Wilma Kauling, a long time Three Rivers resident, donated several copies of documents (i.e. newspaper articles, letters, notes, etc.) to the Three Rivers Historical Society regarding the Hengst family history. Wilma is the daughter of William and Golda Hengst. Her father was born December 23, 1891 and died in 1994. The following is a copy of an article written by Peggy O’Neil of the Three Rivers Current and published in the Sun, Herald, Echo, Current newspaper on December 11, 1991.

William Hengst of Exeter will celebrate his 100th birthday on December 23. Still handsome and alert, Mr. Hengst has lived in rural Exeter on the land his father bought in 1898, almost all his life, watching the “hog wallows” and fields of wheat and barley (50-pound sacks of flour sold for 50 cents) turn into the commercial orchards now bordering busy California 198.

His parents, Frank and Anna Hengst, came from Germany in 1888 to join the Kaweah Colony. Their first son, George, was born in the colony just as it was breaking up after the establishment of Sequoia National Park.

The parents left the colony and homesteaded on the North Fork of the Kaweah River right above Yucca Creek, and three more sons – William, Walter and Herman – were born there.

When William was 7, the family came down from the mountains and acquired a quarter section beside California 198 about three miles west of Merryman Station. William’s three sisters, Freda, Elsa and Ada were all born there on the ranch.

William and his brothers attended the Locust Grove grammar school in rural Exeter. There was no high school in those days. The four little boys spoke German and got into constant trouble at school, until their father put his foot down. “He decreed that only English would be spoken in their home thereafter, and the situation at school improved,” William recalls.

Frank Hengst planted the first olive trees along California 198 and all the boys helped in the orchard. “We came down from the mountains when I was 7,” William remembers, “and I worked with the men from the time I was 10 years old.”

Bill Hengst had time for hunting and fishing in the mountains, too. He regularly went with his uncle Alfred Hengst on his summer cattle drive, when he drove the stock up to their Mineral King summer camp.

In 1910, they crossed over to the east side of the Sierra and brought golden trout, which they planted on the west side. The trout survived, but Bill says, “Those poor fish were on a pack horse for two days.” Uncle Al was a noted conservationist and a few years ago the National Park Service designated one of the mountain peaks in Mineral King Hengst Peak in his honor. He taught William many things, including the secrets of the deep pit barbecue.

In 1913, Al Hengst had two horses pull the car all the way over to Lemoore, so that Bill could fix it for him.

By the time Bill Hengst was 23 he had a Chevrolet agency in Lemoore, but the U.S. had entered World War I, so he gave up the business, enlisted in the Signal Corps, and left for France. There his mechanical aptitude led to airplanes. Mr. Hengst finished his tour of duty testing Rolls Royce engines for the gallant pilots in the air forces.

After Bill came home from France, he returned to Lemoore just long enough to marry Golda Gilcrease on February 7, 1920 (and he still remembers the anniversary!). Golda was the daughter of a pioneer family that had come across the plains from Illinois in a covered wagon.

They were related to the Hearsts, and Golda had completed three years of college at the University of California. But, she gladly gave it all up to settle in Exeter with Bill. They bought 40 acres bordering California 198 from his father, and in 1923, he and Clarence Gowett bought a garage and machine shop in Exeter. He soon bought out his partner, however, and the years went swiftly by.


The Hengsts had a fruit stand out in front of the house by the highway, and the girls would sell fruit in the summer and thus earned their spending money.

Continued on page 3........
It seems like we just left springtime and here we are in September. There is no stopping the events taking place at the Museum this fall. Take a look at our event calendar for details.

If you haven’t taken a minute to send in your membership renewal please take that minute now because your renewal is the backbone of this society and museum.

As you can see by the photos on this page we had a great time with the Native-American Days September 14-16.

Just watching the 4th graders learning about the “Indians” is worth the time spent on this event. I think the photos will tell the whole story.

A boy from Willow Glen school asked if I had seen Jurassic Park because the trees and hillside look like the movie. The point here is that he has never seen the trees and hills before.

Every year we get the same statement, “I saw a real Indian.”

One last thought on the event. On the first day, the first group of 8 students went with me on our Heritage Trail down into the Indian Village. Before starting out I would explain to each group about what they will be seeing. Well the first little girl in the line looked up at me, tapping me on the arm and I knew she was going ask a very good question. Big blue eyes looked up at me and said, “you have white hair just like my grand-pa.”

