No one disputes that Norman M. Melrose gunned down William H. Broome on the streets of Acton in the late afternoon of January 20, 1903. What did become wildly controversial was Melrose’s claim of self-defense to explain his actions. As was explored in the last issue of the Dispatch, Melrose and Broome had been engaged in a long-running feud, which began with Melrose accusing Broome of being a swindler and bunco man who sold people worthless oil stock and land as founder of the Actonoma Oil and Mineral Development Company, which he incorporated in May, 1901. The flames of the feud were further fanned by an incident in July, 1901 in which Melrose was accused of killing a dog owned by one of Broome’s family members. The Melrose-Broome feud culminated in the famous 1903 gunfight, during which witnesses stated that Melrose intentionally ran into Broome with a wheelbarrow, causing a tirade of vulgarities from Broome. Melrose ignored Broome’s epithets and silently walked down the street followed by Broome. When they reached the boundary of the Acton Hotel, Broome was alleged to have laid down his gun, take off his coat, and called out Melrose to fight “fair and square”. Melrose was reported to have reacted by drawing his revolver and shooting the retreating Broome in the back of the scalp. As Broome fell to the ground, Melrose proceeded to beat him in the head with his revolver, and then shot him three times in the torso. Broome soon died of the resulting injuries.

At least that was one side of the story: Melrose told a different tale. Melrose would claim that Broome intercepted him when he was taking his wheelbarrow home, and

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cocked his shotgun while threatening to blow his head off. After Broome laid down his shotgun, both men made a run for the gun, each grabbing an end of it, resulting in the accidental discharge of one barrel. Having regained possession of his gun, Broome attempted to shoot Melrose with the remaining barrel. Melrose claimed he responded by first firing a warning shot into the ground. Having failed to stop Broome's assault with the first shot, he then took aim and shot Broome in the scalp, after which he removed the shotgun from Broome's possession and walked away, claiming justifiable homicide.

THE CORONER'S JURY

The headline in the Los Angeles Times of January 22, 1903, stated “SHOT AND BEATEN AFTER HE DROPPED. Melrose-Broome Killing at Acton Cold-Blooded Murder; According to Coroner’s Jury---Bullet in Head and Three in the Body”. This was the initial conclusion of a coroner's jury that held court at the Acton Hotel the day after the gunfire, mostly based on eyewitness accounts of the incident. The deck appeared to be stacked against Melrose. Most of Acton's citizens were in sympathy with the deceased Broome. Many of them had lived in fear of Melrose, calling him a dictator who had created terror in the town. The inquest had to be delayed a few hours in order to hunt out “jurors from their hiding places”. On autopsy, Broome was found to have bullet wounds in his abdomen, chest and upper left arm. There were no powder marks found on the body, supporting the assertion that Melrose fired his shots from a longer range and not during any grappling for Broome's shotgun. After the gunfire, Melrose and his wife rode up to Lancaster, where he turned himself in to Constable Oliver Mitchell, claiming self-defense. He was brought back to Acton to face the coroner’s jury, where his initial behavior was described as nonchalant and indifferent, as he was confident that he would be acquitted. Melrose stoically stood by and watched as the autopsy physician slashed open the corpse of Broome to determine the path of the bullets which hit him. His nerves of steel were reported to have melted and were replaced with quivering. However, the sadistic act of Melrose shooting an unarmed Broome. Of Melrose it was reported “the unconcerned appearance of the defendant is one of the peculiarities of the case, which attracts everyone's attention”.

Melrose retained attorney Earl Rogers to defend him against the murder charges. On his first day in prison, he gave a “reception” for some twenty visitors, including four women. He was showered with fruit, flowers, and other delicacies. At that point, no charges had been filed, so he was allowed to stay separate from the other prisoners and bring in his own food from an outside restaurant. The LA Times opined “To a man like Melrose it would be a little short of hell to be herded in with hobos”. A few days later, attorney Rogers and District Attorney Fredericks fought to outmaneuver each other in obtaining a favorable venue for the preliminary examination of Melrose. Rogers wanted it held at Lancaster, stating “there is every reason why the examination should be held at Lancaster. The witnesses are all out there and that is where the shooting took place. It will save great expense to have it there”. On the other hand, Fredericks arranged for the examination to be held at the court in Los Angeles reasoning that it would save expenses as the attorneys were there, the exhibits were all there, and the defendant himself was there. There was also a great deal of haggling over which Justice would hear the case. The duty finally fell to Justice Austin in the Police Court.

THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

The preliminary examination began on February 4, 1903. A large standing-room-only crowd was said to be present, including many women and girls. Two witnesses testified before the court that day. There was Charles Swanson, the proprietor of the Acton Hotel, and an eyewitness to the murder. Also testifying was August Schulte, an Acton bee raiser, who witnessed the shooting and helped carry Broome into the hotel afterwards. On the day of the gunfire, both men had been trying to scare up some pigeons from a nearby lot onto the roof of the hotel so that Broome could shoot them with his shotgun. They repeated the testimony that they had given before the coroner's jury in Acton, stating that Melrose had shot Broome without a struggle for the shotgun. The newspaper reported that attorney Rogers “spent most of the time trying to confuse the witnesses, but did not succeed very well”.

The hearing continued the next day with more witnesses, including Mrs. Selma Swanson, proprietress of the Acton Hotel, Mr. and Mrs. Ira L. Houser, Ernest Duehren (son of John F. Duehren, owner of the Acton Saloon and first resident of Acton), and Eugene F. Nichol. They all told the same story of Melrose shooting an unarmed Broome. Of Melrose it was reported “the unconcerned appearance of the defendant is one of the peculiarities of the case, which attracts everyone's attention”.

The defense brought to the stand a local school teacher, Miss Minnie Elizabeth Boucher. She told of having sat next to Broome at the Burbank Theatre a few months prior to the

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shooting, and how Broome had talked of his troubles with Melrose, stating to her “I’ll kill that man if I meet him”. Another time, she had been standing in the street in Acton talking to Mrs. Broome and Mrs. Melrose when Mr. Broome walked up angrily holding a letter which Melrose opened by mistake. He used violent language and again stated “I’ll kill him, if I hang for it.” Four other witnesses brought up to the stand after Miss Boucher also related instances where they had met up with Broome and heard him threaten to kill Melrose. After the defense rested, Justice Austin ordered that Melrose be held without bail for trial in the Superior Court.

THE ARRAIGNMENT

Melrose was arraigned for the killing of Broome on February 12, 1903. He was reported to appear deathly pale and haggard at the time. In addition to Rogers and Luther Brown, he hired a personal friend, Congressman James McLachman from Washington, D.C., to assist in the defense. By March, Melrose had been set free on a $10,000 bond. The Los Angeles Express newspaper of March 18 reported that people who had testified against Melrose were fleeing Acton due to his high-handed actions. His lawyer branded the story “a tissue of falsehoods, absolutely without foundation in fact, and part of a conspiracy to create sentiment against his client in advance of the trial”. The defense planned to prove that the witnesses who had testified against Melrose had falsified their stories out of hatred for the man, and to further prove the truth of Melrose’s statements that the two men had been grappling for the shotgun. Jurors selected on April 6 for the trial hailed from Long Beach, Downey, Pomona, Pasadena, South Pasadena, El Monte, and Los Angeles.

THE FIRST TRIAL

The Melrose murder trial began on April 7, 1903, in the court of Judge Smith. The Los Angeles Times reported “It seems as if the whole of Acton hated either one or the other of these two bitter enemies. About the whole population seems to be in Judge Smith’s court. Those who do not effusively shake hands with Melrose, glare blackly at the back of his head as the tale unfolds”. The first witness for the prosecution was the Acton bee raiser from Germany, Mr. Schulte. He repeated his testimony from the preliminary examination. The defense created a courtroom drama with one of the lawyers lying on the floor with a mock Melrose standing over him with a gun. They asked Schulte, “If those last shots were fired as you say, why were there no powder burns on Broome’s body?” Schulte’s cheerful reply was “I guess he use smokeless powder!” The defense tried very hard to make the witnesses look like liars. The Times reported “It’s no fun to be a witness at this trial”. Private detectives had been hired by both sides to work up evidence against the other side.

