In the last issue of the Dispatch, we began examining historical accounts of the Placerita gold discovery by Francisco López. Our goal is to separate fact from legend regarding the story of the Oak of the Golden Dream. Now we will explore some additional articles chronicling the López story.

JOHN MURRAY, OVERLAND MONTHLY, 1892

An article by John Murray, Overland Monthly | Vol. XIX No. 113, Pp. 524-529 | May 1892, dated the López gold discovery to 1841. Murray quoted from a pamphlet he had obtained entitled “An Historical Sketch of Los Angeles County” published in 1876 by Los Angeles residents J. J. Warner, Benjamin Hayes, and J. P. Widney:

“There is conclusive evidence that the first known grain of native gold dust was found upon, or near, the San Francisco Ranch, about forty-five miles westerly from Los Angeles city, in the month of June, 1841.”

The discovery of this gold was, in a two-fold manner, accidental. Sometime in the latter part of 1840, or the early part of 1841, a Mexican mineralogist, Don Andres Castillero, traveling from Los Angeles to Monterey, while passing along the road over the Las Virgenes... Continued on Page 2
Rancho, saw and gathered up some small water-worn mineralogical pebbles, known by Mexican placer miners as tepustete, a variety of pyrites. He exhibited them at the residence of Don José Antonio de la Guerra-y-Noriega in Santa Barbara, where he was a guest, and stated that wherever these pebbles were found in place it was a good indication of placer gold fields. A Mr. Francisco López, also known by the name of Cuso, a farmer and herdsman, living at the time upon the Piru Rancho, was present and heard the statement, and saw the pebbles. Not long after this incident, Mr. López noticed a pebble similar to the one he had seen in the hands of Mr. Castillero; and remembering what was then said about its being a sign of gold, he scooped up a handful of the earth and, rubbing it in his hand, found a grain of gold. The news of this discovery soon spread among the inhabitants, from Santa Barbara to Los Angeles, and in a few weeks hundreds of people were engaged in washing and winnowing the sands and earth of these gold fields.”

Murray questioned the accuracy of the Abel Stearns account dating the gold discovery to 1842: “Mr. H.H. Bancroft makes the date of discovery 1842, and so does Mr. Stearns. In a recent letter from Colonel Warner, which is now presented, he explains how Mr. Stearns could easily have been mistaken. The pamphlet also points out that Mr. Stearns, writing upon the subject after a lapse of twenty-five years, and a merchant at that time, would, upon referring to his books, be more likely to find the date of the purchase of gold than that of the discovery of the gold fields.”

The letter written on November 13th, 1891, from Colonel J. J. Warner to Murray stated, “I arrived in Monterey, from a visit to New England, in June, 1841. I reached home in Los Angeles July 4th...Not long after my return home, I accompanied three or four men to the gold fields on the ranch of San Francisco, then owned by Antonio Del Valle. The men with whom I went were not residents, but visitors in Los Angeles, being owners, supercargoes, clerks, etc., of merchant vessels then trading on this coast. I do not remember (and have no notes to which I can refer) the month in which this visit was made. It was in the summer, or dry season, of the year...Mr. Bancroft asserts that the discovery of gold was made in 1842, and cites events and transactions to sustain the assertion; but the careful reader will observe that no one of the events he cites has any bearing upon, or connection with, the date of the discovery... In another place Mr. Bancroft says that the gold was discovered on the ranch of Antonio Del Valle during his lifetime. There is also, in one of his volumes, a biography of Mr. Del Valle, (probably furnished by his son, Don Ignacio Del Valle,) in which it is stated that Mr. Del Valle died in 1841.

“Mr. Stearns could not have bought gold upon the day of the discovery, nor until the gold was mined and taken to market; and this might, or might not, have been until the lapse of one or more years from the time of discovery: so his purchases of gold, whether made in March, or some other month, have no weight in fixing the date of discovery.” From this letter, Murray concluded: “Thus the date of the discovery is established as being 1841. The very limited circulation of the fact, even in the State itself, is warrant for this article.”

J. M. GUINN, SAN FRANCISCO CALL, 1895

In an article in the San Francisco Call newspaper of September 8, 1895, J. M. Guinn, Secretary of the Southern California Historical Society summarized the controversy over the date of the López gold discovery, “The time of the discovery is not so satisfactorily settled. Colonel Warner, usually very reliable, gives June 1841 as the date, and quotes Don Ygnacio del Valle, on whose rancho the discovery was made, and who was appointed encargado de justicia to preserve order in the mining district, as one of his authorities for that date. Don Abel Stearns gives us the date March 1842; Bandini, April 1842. [Antonio F.] Coronel, who spent some time in the mines and employed Indians in mining, asserts positively that it was made in 1842. Bancroft is contradictory in his dates. In the text of his history he gives March 1842, evidently following Stearns’ statement. In his Pioneer Register he states: ‘Antonio del Valle died in 1841, the same year that gold was discovered on his ranch...’ William Heath Davis, usually one of the most reliable
President's Message

Continued from page 2

chroniclers of pioneer events, in his book, *Sixty Years in California*, gives the date of the discovery 1840, and the discoverers a party of Sonorans traveling to Monterey... From this mass of contradictory data it is impossible to evolve the correct one. Nor is it probably that the exact date will ever be known. The strongest evidence seems to incline toward March 1842..

