



# The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 43, Issue 2

March - April 2017

## Calendar

### Saturday, March 11

St Francis Dam site lecture and bus tour; Lecture 11:00 AM, tour 12:00 PM, Saugus Station; \$35 per person; see page 7

### Monday, March 27

Board of Directors Meeting 6:30 PM Saugus Station

### Monday, April 3

Deadline for the May-June *Dispatch*

### Friday, April 21

Jon Chandler concert and lunch at Rancho Camulos, see page 6

### Sunday, April 23

Historical Bus Tour 9:00 AM, Saugus Station; see page 7

### Monday, April 24

Jon Chandler concert and lunch 11:00 AM, Rancho Camulos Museum; See page 6

### OutWest Concert Series at The Repertory East, 24266 Main St in Newhall. 8:00 PM

Friday, March 24: An evening with Walden Dahl. \$20 for SCVHS members

Wednesday, April 19: An Evening with Mary Kaye and Joe Herrington. \$25 for SCVHS members (part of the Cowboy Festival)

Check [www.scvhistory.org](http://www.scvhistory.org) for other upcoming events.



Articles and inquiries regarding *The Dispatch* may be made to 661 254-1275

To arrange for filming at Heritage Junction, contact Cathy Martin at 661 645-0107

## President's Message

by Alan Pollack



He was a con man who really wasn't...but didn't know it. Milfred Yant was born in 1898 in Ohio and served as a seaman in the Navy in 1917 during World War I.

A Time Magazine article in 1949 described him as "a man with a remarkable air of respectability; it is accentuated by his pudgy figure, his middle-aged stoop, his brownish hair and open countenance." By 1935, Yant had drifted to Los Angeles and took up a vocation of selling real estate parcels in Placerita Canyon. But this was no ordinary real estate agent. Yant was a con man, or at least he thought he was.

Yant purchased some land in the hills above Placerita Canyon for a total of \$1900. On

these hills were some broken-down oil derricks. At the time, there was no evidence of any significant oil reserves in the area. As far as Yant was concerned this barren land was essentially worthless, but he had a scheme in mind. Using the oil derricks as his bait, he built a clubhouse on leased land in the canyon bottom and offered free bus rides and lunch to senior citizens in Los Angeles to come out and look at his land. He convinced his victims that he owned the land in the canyon and that there was an ocean of oil underneath.

### YANT'S SCHEME

So the scheme went like this; Yant would sell small parcels of the land, as little as one hundredth of an acre to the seniors. He then hired an "agent" who sought out the buyers, misrepresented himself as being

*Continued on Page 2*

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## President's Message

*Continued from page 1*

an employee of a major oil company, and offered them \$5000 for an acre of land. Thinking they had a great deal on their hands, the duped buyers rushed in to buy even more land. Unfortunately, rather than purchasing their land, the "agent" disappeared, never to be seen again. Eventually the buyers figured out that they had been swindled into buying worthless real estate. In his first year, Yant walked away with a sum of \$242,000.

Like many a schemer, Yant eventually ran out of luck. In 1938, he was arrested, charged with grand theft, and thrown in jail. Yant and his co-conspirators Robert A. Randall, Robert E. Tabor, Earl A. Libby, Aubrey Pereira, Jack Freeman, H. Martin, and William Burns were indicted. Yant was found guilty on one count of conspiracy to violate the Corporate Securities Act and to commit grand theft, guilty on the nine counts of the indictment charging violations of the Corporate Securities Act, and not guilty as to the counts charging grand theft.

### YANT'S APPEAL

Yant filed an appeal to the Second Appellate District, Division One, on June 3, 1938. Court records detailed the crimes committed by Yant's gang of conspirators: "On April 27, 1935, the appellant entered into a ninety-day sublease agreement with the Nile Oil Company, Ltd., a corporation, covering certain oil lands near Newhall, California, on which there were four wells. On April 30, 1935, the appellant Yant and his codefendants Earl A. Libby and Aubrey Pereira organized a corporation under the laws of California, the purpose of which, among other things, was to engage in the oil, petroleum, mineral and gas business under the corporate name of Yant Petroleum Corporation, and filed articles of incorporation with the Secretary of State on May 1, 1935. The corporation commissioner issued a permit to the corporation to sell not to exceed 1,000 shares of its stock for cash to its officers, appellant Yant, and codefendants Libby and Pereira, who were respectively president, secretary-treasurer, and vice-president. There is no evidence that authority was given to sell to the public or that any sales of stock were made to the public. It further appears that appellant Yant entered into an option to purchase certain real properties from Thomas F. Frew, Jr., and wife on June 15, 1935, covering approximately 300 acres of land near Newhall at the