Enjoy the photos........
Since Woodlake High School began on August 9th, I have asked a couple of students around campus what they are most looking forward to this year. Katie Pfaff of Three Rivers is most looking forward to tennis matches, band competition, and home football games in her Junior year. Kiara Benividas, a Junior from Woodlake is most looking forward to attending Formal and Prom this year. Senior Dulcebella Nieto of Woodlake is looking forward to making tons of memories and making her final year of High School her best by far. Lizbeth Meza, who is also a senior from Woodlake, is most looking forward to stepping out of her comfort zone and making her final moments as a Tiger count. Finally, I am most looking forward to cheering on Friday nights at football games, and leading all FFA meetings this year as President. All of the Students at Woodlake High School are enthusiastic about what the 2016-2017 school year has to offer.

William Hengst At 100, continued from page 1

Mr. Hengst retired in 1948 to spend time on his ranch with Golda. However, he continued repairing machinery in a little shop back of his home. “People came to me to fix things when no one else could do it,” says Mr. Hengst.

And he and Golda also traveled. They went to the Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley in 1960, and to Alaska on the Alcan Highway in 1961. In 1962, they went to Mexico City, and they flew around the world in 1962.

Mr. Hengst told about watching men logging redwood trees in Singapore, as he showed his prize Sequoia gigantea, and the two redwood trees he has planted by his home.

On the ranch, Mr. Hengst grew apples, oranges, olives, peaches, plums and grapes. In just the last five years he has developed and parented two special plums – the Golden Nectar and the October Gem.

After retirement he was much in demand as chef for the deep pit barbecue dinners put on by the Visalia Sportsmen’s Association and the Exeter Sportsmen’s Association.

In 1950, he cooked a banquet for 1,500 people with Golda’s help on the beans and cole slaw. His daughter, Wilma, proudly says that for seasoning he only used salt and pepper, which let the full flavor of the meat come through. “It was really good,” she recalls.

“He is as honest as they come,” says Mrs. Kauling. “You could always count on him to do the right thing. He couldn’t bear to overcharge anyone when he had his auto repair shop, and he didn’t believe in doing anything on borrowed money. He is a generous man who lives simply and has very definite ideas.”

What changes has Mr. Hengst noticed in his 100 years? “I’ve never seen it as cold and dry as it is now,” Mr. Hengst replies. “The water is getting less and less.” “Our well is not affected,” Mr. Hengst adds, “but others around here are, and all the new wells going in lower the water table. When we first came here there were water holes in the fields. And now there is so much smog – all the autos make a difference.”

In January of this year, at age 99, Mr. Hengst had heart surgery. The Fresno surgeon who performed the four-way bypass was reluctant to operate at first. But when he considered Mr. Hengst’s overall physical condition and the family support available, he went ahead – with obviously excellent results. When Mr. Hengst is asked for the secret of his good health and longevity, he replies: “No smoking or drinking and a lot of hard work.”

His advice for youngsters today: “Work instead of loafing around. When I was young, we did anything that came along. Our days were long – sunup to sundown, and after supper we had to take care of the horses.”

The simple, precious secrets of a long, productive and happy life.
2016 Historical Society & Museum Events

LIVING HISTORY DAY
Learn about our way of life from 1900 to 1935 with displays and demonstrations including a Model "A" Ford club.

   October 8, 10am-4pm, Saturday

BILL TWEED, RECEPTION & BOOK SIGNING
If you have known Bill Tweed, retired National Park Service Ranger and author, you know that his publications are excellent reading. Bill will be here to sign copies and talk about his newest book.

   October 9, 12n-3pm, Sunday

DYNAMIC LIVES: ORAL HISTORIES OF THREE RIVERS
Aging in the Community is having a reception to honor iconic Three Rivers people.

   October 16, 2pm-4pm, Sunday

HOLIDAY BAZAAR AT THE MEMORIAL BUILDING
The Museum will have a booth with a full line of products and books from our gift shop. We will also have all the same at the Museum at special prices through December 24th.

   November 12, 9am-4pm, Saturday

COMMUNITY CAROLING AT THE MUSEUM
Large campfire, old fashioned s'mores, lots of singing and more at this annual event. Free. Bring a non-perishable food item for the Food Pantry.

   December 3, 5pm-7pm, Saturday

HISTORICAL SOCIETY 25TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION
Join us in celebration of our 25th year. Reception and displays on our first 25 years.

   December 11, 1pm-4pm, Sunday