Guinn further in his article compared the two California gold discoverers, López and Marshall: “López, the real discoverer of gold in California, lived in obscurity, died in poverty, and sleeps his last sleep in a nameless grave. Marshall, the reputed first discoverer, obtained celebrity — world-wide — in his later years earned a pension of $3,000 a year from the State, and after his death the grateful republic erected a statue of bronze to his memory. Very little merit attaches to the discovery in either case; in both cases it was purely accidental; but whatever does, belongs to López, not to Marshall.”

82 year old pioneer Isaac L. Given wrote a letter to Guinn in response to his article disputing the 1842 discovery date: “Dear Sir: I read in today’s San Francisco Call a communication from your pen concerning the first discovery of gold in California in which you quote from the account on that subject written by Col. J. J. Warner, for whose accuracy in historical fact you vouch, and very properly, as I think. This account gives the date of the discovery of gold in June 1841. And you also quote Don Abel Stearns as giving the date of the discovery in March 1842. Now it is about the latter date that has influenced me to send you these lines. I was one of the party, in which Roland and Workman were perhaps the best known members, who came from Santa Fe to California in 1841, arriving in Los Angeles in the fall of 1841. Shortly after our arrival, Dr. Lyman, a member of that party, and myself, were invited to dine with Don Abel, as all the natives called him, and while in his house he showed us a quart bottle of gold dust containing about 80 ounces obtained where Colonel Warner describes the placers located. Now how could Mr. Stearns place that date a year later?” Pliny F. Temple, son in law of William Workman (who established the Workman and Temple Family Homestead in what is now the City of Industry in 1842), wrote to his brother Abraham Temple on May 11, 1842: “There has been a gold mine discovered about forty miles from the Pueblo, the gold is of a fine quality & some grains have been found worth nearly three dollars. There are upwards of Fifty men to work washing the earth & there are expected the coming fall a large number of Sonorans to work in the mines. Should this prove to be as rich in quantity as it is in quality, the country will in a very short time have a different aspect.”

Francisco García,
Los Angeles Times, 1896

In a Los Angeles Times article of April 23, 1896, a 115 year old Sonoran, Ygnacio Francisco de la Cruz García, aka Francisco García, claimed to have been with López at the gold discovery in 1838: “In the Santa Feleciana Cañon, some forty miles northwest of Los Angeles, he and Francisco López and another man discovered the first placer gold found in the State, though this date does not coincide with that given by Don Abel Stearns and others. It would not be surprising, however, that there should be a lapse of three or four years in the memory of a man of his age.” Leon Worden, in analyzing García’s claim states: “The present story says García claimed to have been with Francisco López and another man when they made the first discovery of placer gold in California — in San Felicia (aka Feliciano, Feliciana) Canyon, i.e., the Piru area. According to López’ mining claim, however, which isn’t specific to location, López, Manuel Cota and Domingo Bermúdez made the initial discovery. No doubt García was around, though; Prudhomme (1922) says López showed García the location of his discoveries in Placerita and Felicia canyons in 1843, and that García returned to Mexico and came back with miners who worked the two areas.”

In the next issue of the Dispatch, we will conclude the story of the Oak of the Golden Dream, and consider if it is truly fact or legend.

Alan Pollack will give a talk on the gold discovery on Sunday, January 17, at 2:00 PM. The talk will be at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.
In January, 1912, 47-year-old Bill Hart was out touring with *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. It will be his last starring role on the stage. This play is based on a romance/western novel written by John Fox, Jr. in 1908. Not only was it Fox's most successful novel, but it was included among the year's top ten list of bestselling novels.

The plot is set in a sheltered Appalachian community at the turn of the twentieth century, where two influential families, the Tollivers and the Falins, have been feuding for over thirty years (sound familiar?). The progressive outside world and industrialization are beginning to creep into their world and exert their influence. Enter "furriner" John Hale, who as a geologist has a vision for the potential wealth of natural materials (i.e. coal). And of course he has an eye for the young natural beauty of a mountain girl, June Tolliver, which thrusts him right in the middle of the family feud. John wants to free June from the confines of mountain life and introduce her to higher education. This sets up the inevitable clash between law and order and the traditional mountain ways of settling differences, and is a threat to the nascent romance between John and June, who must choose between clan loyalties and personal love.