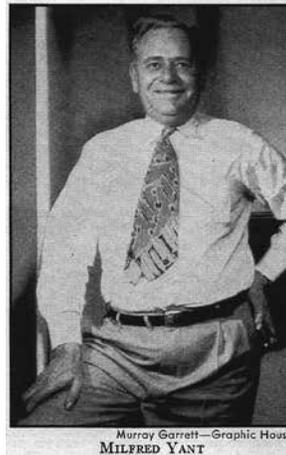
stipulated price of \$50 per acre, and on February 15, 1936, appellant entered into an option to purchase an additional small tract of land near Newhall from Thomas F. Frew, Jr., and Walter Park, at the agreed price of \$1,000 for each and every 1/12th acre."

### YANT'S VICTIMS

The Court used the story of one victim to represent the multiple victims of the swindle. According to the records, on December 13, 1935, Dr. H. B. Bryson, who was 79 years of age, met the defendants Martin and Pereira, who took him and a Mrs. Emma K. Lemley out to the property at Newhall, where he was introduced by defendant Martin to Yant. Yant told the doctor that he owned 417 acres of the land, and was selling his property at \$1950 per acre, but that he would sell any part of an acre in small fractions pro rata. He further claimed that the four oil wells on the property were currently producing. Dr. Bryson agreed to purchase one acre. He was advised of the oil possibilities of the land and was requested to execute a community oil and gas lease to the Yant Petroleum Company. On February 10, 1936, Dr. Bryson purchased another one-half acre of land. Yant stated that "he had a very choice half-acre very close to the producing wells and the well he was then drilling, and pointed out the location of this very choice half-acre". On July 18, 1936, Dr. Bryson purchased an additional half-acre from Yant, adjoining the previously-purchased half-acre.

Shortly after purchasing the land, Bryson was approached by the defendant Burns (who was indicted but never apprehended). Burns stated to Bryson that "he represented the Consolidated Oil Royalties Company of Oklahoma, and was authorized by his company to purchase thirty acres of the Yant Petroleum Corporation's holdings at \$5,000 per acre; and that Burns said he obtained Dr. Bryson's name from a former employee of Yant Petroleum Corporation.

Following this conversation wherein Dr. Bryson told Yant and Libby of his conversation with Burns, the doctor purchased an additional three acres from [Yant], giving to the latter in payment for this acreage certain oil bonds aggregating \$5,000, and a promissory note in the sum of \$1950. Following the receipt of a deed to this last-named property, executed by Yant, the doctor in turn gave an oil and gas lease on the land to Yant Petroleum Corporation. It might here be noted that Burns never again appeared."



Murray Garrett—Graphic House  
MILFRED YANT

*Continued on Page 3*

## President's Message

*Continued from page 2*

Yant later sent a letter to all of his purchasers that he was no longer selling the property as a well had "blown in" and the property was too valuable to sell to anyone. The oil and gas leases executed by Dr. Bryson and others provided for monthly rentals to be paid by Yant Petroleum to the landowners of up to \$16.20 per acre in addition to monthly payments of a specified fraction of the net proceeds of the sale of oil by Yant's company. These rental payments from Yant ceased after September, 1936. The Court concluded that Yant and his codefendants never intended for the purchasers of the land to receive any returns from their money.

Yant lost his appeal. He spent the next two years in prison at San Quentin. When released from prison, he helped swindle an old lady out of her money and was sent back to prison for violation of his parole. After being released from his second prison stint, Yant landed a job in Hawaii, then returned to California in 1944. For the next few years, he settled down and operated an electrical appliance store in Hollister, California.

