



Courthouse 1900: Photo courtesy of Museum of

Ventura County

# A rich history of transformation

## From courthouse to city hall, Ventura celebrates 100 years

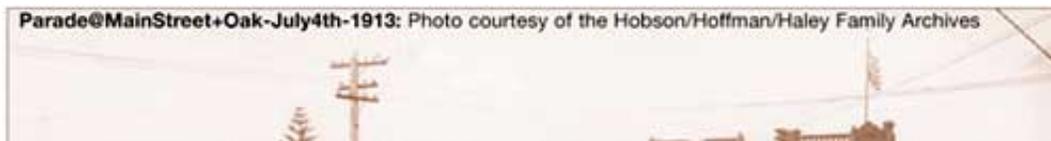
By [Carla Iacovetti](#) 07/03/2013



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“Visionary builds what dreamers imagined.” – Toba Beta, *My Ancestor Was an Ancient Astronaut*

**One hundred years ago**, Ventura had a lot going on. With only 5,000 residents, it was blessed with talented visionaries that had a grasp of this city’s future. Looking at the rich potential, these futurists blazed trails and opened the doors for Ventura to become what it is today. Men like, William Dewey Hobson (W.D.), known as the “Father of Ventura County,” who successfully lobbied the California Legislature for the separation of Ventura County from Santa Barbara County; Abram Lincoln Hobson (Abe), W.D.’s second son, who took over his father’s meat packing company; Albert C. Martin, the legendary Los Angeles architect who was hired to rebuild Ventura’s third courthouse; and William Arthur Hobson Will, Ventura’s own Gatsby type and William Dewey’s fourth son. Will was almost single-handedly responsible for organizing the biggest festivity Ventura ever seen — the weeklong party celebrating the opening of the newly designed courthouse, the completion of the Ventura River Bridge and the restoration of the historic Grant Park cross, led by Alice Bartlett of the E.C.O. Women’s Club.



Parade@MainStreet+Oak-July4th-1913: Photo courtesy of the Hobson/Hoffman/Haley Family Archives



Martin AC, the L.A. architect who rebuilt Ventura's third courthouse: Photo courtesy of A.C. Martin Partners



Downtown makeover California, Oak South: Photo Courtesy the City of Ventura Archives



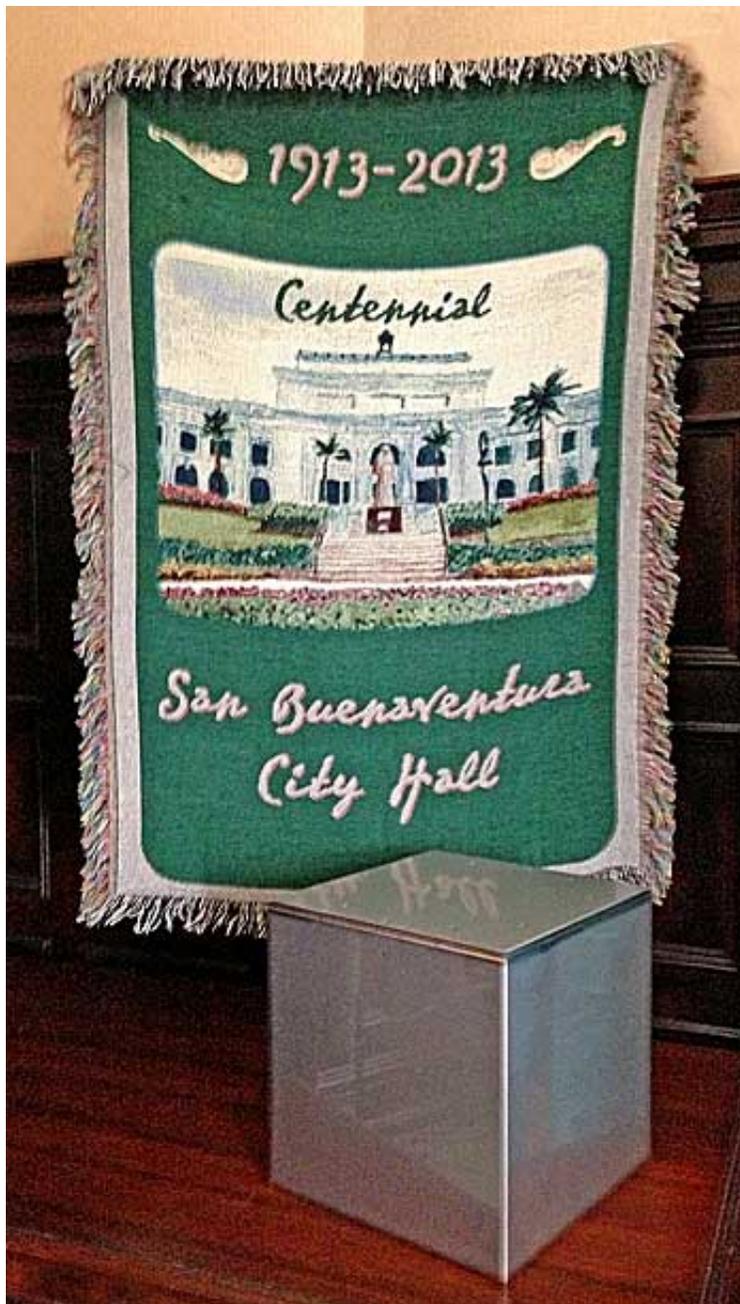
William Dewey Hobson, 45, in 1874, known as the Father of Vta County: Photo courtesy of the Smith-Hobson Family Archives