The defense began their case on April 9. Attorney Rogers opened by claiming that the killing was an “outgrowth of an old feud between the Germans who settled Acton and the Americans who came in afterward. Broome and Melrose took it up bitterly”. He claimed that Melrose had been persecuted, the graves of his family at Acton desecrated, his trees cut down and his cattle poisoned. The feud was brought to a head when Melrose shot and killed a dog belonging to Broome which had bit him. He aimed to prove that Broome was killed in a hand-to-hand scuffle while admitting that the last shot was fired as Broome was already falling. He characterized the last shot as Melrose “not being thoughtful”. Eugene Nichol, a German miner was called to testify for the defense. He stated that Melrose had come to him after the killing and asked that he be a witness for the defense. However he had not heard or seen Broome use his shotgun against Melrose. Alluding to the prosecution witnesses, he said they “would not admit it if they had seen it”. The defense got Mrs. Swanson to admit that she was unfriendly with Melrose as he apparently had been the cause of her losing a saloon license at the Acton Hotel. Numerous other witnesses were brought up testifying to Broome’s multiple threats to kill Melrose. The town schoolteacher, Miss Lillian B. Plato, testified that she had witnessed through a pair of field glasses that Broome was killed during a hand-to-hand struggle with Melrose and was not trying to run away.

MELROSE TAKES THE STAND

Testimony in the murder trial ended on April 14. That day, Melrose himself took to the witness stand. He was described as an excellent witness with an instinctive appreciation of dramatic effect. Melrose and Broome had first met when Broome was a telegraph operator at Vincent. He told of the dog-shooting incident and various instances when Broome with his shotgun was attempting to kill him. He told his version of the gunfight and the struggle for Broome’s shotgun. He related “As he turned he had the shotgun in his hand. I grabbed it by the muzzle with my left hand and it went off. Then I used my gun as fast as I could. At last it missed fire. Broome yelled, ‘the damn ______ has shot me, but I will get him yet’. Then I reached over and beat him over the head with my revolver with all my force. I did not hit him after he fell... I could not have, because my gun was jammed and would not shoot.” Asked by the prosecution how he was feeling at the time, Melrose replied “I was feeling that self-preservation is the first law of nature.”

After closing arguments, the jury went into deliberation. After 10 hours the jury reported that they were not able to agree. The judge ordered them back to their room to try to reach a verdict. At the end of the evening the vote stood at 7-8 for
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acquittal and 4-5 for conviction. They were ordered locked up for the night and went to bed stating that it would be absolutely impossible for them to come to an agreement. It was a hung jury.

THE SECOND TRIAL

After the hung jury, the prosecution decided to retry the case. By June, the town of Acton was split between friends of Broome who claimed that Melrose had “reduced the whole countryside about Acton to a frazzle of nervous terror”, and friends of Melrose who claimed that “base emissaries of the Broome faction are abroad buying up testimony with whiskey.” Melrose’s enemies accused him of parading around the terrified streets of Acton with a Winchester rifle and revolver. He was said to have an evil glitter in his eye and be drinking “gunpowder tea”. His supporters told tales of “detectives…haunting the precincts of Acton, seeking to lead innocent citizens to do no one seems to know just what, something that takes large and wicked quaffs of whiskey to do.” Some of the townspeople went before Judge Smith asking him to revoke Melrose’s bail. He rejected the request, to the outrage of the District Attorney.

The second trial began on July 7 with jury selection. Jurors came from Norwalk, Pomona, La Canada, Irwindale, South Pasadena, Compton, Azusa, and Los Angeles. After 10 days of many of the same witnesses and much of the same testimony as the first trial, the jury deliberated and was able to come up with a verdict which they announced on July 1: “People versus Norman Melrose. We, the jury in the above entitled action, find the defendant not guilty.” Upon hearing the verdict, Melrose kissed his tearful wife and shook hands with friends gathered around him. Judge Smith discharged him from custody and he and his wife walked over to the jury box.

The Los Angeles Times concluded “Melrose and Mrs. Melrose were too much overjoyed to speak, and with the picture of the Acton killer and wife, shaking hands with the twelve men who held the life of Melrose in their hands for two weeks, the most famous murder trial in the history of the county came to an end yesterday evening at 6:35 o’clock.”

HAPPENINGS AT THE JUNCTION

The annual tour led by Frank and Carol Rock to the St. Francis Dam site on the 85th anniversary of the dam disaster was a great success, with 80 people piling on to two buses to see the remains of the second worst disaster in the history of California. We would like to thank the Santa Clarita Signal for their help in publicizing the dam tour in the newspaper with a well-written front page article. And thanks to the “Dam Man” himself for another job well done!