### YANT'S COMEBACK

Here Yant's story took an ironic twist. Ever the con man, in 1949 Yant convinced a customer, a wealthy Spanish cattleman, to finance a well to be dug on his property in Placerita Canyon. Ramon Samovia handed over \$53,000 for the project, and the Samovia-Yant Oil Company was formed. Expecting to swindle Samovia out of his money, Yant dug a well as he had promised, but he was in for a big surprise. He actually hit a gusher, producing 2000 barrels per day. He sank four more wells. They all produced.

Yant's discovery set off a wild oil boom in the hills of Placerita. Many of Yant's previous victims and other oil speculators rushed to Placerita Canyon to get their share of the bounty. They all got rich, including the old con man Yant. The California Superior Court ended up reversing a law limiting one oil well per acre, allowing a multitude of oil derricks to sprout on Yant's old subdivisions. So wild were the oil claims, that Yant's property became known as "Confusion Hill".

Milfred Yant certainly got the last laugh. He felt vindicated by his oil strike and told Time Magazine, "Some people think I'm a scoundrel and some think I'm a wonderful guy — depending on whether they made or didn't make money out here. But do you know what? I don't give a damn. I'm gonna eat for the rest of my life, I'll tell you that."

## Thanks to those who volunteered since the last issue of the *Dispatch*:

### Weekend Docents:

Sioux Coghlan	Alan Pollack
Evan Decker	Jeff Prange
Anna Kroll	Anna Schindler
Barbara Martinelli	Gordon Uppman
RuthAnne Murthy	

Interested in becoming a docent? Visit our website at [www.scvhs.org](http://www.scvhs.org)

### Those who open and close for the docents:

Evan Decker	RuthAnne Murthy
Barbara Martinelli	Alan Pollack

### First-Sunday Questers\*

Ann and Fritz Grayson	Bill and Libby Hinze
Cynthia Harris	Jenewyn Van Wie

### Grounds:

Mike Jarel	Cathy Martin
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\*Don't know who the Questers are? See [www.questers1944.org](http://www.questers1944.org)

## Ralphs Community Contribution Program by Cathy Martin

We have a simple way to earn funds for the SCV Historical Society. It doesn't cost you anything, all you have to do is shop at Ralphs' supermarket and use your club card at checkout. Ralphs does the rest for us. For every sale over \$25.00, the SCV Historical Society will get back 4% of your purchase.

Instructions are simple: Go to the [ralphs.com](http://ralphs.com) website, click on Community, then click on Ralph Community Contribution Program. Next click on Enroll Now and follow the directions. Our non-profit organization number (NPO) is 92017.

For those of you without access to the Web, please call Ralphs at (800) 443-4438. Have your club card number handy.

You can have your friends sign up too; they don't have to be members of the SCV Historical Society. The more people we get to sign up the larger the donation.

Thank you

## Those Halcyon Newhall Nights of Poker

by John Boston

*"I felt sorry for myself because I had no hands, until I met a man who had no chips."*

— Kent G. Anderson

When I was in my 20s and 30s, I was in a regular Monday night poker game with my closest friends. For years, at ranch bunk houses and yuppie rec rooms, the game went on, through deaths and divorces of pets and spouses, unemployment and childbirth.

"I can't ever imagine us *not* doing this." One of us said that. I can't remember whom. It doesn't matter.

When I'm home, channel surfing late at night, I'll sometimes stop on one of those many world champion poker tournaments on the fringe cable channels. It can't be the same game. Humorless men, many of them in sunglasses, sit stone-faced for days at a time. Most of these idiots would have been bounced from our game. I mean, picked up by the seat of their pants and thrown out of the bunkhouse. We always felt poker was supposed to be fun, not grueling.

I grew up in Newhall, long before Valencia, before a single traffic light. I suppose if I were to list the top thing I missed from my youth, it wouldn't be invulnerability or athleticism. It would be the complete comfort of abandonment and laughter among friends.

We were all decent players with different styles. A tsunami night for someone would be losing 60 bucks. Of course, back then, that's half the rent or four months' worth of electric bills. But over the long haul, it evened out.