**Raising Cross:** Photo courtesy of Foster Library Archives (Ventura Free Press)

W.D. was a forty-niner who gave up his quest for gold and made his way to Ventura from Sacramento with his bride, Isabel Jane Winemiller, by his side. His livestock and packing company became prominent throughout the state, and he also built a number of businesses on Main Street, such as Hill School, Spear's Hall (the first city hall) and the Ventura House, which later became the Occidental Hotel.

The acorn did not fall too far from the tree with his sons Abe and Will. Both men possessed a strong entrepreneurial spirit and took up where their father left off. The packing company known as the Flying H was only the tip of the iceberg of the *family* business activities. In 1895, they were both involved with the first oil discoveries at Rincon, the development of Pierpont Bay, street paving and real estate purchases from the central coast to San Diego County.



## **Hanging throw rug for capsule: City Hall**

Will might have given Scott Fitzgerald's character Jay Gatsby a run for his money, as he was a man who prized pageantry and lively celebrations. In addition to his flair for pomp and circumstance, the youngest Hobson son loved going fast. Whether it was riding proudly on the back of a black stallion, on a train or behind the wheel of an automobile, Will lived life to the fullest. In 1910, Will spent time in Europe with his family and became inspired by the causeways of Europe. He was involved the construction of a number of causeways between Ventura and Santa Barbara, and a survey for the Maricopa Highway, which is now Highway 33. Will was all about the spectacle of an event, and it is no wonder that he was appointed grand marshal and chairman of the July 4-5, 1913, opening parade and celebration at Ventura County Courthouse. In costume, Will led the parade on his black stallion. There was a party like no other.

While Main Street is an energetic hub for business and tourism today, it is hard to imagine that we have anything close to what Ventura residents experienced during that week of celebration. The Ventura Free Press said of the event, "Well, it is over and ended. But it will be a long time before it is forgotten." One hundred years later, and it's still being talked about it.



**William Arthur Hobson, 20, in 1885:**

Photo courtesy of Hobson/Hoffman/Haley Family Archives

The excitement actually began on July 3, when the nearly 900-man crew from the U.S.S. South Dakota docked in Ventura and joined the festivities in town. Dressed in uniform, these men added to the procession as their own band led them. On July Fourth more than 15,000 people showed up from various counties in Southern California. Santa Barbara, which offered full support, came by train and automobile, and some rode in on horses. Santa Paula came with firecrackers and a decorated fire truck, and all of Ventura County, including every city official, joined the celebration.

The festivities began with the dedication of the Ventura River Bridge, and it was “a graceful and beautiful affair,” according to the Ventura Free Press. The bridge cost more than \$75,000, forever connecting this coastland to the outside world.