Alan Pollack

William S Hart . . . Junior!
by Rachel Barnes

Last issue it was Mary Ellen Hart. This month, let us continue our journey through the relatives of our favorite cowboy movie star by taking a closer look at his son.

A son? Yes, many may not be aware that our favorite cowboy movie star did have one son, William S. Hart, Jr.

Junior was born on September 6, 1922, in Santa Monica, California. His mother, Winifred Westover, was an actress that Bill Hart, Sr. met on the set of his 1919 flick, John Petticoats. The two became friends, and stayed in touch when Winifred went overseas to work on another film later that year. When she returned to the States in late 1921, the two were married. Sadly, the union was not to last. After a short 6 months, Winifred and Hart were separated, and when Junior was born 4 months later, Winifred was awarded sole custody of her son. Therefore, Junior grew up in Santa Monica, but he did spend time with his dad on the Horseshoe Ranch.

In the early 1940s, when Bill, Sr.’s health started to deteriorate, Junior sued and was appointed co-guardian of his father’s person. And when Hart passed away in 1946, Junior contested his will, claiming that Hart’s associates had convinced him to exclude his son (Hart wrote that he had established a $100,000 trust fund for Junior, and therefore felt he had “amply provided for him during my lifetime.”). The lawsuit dragged on for several years before the courts ruled in favor of Los Angeles County.

Before the lengthy litigation over Hart’s will, Junior attended UCLA and earned both a bachelor’s and master’s degree, the latter in environmental planning. During World War II, he worked for the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor of the CIA) as a cryptographer. In 1945, he returned to California and started his own real estate business. On the side, he taught finance, business, and economics classes at UCLA, USC, and Santa Monica College.

And it was in one of these classes he taught at SMC that Junior met Rosalind, the woman who would become his wife. Together the couple would have 3 daughters, and in 1989, when Junior finally retired from his business and teaching, the entire family moved from Southern California to Washington State. On their way north, they stopped by the Hart Mansion and took a tour, where Junior charmed the staff with childhood stories of hiding in the dumbwaiter and playing with the telescope in the observation tower.

The family settled on Bainbridge Island, and on May 13, 2004, the 81-year-old William S. Hart, Jr. passed away at a Seattle

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Our local area is rich in cinema history. One of the best places to explore local cinema history is the Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark Museum near Piru. This is where the D.W. Griffith film *Ramona*, starring Mary Pickford, was filmed in 1910. Imagine visiting a movie set that has survived 103 years, even escaping the ravages of the St. Francis dam disaster! A re-mastered version of the 17 minute silent film is shown as part of the regular museum tours. Visitors wishing a more in-depth movie history experience can arrange a special tour. Perhaps a little more historical background will pique your interest.

The continued popularity of Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel, *Ramona*, ensured that it would remain in print and become the subject matter of numerous live theatre productions. The next logical step was *Ramona*, the movie, specifically the 1910 Biograph Company production *Ramona: A Story of the White Man’s Injustice to the Indian*. Helen Hunt Jackson had written the romantic novel *Ramona* after her statistical tome, *A Century of Dishonor*, failed to rally the American public to her cause of fighting the mistreatment of the Native American people. After a research trip through Southern California investigating the situation of the Mission Indians, she decided to write a story about a beautiful Mexican Señorita, Ramona, raised on a Californio rancho who falls in love with a handsome Indian, Alessandro. It was the quintessential story of Romeo and Juliet, set in the period of social and racial conflict just before California became a state. It captured the imagination of the American public and caused the first tourist boom to California, promoted by the relatively new transcontinental railroads. Ms Jackson died without revealing the true location of the fictitious Moreno rancho. However, by 1910 Rancho Camulos was acknowledged by some writers of the day as the true “Home of Ramona”. Rancho Camulos was what remained of the 48,000 acre, 1839 Mexican land grant to Antonio del Valle that once included all of Santa Clarita. In 1910, the rancho was still occupied by his descendents and was then, as now, considered one of the best remaining examples of the Rancho period. Perhaps it was the professional friendship between former actor turned director D.W. Griffith and Antonio’s great-granddaughter, stage actress Lucretia del Valle, or perhaps the influence of a family friend, historic preservationist Charles Lummis, that gained access to the family compound, but the rest is movie history.