There would be times when it took 45 minutes to play one hand. One lousy hand. Gambling could be interrupted for singing. Yes, singing. Half of us were musicians. Every once in a while, someone would start somberly singing the oddest song for a poker table, "Bali Hai" comes to mind. Soon, all of us were harmonizing. Odd thing, everyone at the table was straight.

We'd freeze, cards in hand, as my friend Curtis would borrow someone's wire rim glasses and do 10 minutes imitating Lyndon Baines Johnson. We'd try playing a hand with poker chips squinched in our eyes.

"I'm betting blind," someone would say. You don't even see that on Celebrity Poker Showdown.

There were five regulars. Me, Curtis Stone, his dopey kid brother Jon Stone, Becker (no first or last name; just, "Becker...") and Mike "That ;#\*%€!!" Porter. Mike was the cheapest man on the planet. If he won early, he wouldn't play anymore. Getting sworn at, struck, threatened, food thrown at him, Mike could sit on his chips for eight hours, sandbagging.

I still have an unanswered question: How can five grown-up men who held down jobs, plus any semi-regular or rookie marks they brought to the table, start a poker game at 10:00 o'clock on a weeknight that would run until long after the next dawn? We were young. We had stamina.

Today, I cannot remotely fathom sitting in a little unventilated bunkhouse with a wood-burning stove and as many as eight men smoking. Cigarettes. Big, indecent cigars. Pipes. Some of us had beer. Once, we had moonshine. I sometimes brought a thermos of hot tea. Today, every pore of my body cries at the thought of even walking through a room like that, let alone sitting in liquid smoke for 10 hours.

I remember Curtis and I were at the old Sand Canyon Safeway the next evening. We bumped into Jonathan's wife, Kathy. She playfully scolded us that it was okay, worthless artists we were, to stay up all night and cavort. But HER husband had an actual job and had to be at Capitol Records at the ungodly hour of 11:00 AM.

Without so much as a conspiratorial look, Curtis and I laid the trap. "Gosh," I said. "We're sorry, Kath. Jonathan left a little after midnight last night."

"Yeah," said Curtis. "We'll make sure he gets home next week at a decent hour."

Mrs. Jonathan Stone looked like a ghost had stepped on her heart. Her eyes narrowed. "Jonathan got home at 9:30 this morning..." she said.

With pretend fluster, we looked at one another and stammered. "I don't know," I said. "I wasn't really paying attention to the time. He could have left, uh, later..."

His brother fumbled: "I didn't even look, but I think he had too much to drink, and I'll bet he just fell asleep on the sofa in the big house. Yeah. That's probably it."

"Yeah. I'll bet that's what happened.

*Continued on Page 5*

## John Boston Article

*Continued from page 4*

We joined Mrs. Stone in silence for an uncomfortable (for her) long moment.

“Well. I got a deadline!” I said, slapping my thigh.

“Yeah I think I got hit the studio when I get back,” said Curtis. We waved and beat a hasty retreat.

This was before cell phones. We hightailed it back to the old Rolling Stone Ranch to wait for the call from Jonathan. There were no hellos, just 10 minutes of ribald suggestions on self-procreation from Jon.

“SHE’S GOING TO DIVORCE ME YOU ;#\*%! #>± SO-&SO’s!!!” Only he didn’t say, “So-&-So’s...” Then the three of us laughed.

Last I looked, Jonny Stone’s still married.

It really wasn’t about the chips or the cards, although they helped add a dimension of ongoing drama. We played like no other group. Sometimes, when one of the more gullible (Becker, Jonathan) would leave the room, we’d salt the deck. When they came back, their cards were waiting and all of us would pretend to be involved in some large, amiable conversation. They’d sit, steal a quick glance and see they had four kings or a low flush in a split game. They’d pretend to enter the discussion and pretend to laugh. The rest of us would just keep talking. The cue was when the mark a half-hour later said something like, “Hey. Let’s play poker!” Then we’d all look at our cards and fold.

We’d “steal” chips (usually from Becker or Jonathan). A few here and there. They’d be having a great night and a couple hours later, look at their stack. “I’ve been winning all night and how come I’m behind!?”

We’d give them back the money, at some point. It might even be a month later.

