ran up, drew his pistol, and shot Castillo over and over. Leaving a trail of blood along the way, somehow Castillo dragged himself to the ranch house. Just before he died, he said “Sylvestro ‘Pedro’ Morales” had shot him. An intense search, led by Keno Wilson, combed both sides of the border for over a week, but they never found Morales.

Keno Wilson died September 24, 1936. From the time of Castillo’s death, and for the rest of his 71 years, Wilson never talked about two subjects: his brother had been murdered in cold-blooded revenge; and another brutal murderer had sworn revenge on him.

### QUOTATIONS

1. *Daily Alta California*: In 60 days, Morales “made a record for himself actually surpassing the ‘finest work’ ever accomplished by Joaquin Murietta and Tiburcio Vasquez, whose careers as outlaws have an almost world-wide notoriety.”
2. *Claudine Burnett*: “Southern Californians didn’t have to rely on reading dime store westerns to get an idea of the untamed frontier; all they had to do was [read] the morning newspaper.”
3. *South Oceanside Diamond*: “Keno is a brave and determined officer, and is very exultant over making the most noted capture of recent times.”

### SOURCES

- Boag, Peter, *Re-Dressing America’s Frontier Past* (Berkeley, 2012).
- Burnett, Claudine, *Murderous Intent?* (Bloomington, 2009).
- Castanian, Pliny, *To Protect and Serve: A History of the San Diego Police Department and Its Chiefs* (San Diego, 1993).
- Hawthorne, Kristi, *Oceanside: Where Life is Worth Living* (Virginia Beach, 2000).
- Lyons, Matthew, J., *Images of America: Oceanside Police Department* (San Francisco, 2006).
- Ribbel, Arthur, “A Lawman’s Lawman Stood Tall for Order and Decency,” *San Diego Union*, May 16, 1982.
- Articles in *San Diego Union*, *Herald*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Daily Alta Californian*, *South Oceanside Diamond*, *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, *San Jose Mercury News*, and others.
- Preliminary hearing and trial transcripts, San Diego History Center.



John Murray was buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in San Luis Rey.

These are some of the wonderful images recently donated by Ken Woodward, son of Police Chief Guy Woodward.



Hudson Essex Dealership at 424 South Hill Street circa 1930's



Officer Guy Woodward poses with stolen car



Crossing Guards at Topeka & Hill Streets 1938

Do you have old photos of Oceanside? Please share them with us!

# Oceanside Historical Society

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Spring 2016 Newsletter

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## Membership Application

Please make checks payable to the **Oceanside Historical Society** and mail to:

**OHS, P O Box 125, Oceanside CA 92049-0125**

Donations & memberships may be made through our PayPal account via our website at: [www.oceansidehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.oceansidehistoricalsociety.org)

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\_\_\_ Family \$25.00

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