The Biograph entourage was completing their first winter of filming in California. They traveled by train to Piru and stayed at the Round Rock Hotel. They reportedly filmed all of the exterior shots there from March 31 through April 2, 1910. The movie had many firsts: It was the first to list the shooting location in its credits, and it was the first to cite the book on which it was based. (The Biograph Company paid the book’s publisher, Little, Brown, and Co. $100 for the rights to the film.) Cameraman G.W. Bitzer used some innovative techniques, such as simultaneous foreground and background action, and panoramic views of the countryside. It was the most expensive movie produced up until that time, and was quite an accomplishment, considering the technical constraints of the time, condensing a 350-page novel to a one-reel movie. There would be three subsequent Ramona films: Donald Crisp’s 1916 version starring Adda Gleason, Edwin Carewe’s 1928 adaptation starring Dolores del Rio, and Henry King’s 1936 rendition starring Loretta Young, but only one was filmed at the true “Home of Ramona”. Check [www.ranchocamulos.org](http://www.ranchocamulos.org) for museum hours, and come experience Ramona - The Movie.
Remembering My Neighbor, Leonard Slye
by John Boston

“My heroes have always been cowboys ...”
- from the album Electric Horseman, by Willie Nelson

When I was small, Leonard Slye made me blush. I was sitting at the counter with my mom in a little coffee shop, on Topanga near the original Scared O’ Bears Ranch in Chatsworth. Leonard was way at the other end of the restaurant, having breakfast alone. I think my eyebrows must have stuck near my hairline because I just kept staring at Leonard.

It’s a little blurry, but I’m putting it together this was probably 1957, summer. Instead of his regular cowboy hat, he was wearing a baseball cap and the patented 1950’s stiff jeans with the cuffs rolled way up - a style, I confess, I’ve stolen from my good neighbor Leonard.

I remember to this day what I was eating - tuna on toasted wheat, vanilla Coca-Cola. Actually, I wasn’t eating. My 7-year-old stomach was doing backflips.

“Why don’t you just walk up to him and say ‘hi,’” my mother suggested. Why don’t I just bicycle the 32 miles to the Los Angeles Zoo and walk into the lion cage, find the 600-pound grumpy alpha dominant male and head-butt him? Saying a simple “hey” to Leonard would take about as much courage.

I remember his voice with that Midwestern lilt and that when he sat down at the counter stool, he threw a leg over and just sort of settled in like it was a saddle. I remember he sat tall and was the politest of men with an easy smile and laugh. My child’s mind wondered if he left his guns in his truck, but, even at 7, I figured their absence must have had something to do with The Code of The West, the passage that reads: “Thou Shalt Not Wear Pearl-Handled Revolvers In The Corner Coffee Shop So As Not To Startle The School Marms and Small Fries.”

He wolfed down a cup of coffee and some sort of beige grown-up cowboy food. I remember being startled that Leonard actually ate. My 7-year-old stomach was doing backflips.

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He wolfed down a cup of coffee and some sort of beige grown-up cowboy food. I remember being startled that Leonard actually ate. I remember panicking that he would finish his meal before me, pay his check and be long gone in his truck before I worked up the gumption to approach him.

He stood, slapped down some money and bid farewell to the waitress. Stupid kid style, I just blurted out: “Uhhhh, hey ...!” I wanted to say, “Hi!” followed by the fellow’s name. Instead, I just stammered and turned beet red.

I remember Leonard smiled graciously at my embarrassment. He walked over and I was so dizzy I just about threw up. He shook my hand. It was rough and hard, strong I imagine from all that roping and reining. He patted me on the head with sincere fondness.

To this day, I still learn from him. Leonard Slye was a male role model for me, along with James Garner of “Maverick” and my dad, Walt Cieplik. We’re 13 years into a new century. It feels like all those things Leonard personified — good manners, a straight spine, responsibility, dependability, courage, to search for the Right Thing, good humor, the ability to sing a simple song without being too self-conscious, and, above all, the ability to be a friend — these qualities, they seem to be silly to many. To some, to be a man of values in these politically correct climes is a sin to be denigrated.

