

Fallbrook's 100-year-old Ficus



100 year-old Ficus on Ammunition Rd near Albertsons, next to Carl's Jr. restaurant.

A 100-year-old tree with a history going back to the beginnings of the town of Fallbrook lives on Ammunition Rd near Albertsons, next to Carl's Jr. restaurant. This tree, a *Ficus macrophylla*, commonly known as a Moreton Bay fig, is native to the east coast of Australia and must have come to California by ship as a seedling. Other notable Moreton Bay figs of approximately the same age are found in Balboa Park, Oceanside, and Santa Barbara. Some of these trees may have been imported as an experiment to test their usefulness for timber, but became more popular for landscaping because of their majestic canopies.

Records are still being researched, but the Fallbrook tree was planted on the original homestead of James Henry Bush. In the 1880s, James Bush's farm stretched approx. from today's Fallbrook St. to Clemmens Lane between Main Ave and Alturas St. The land was later subdivided. A century ago, the tree was protected as a condition of any sale.

The Mahr family then purchased the parcel of land the tree lives on. In 1925, Albert Clemmens purchased the parcel neighboring of 13 acres bounded by Alturas Lane, Clemmens Lane and Ammunition Road for \$5 acre adjoining the Mahr's property. The tree was at the boundary of the Mahr and Clemmens properties. Albert's son, 99-year-old Marion Clemmens

tells about playing marbles in the shade of this large tree with his brothers and the Mahr boys in the mid 1920s.

In the 1950s the parking lot of Albertson's was a residential area with a trailer park and small homes. The tree was a familiar part of their neighborhood. In the 1970s the tree canopy was much larger than it is today. A very large section of the tree broke off over 10 years ago. Look around; you may be surprised to see an icon of this tree is on several community signs around Fallbrook.

The Fallbrook Historical Society is working to document the story of this amazing tree in our community. We ask anyone with stories or early photos of this tree to please share them with us.