Once, we dealt someone (Becker) the same hand five times in a row. He never noticed.

You had to pay attention.

And that darn Becker. We would have a yearly tournament and Bob, worst player of the bunch, won it one year. He bought a pair of expensive cowboy boots and makes it a point to dust them off in front of us to this day. The point wasn’t to gather chips or win. The point was to get a rise out of your pals.

Before a game once at my house, Curtis and I made a snack run. I’m standing in line at Placerita Liquor and Curtis plops down a six-pack on the counter. Straight as can be, he asks: “Do you have a refrigerator?”

It’s just so discombobulating on so many levels. Friends moved away, careers raised their ugly heads. The surgeon general warned us to not even be in the same state as someone who smoked.

We all used to laugh so much on Monday nights, some of us would cry and our faces literally hurt. Exhausted the next day, I’d be at my desk at work, smiling. I’m still smiling now.

That’s poker.

*(With more than 10,000 essays and opinion pieces, SCV author John Boston is America’s most prolific humor writer. Weekly, he pens The Time Ranger & SCV History for the SCVBeacon.com. Every two weeks, he writes the SCV History for your SCV Gazette. Don’t forget to check out his national humor, entertainment & swashbuckling commentary website, [THEjohnboston.com](http://THEjohnboston.com). You’ll be smiling for a week...) © 2017 by John Boston*

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## Smithsonian Selects Camulos Arifacts

### by Maria Christopher

A little bit of the history of the Santa Clara River Valley is heading to Washington, D.C. Three artifacts from the Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark have been selected by the Smithsonian Institution to become part of a new exhibit. The exhibit, "Many Voices, One Nation", is scheduled to open at the National Museum of American History this June.

According to Rancho Camulos Museum Director, Dr. Susan Falck, these items were chosen from the museum's collection: A Tataviam mortar and pestle, a chapel altar ornament, and an outdoor cross from the chapel garden. The first is related to the Kamulus Native American period, while the other two are related to the Rancho Camulos del Valle period.

Rancho Camulos, which was dedicated as a National Historic Landmark in 2000, is what remains of the original 1839 Mexican land that included most of what is now Santa Clarita. The land grant of the 48,000 acre Rancho San Francisco, part of the San Fernando Mission lands, was given to Antonio del Valle in return for his services to the Mexican government that included the secularization of the San Fernando Mission. His son, Ignacio del Valle, inherited the approximately 1,800 acre westernmost portion of that property, and he called it Rancho Camulos, after the Tataviam Indian village, Kamulus, at that location. The del Valle family held on to the property until 1924, when it was sold to the Rubel family, who still own and operate that working ranch today. Today, visitors to the nonprofit Rancho Camulos Museum can still see the del Valle 1852 adobe home, the 1920 adobe ranch manager's home and office, the 1867 winery, and the 1867 chapel.

It was Professor Marjorie Brown-Coronel of California State University, Fullerton, who first led the Smithsonian researchers to this hidden gem, a vestige of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Californio rancho life. The professor had visited Camulos several times while doing research for her work, "Four Generations of del Valle Women". Museum Director Falck then worked with the Smithsonian research team to identify artifacts suitable for the upcoming exhibit.

The stone mortar and pestle date back to the time when Kamulus was a small Tataviam village situated at the

confluence of the Santa Clara River and the Piru creek. Many Tataviam and Chumash remained and worked on the ranch, and some of their descendants still live in the Piru area.

The other two artifacts are from the del Valle Period and are related to their Roman Catholic heritage and the Camulos chapel that was built and consecrated as a Catholic church in 1867. The chapel was used for daily family prayers, as well as for traditional liturgical services conducted by visiting priests from Ventura and San Fernando.

The altar ornament commemorates the "Sacred Heart of Jesus", a focus of religious devotion of the Californios who had been influenced by first the Jesuits, and then the Franciscan missionaries. The red glass and ornate metal design was part of the chapel's altar display.



*Chapel Ornament*

A replica of the memorial cross can still be seen next to the chapel in the Camulos gardens today. The original cross that will be included in the Smithsonian exhibit is a hand carved and inscribed wooden cross about six feet high and is painted white.