**City Hall** • Photo: Ave Valencia

The streets were covered with people, fanfare, lights, automobiles, horses and various vehicles. According to the Ventura Free Press, “By the time the great parade started on schedule time, the Main Street was a seething mass of people and the sidewalks all but impassable.”

Ford automobile supplied 14 decorated cars that were driven by daughters of local residents. Julia Barr of Oxnard and dozens of little girls graced the Goddess of Liberty float. Other attendees included the Uniform Rank Knights of Pythias, Union Latin Americans, Santa Barbara’s LaMonaca’s band and beautiful girls that randomly tossed small bags of lima beans from the Mound Farmers float.



**City Hall with gates closed** • Photo: Karen Moser

Quite tragically, and perhaps ironically, Will Hobson, a man who loved going fast and living life without reservation, died in Ventura County's first deadly automobile accident shortly after the celebrated events. At least the young industrialist was able to see his efforts so perfectly displayed at the triple celebration. At the opening session of the Superior Court on July 21, 1913, Judge Robert M. Clark dedicated it to Will, making mention of his vast personal and professional contributions to Ventura County. He was a visionary that this County will never forget.

In 1910, the Daily Democrat pronounced that the Ventura County Courthouse (now the San Buenaventura City Hall) would be a "splendid new seat of government at the top of the hill commanding the grandest view." It's no wonder that this structure is one of the most photographed buildings in California.

"Ventura County has determined to build for all times . . . one of the most imposing structures in California." — Los Angeles Times editorial, 1911.

It seems makeovers were popular even back then. In 1910, Ventura County chose Albert C. Martin, the renowned Los Angeles architect to redesign Ventura's third courthouse, and it was quite a makeover. Though Martin was only 31, his prior work for the Pennsylvania Railroad Co. and Cabria Steel (later to become the U.S. Steel Corp.) gave him first-rate experience building large structures with reinforced steel. With an architectural degree from the University of Illinois, Martin was a structural expert, and his aesthetic and artistic style can be seen in our beautifully designed civic structure. Today a historic landmark, the San Buenaventura City Hall is a building for all times.



**City Hall columns • Photo: Bernie Goldstein**

As the celebration of 1913 moved from the streets to the halls of the new courthouse, which cost \$269,000 upon completion, there was a dedication ball and public concert showcasing some 3,600 tiles, halls of Italian marble, terra cotta friars' heads, enormous Doric columns and Roman arch windows, coffered ceilings and 15 lima beans bouquets that interlaced the bronze entry gates.

In 1913, Ventura County had the largest lima bean ranch in the world. It was the main agricultural harvest, producing three-fourths of the world's supply. The lima bean, a native of Peru thrives primarily in desert climates, and both Ventura and Santa Barbara counties offer the perfect growing environment for lima beans. The lima bean bouquets that are beautify displayed inside and out of our City Hall building serve as a continual reminder that the Ventura County Courthouse was "built by lima beans."

Beginning July 4, throughout the month of July, the city of Ventura will pick up where the community left off in 1913, celebrating the 100-year anniversary of our exquisite San Buenaventura City Hall building. In similar style, it will have a festival in the streets, extending along Main Street from Fir Street all the way to Ventura Avenue. The yearly Pushem-Pullem Parade is set to begin at 10 a.m. at Cemetery Memorial Park on Main Street, and will end at the Street Fair. There will be six stages set up for entertainment, and more than 200 artists, crafters and food vendors. Between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., free shuttle bus service will run from the Ventura County Government Center. An estimated 50,000 people are expected to attend the event.

One of the exciting opportunities for Ventura residents is to be a part of City Hall's Centennial time capsule. Presently, there are three of them. Time capsules generally contain all types of memorabilia like, photographs, personal items, postcards, magazines, and messages and letters that will connect the future with 2013. These sleeping museums will be opened in 2066, 2076 and 2113.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Ventura is a reflection of the dreamers of yesterday — those who saw the potential of this rich and diverse coastal city and planned accordingly.

In 1782, when Father Junipero Serra founded San Buenaventura, a name that means the "good fortune," perhaps he had some foresight naming it after the Italian St. Bonaventure.

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