

City of Chino ❖ Hall of Fame

presented on May 15, 2018 honoring

William Tilton Butterfield

William Tilton Butterfield, known as W.T. Butterfield, became a master builder, responsible for many structures in early day Chino. He and his wife Mary also operated a ranch known for its fruit and grapes, and helped build prize-winning fair exhibits for Chino. The story of his coming to California was typical of many of Chino's early pioneers.

Mr. Butterfield was born on September 7, 1853, in Randolph, Vermont. He was the next to the youngest of six siblings. After the passing of his parents in 1872, Mr. Butterfield moved to Nebraska to help his brothers on their farm before striking out on his own.

In 1880, the owner of a construction crew took notice of the hardworking young man and encouraged him to become a carpenter. On January 1, 1885, he married Mary Louisa Moore, the daughter of his employer, in Tyrone, Nebraska.

When jobs in Nebraska thinned out, it became evident he would have to leave his wife, and by then, two young sons, to find work. In 1888, Butterfield took a train to Southern California. Until he found a job, he slept in the citrus groves. Butterfield found work as a bee keeper on a fruit ranch in what is now Highland Park. He also did carpentry work, dug wells, fixed wagons, and other jobs to bring his family to California. In August, Mary Louisa arrived with their 2-year-old son, Warren, and 5-month-old baby, Harry. The family grew with the addition of eight more children: Nellie, Oliver, Will, Howard, Clarence, Florence, Albert, and Alice.

In 1904, the Butterfields acquired an 8½-acre ranch and mortgage, and moved to Chino. Mr. Butterfield's first job in Chino was as a carpentry foreman for the new Methodist Church. He then became involved in building the Chino Bank and the Baptist Church. After these jobs, he got enough carpentry work for the next few years. With his growing family, the ranch, and his busy work schedule, Mr. Butterfield always set Sunday aside as a day of rest.

The family home on a high spot on Walnut Avenue near the future Newman School was expanded and updated several times, and is still there today. By 1907, Mr. Butterfield had built 14 houses in Chino and his Big Tree Fruit Ranch was very profitable. He had acres of fruit trees and over 100 different varieties of grapes. It was during this time that their 11th child, Ruth, was born.

Besides running the ranch with his wife, Mr. Butterfield was also involved with the community and became president of the school board. He won many awards at the Los Angeles County Fair for his elaborate agricultural displays of grapes and various citrus fruits. Mary had 42 years of service on the Board of Directors at the David and Margaret Home for children in La Verne. Each year, they tithed money from the chicken proceeds to contribute to the Chino Methodist Church. Hard work and giving back to the community were the cornerstones of the Butterfield family legacy.

Mr. Butterfield was very patriotic and civic minded, and purchased war bonds as a way of supporting the war effort. Many households counted on buying his grapes for jams and jellies. He wrote poems, letters, and assembled scrap books so when he was gone his children would know how much he valued them and the City of Chino. Mr. Butterfield continued to work well into his 90s, until his death on February 19, 1947. He and Mary were married for over 62 years.