Everyone at Rancho Camulos Museum is very excited about this honor, according to Board Member, Leon Worden. The museum is looking forward to sharing our local history with this broader audience, and we hope it will bring visitors to Rancho Camulos, where the history, myth, and romance of old California still linger.

Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark is located on Highway 126, 10 miles west of I-5 at its Newhall Ranch Road Exit, and about 1 mile east of Piru. The museum, which is on private property, is open to the public only for special events and by docent-led guided tours. Tours are held Sundays at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00 PM. Check first to confirm they are not closed due to weather or private events. Information and details about the museum can be found at [www.ranhocamulos.org](http://www.ranhocamulos.org). Find out about other things to do while visiting the Heritage Valley, the historic Highway 126 corridor, at [www.heritagevalley.net](http://www.heritagevalley.net).

There will be a Jon Chandler concert and lunch at the Rancho Camulos Museum on Friday, April 21. \$40 admission includes a Tour, Vaquero Buffet lunch, and the concert. Contact (805) 521-5201.

## St Francis Dam Site Lecture and Tour

On the 89<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dam disaster, the annual St. Francis Dam lecture and bus tour will be held on Saturday, March 11, 2017. The tour will begin with a presentation on the history of the St. Francis Dam event at 11:00 AM in the freight room of the Saugus Train Station in Heritage Junction. At noon, ticketed passengers will board a motor coach for a trip up to the dam site in San Francisquito Canyon, and a hike to the dam ruins.

The tour includes approximately a one-mile walk, with a steep uphill hike at the dam site. Participants should wear long pants and sturdy hiking shoes. Water will be provided.

Because this tour is a very popular fund-raiser, it is impossible to guarantee that seats will be available for purchase on the day of the tour. Seating is limited, so order your tickets now!

Tickets may be reserved by calling (661) 254-1275 with credit card and contact information, or purchase online at [www.scvhs.org](http://www.scvhs.org).

There will be an admission Fee of \$35 per person. Proceeds will benefit programs of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society. The fee includes the lecture, snacks, and bus transportation.

This year's tour leaders will be:

**FRANK ROCK:** "The Dam Man"

Long-time renowned expert on the dam disaster, Frank has been featured discussing the St. Francis Dam on the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and local television.

**DR. ALAN POLLACK:** President, SCV Historical Society

Dr. Pollack has written articles on the St. Francis Dam history, and was featured on Travel Channel's "Mysteries at the Museum".

**DIANNE ERSKINE-HELLRIGEL:** Executive Director, SCV Community Hiking Club

Dianne, along with Dr. Pollack, is currently working on legislation in Congress to make the dam site a National Memorial and National Monument.

## SCV Historical Bus Tour- Sunday, April 23

A narrated bus tour of historic sites in the Santa Clarita Valley will be presented as part of the Cowboy Festival.

Some of the sites visited will be:

- Heritage Junction – home to restored, furnished historic homes; a chapel, schoolhouse, train depot, and steam locomotive.
- An 1898 Trestle Bridge – replacement for one swept away by the St. Francis Dam floodwaters.
- Mentryville – site of the first commercially successful oil well in the west, and the longest continuously producing well in the world.
- Oak of the Golden Dream – first gold discovery in California.
- Lang, the site of the driving of the spike at the joining of San Francisco with Los Angeles by rail in 1876.

Includes lunch (vegetarian and vegan selections will be available) and snacks

We will be walking short distances over uneven terrain.

No children under six years of age.

Departs from the Saugus Station at Heritage Junction on April 23 at 9:00 AM, returns at 4:00 PM

Tickets: \$50. Available at-

<http://cowboyfestival.org/schedule/santa-clarita-valley-historical-bus-tour/>;

Click on Buy Tickets Now and then scroll down.



The Heritage Junction Dispatch  
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Telephone (661)254-1275  
Headquarters: Saugus Train Station  
24101 Newhall Avenue, Newhall 91321  
Open to the public each Saturday and Sunday  
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Kingsbury House is open the first Sunday  
of each month from 1:00 to 4:00 PM

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*St Francis Dam after the collapse;  
see pages 1 and 7 for March 11 lecture and tour*