



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 4.2 - John Muir and Martinez

John Muir is known to many as an explorer, mountaineer, botanist, writer and pioneer of conservation. He was also a husband, father and family man. In 1880 he married Louie Strenzel. His home became her father's fruit ranch near Martinez in the Alhambra Valley.



Dr Strenzel at the Martinez ranch.
Library of Congress

Dr John Strenzel had fled his native Poland in 1831. In 1849 he settled with his family in California and introduced fruit farming to the area. Until then local farmers had concentrated on grain crops. His business became very successful. John had worried once that he *should be a bachelor and doomed to roam always far outside the family circle*. He now threw himself into work on his father-in-law's ranch.

John leased some of the land and also helped manage the business. By the 1880s, Dr Strenzel was producing pears, grapes, apples, peaches, apricots, oranges, and mulberries. John was a good businessman and worked long hard hours. He was successful at a time when the market was difficult. He became a familiar figure as he took his profits, in a laundry bag, by horse and cart to the banks in Martinez. He soon had enough money for his family To live in comfort in their lifetime

John and Louie lived on the ranch in the Dutch Colonial house, first lived in by Louie's parents. The Strenzels built a larger Victorian house on the hill in 1864. John and Louie moved there in 1890, when Dr Strenzel died.



The Muir family. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley



House 1890.
Library of Congress

Despite his success and regular trips, John began to pine for the wilderness. His health began to suffer. Louie realised that *a ranch that needs and takes the sacrifice of a noble life ought to be flung away beyond all reach and power for harm...* She urged John to delegate his work and to travel and write once more. In 1891 John's sister Margaret and her husband John Reid moved to Martinez. Both they, and later his brother David and his family, took over a part of the ranch.

At Martinez, John spent many hours walking with his two daughters, Helen and Wanda. He shared his love of nature with them and told them stories of his past expeditions. He also enjoyed the company of both old friends and family visitors.

John also spent hours in his study or 'scribble den'. Here he wrote many of the articles and books that remain with us today.



Muir with John Swett. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Further Reading

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- Rubissow, Ariel. *John Muir National Historic Site*. Tucson, Arizona; Southwest Parks and Monuments Assn, 1990.
- Martinez Historical Society. *Martinez, A California Town*. Martinez; RSI Publications Inc, 1986.

Websites

- The Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit
- John Muir's Birthplace www.jmbt.org.uk
- John Muir National Historic Site, Martinez www.nps.gov/jmu