Leonard was a bona fide movie star, having made more than 100 films and a hit TV series in the 1950’s. The man could actually yodel and make it seem cool. But for all his fame and fortune, I remember that man for taking a minute from his busy life just to make eye contact with me in a Chatsworth coffee shop.

I bumped into him, again almost 20 years ago now. For some oddball reason, I was in the desert, in Apple Valley, on some knight’s errand. Leonard had a business out there, a museum. All those years, I had never visited. In one of those strange cosmic ooches, I pulled a U, parked and walked in. I had no idea whatsoever that he’d be there.

He was in his 80’s then, still a handsome rascal with those piercing, kind Indian eyes. His handshake was firm and honest and, I noted sadly, with just a touch of frailty. I told him how he had patted me on the head 40 years earlier in our hometown, that we had lived just down the road from him and how much that had meant in my life. The guy was so in the moment, he asked me how my life had faired, from 5 to nearly 50 then. What could I say? Some pets and wives had come and gone.

We talked briefly about the peace one finds atop a horse. Well, a good one. He could have patted me on the head and I wouldn’t have protested.

The guy who lived down the road, Leonard Slye, died back in 1998, two days after the 4th of July. He lived an amazing life - rich, triumphant and heart breaking. Interestingly, famous as a cowboy, he was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. He worked in a shoe factory. Picked fruit. Drove a truck. Sang in a band and yodeled. He ended up seeing a palomino being used in the Errol Flynn “Robin Hood” movie shot out here in Newhall, bought the horse and called him Trigger. He became one of the top movie stars on the planet. The world called him Roy Rogers.

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John Boston

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That chance meeting, so long ago now - for some odd reason, it just set the world right with me. It wasn’t so much the movie Roy Rogers, rather, the man, who reminded me of something. Here I am, sneaking up on middle age. There’s much to do. And this is America. I still have time to be that man I am supposed to be.

(John Boston is a writer, living in Castaic.)

William Hart, Jr.

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hospital. Interestingly enough, he was the same age as his dad when he died in 1946. Junior is buried in the Pierce Brothers Westwood Memorial Park in Westwood, California, not too far from famous starlet, Marilyn Monroe.

So be sure to come on by and visit the Hart Mansion. See the clown juicer Junior gave to his dad one year as a present, or giant seashells Junior said he found on a visit to Malibu with his dad that now sit on the bathtub in an upstairs bathroom. For while Junior never lived in the mansion with his dad, he was, and is, very much a part of it.

Quester News
by Roberta Harris

During the February and March Sunday Open house events, approximately one hundred people toured Quester Court. Many of these were families with children involved in historical school projects. Docents for these days were Oak of the Golden Dream members Sue Yurosek, Judy Holland, and Roberta Harris.

Oak of the Golden Dream has purchased six antique lampposts, which the Historical Society will install (in working order) along the road leading to Quester Court. Hopefully this will discourage some of the vandalism that has recently occurred.

April and May are the months when hundreds of school children tour Heritage Junction to augment their study of California History. Docents from all three Quester chapters participate in giving tours of the Kingsbury and Edison Houses.

Thanks to our generous volunteers during March and April:

Weekend Docents:
Frank Adella
Phyllis Berman
Wendy Beynon
Laurie Cartwright
Linda Casebolt
Sioux Coghlan
Evon Decker
Bob Feder
Sarah Floyd
Francesca Gastil

Catherine Hartnek
Harold Hicks
Anna Kroll
Theresa Marg
Barbara Martinelli
RuthAnne Murthy
Alan Pollack
Gerry Sokolowicz
Konrad Summers
Gordon Uppman

Interested in becoming a docent? Visit our website at www.scvhs.org

Those who open and close for the docents:
Linda Casebolt
Duane Harte

Alan Pollack
Scott Sivley

Weekend Questers:
Helen Barlow
Roberta Harris
Judy Holland

June Myers
Dee Roche
Sue Yurosek

School Tour Docents
Laurie Cartwright
Evon Decker
Bob Feder

Harold Hicks
T. J. Kawashima
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Cathy Altuvilla
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T. J. Kawashima
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Ed Marg, Sr
Gerry Sokolowicz

Glen Terry

See www.questers1944.org

* Don’t know who the Questers are?
The End of the Crown Valley Feud
by Jerry Reynolds
See Page 1