There was a 1916 silent film adaptation of this novel by Cecil B. DeMille. A 1936 version directed by Henry Hathaway ("*True Grit,*" "How the West Was Won," "The Sons of Katie Elder,") starred Sylvia Sidney, Henry Fonda, and Fred MacMurray. It was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song, "A Melody for the Sky." It was also awarded the Venice Film Festival Award for Best Color Film, being the first time the full (three-strip) Technicolor process was used for outdoor filming. This version is considered to have remained fairly faithful to the original novel. A funny bit of trivia regarding Henry Hathaway from IMDB: "Hathaway was shooting a scene on location on Wall Street in New York City. Many of the windows in the adjoining buildings were filled with office workers leaning out to watch the filming going on below them. Hathaway got so frustrated with all the attendant noise that he finally leaped out of his director's chair, looked upwards at the crowds and yelled, 'God damn it, I don't look over your shoulders when you work!'".

Since 1964, the play has been performed outdoor in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, the hometown of the novel's author. It is the longest continually running outdoor drama in the state of Virginia. [http://www.trailofthelonesomepine.com/](http://www.trailofthelonesomepine.com/)

And of course, we know that it was while on the road in *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* that William S. Hart made the fateful decision to come out West to break into motion pictures. As he writes in his autobiography, "While playing in Cleveland, I attended a picture show. I saw a Western picture. It was awful! I talked with the manager of the theater and he told me it was one of the best Westerns he had ever had. None of the impossibilities or libels on the West meant anything to him – it was drawing the crowds. The fact that the sheriff was dressed and characterized as a sort of cross between a Wisconsin woodchopper and a Gloucester fisherman was unknown to him…Here were reproductions of the Old West being seriously presented to the public – in almost a burlesque manner – and they were successful…The opportunity that I had been waiting for years to come was knocking at my door…Rise or fall, sink or swim, I had to bend every endeavor to get a chance to make Western motion pictures…I was part of the West – it was in my boyhood home – it was in my blood."
In Memory of Duane Harte 1947 - 2015
By Alan Pollack

He was the heart and soul of a community. The Historical Society mourns the loss of our longtime Board member, treasurer, and friend, Duane Harte. Duane passed away suddenly during the early morning hours of November 23, 2015. With his passing, Duane leaves a huge hole in our organization and city which will be almost impossible to fill. Duane shared with us his huge passion for history, and dedicated countless hours to furthering the goals, aspirations, and daily functioning of the Society. Words alone are not enough to describe the value he added to our mission of historical preservation and education; he will be sorely missed by everyone who knew him and had the privilege to call him a friend and colleague.

Duane Harte was the quintessential community volunteer. His dedication to service did not stop with the Historical Society. In fact, Duane had his hands in so many organizations, that his death can be equated to an earthquake which rocked the very infrastructure of the Santa Clarita Valley. In addition to his work with the Historical Society, Duane served as founding director and treasurer of the Friends of Mentryville, past chairman of the SCV Chamber of Commerce, founding President of the SCV Senior Center Charitable Foundation, past chairman of the Newhall Redevelopment Committee, Board member of the Canyon Theatre Guild, treasurer of the SCV Man & Woman of the Year Committee, chairman of the city of Santa Clarita’s Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission, president of the SCV Veterans Memorial Committee, and vice chair of the SCV Fourth of July Parade. He was a 17 year member of the Elks Club, and also participated in the activities of the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Clarita, Friends of the Libraries of the SCV, Zonta, and the American Legion. For his Herculean efforts, Duane was named the SCV Man of the Year in 2003. Duane even spent the last night of his life helping to organize and run the Festival of Trees Boys & Girls Club event.

He was a true American hero. Duane Harte served his country in the United States Navy for 23 years. He retired as Senior Chief Petty Officer in 1990. SCV Veterans Committee Vice President Bill Reynolds described him as the ‘Veterans’ Veteran.’ Duane regularly appeared as master of ceremonies or keynote speaker on Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies to honor his fellow veterans. He looked dashing as he donned his old Navy uniform. Duane was an active member of the Newhall American Legion 507. He cared deeply for and sought to help all veterans in need.

He was a devoted family man. Duane Harte leaves behind a loving family, including his wife of 43 years Pauline, daughters Denise and Donna, and grandson Evan Alexander. Our hearts, thoughts and prayers go out to the Harte clan. We share in their grief and offer our condolences and support through this difficult time in life. On the day of his death, daughter Denise posted on Facebook, “I am overwhelmed and humbled by the outpouring of love and compassion the community has shown my family. Still in disbelief, we are completely grief-stricken. The loss of my dad this morning was more than unexpected. Heartbroken and saddened, and feeling a little lost without the rock that my dad is and was.”

He was loved by his community, a real life version of “It’s a Wonderful Life”. Duane Harte was laid to rest at Eternal Valley Cemetery in Newhall on the windy afternoon of December 5, 2015. Over 500 of his fellow Santa Claritans attended a memorial service at the Sanctuary Church in Friendly Valley. The service was followed by a motor procession led by flag bearing members of a local veteran’s group. In honor of a lifetime of service to his country and community, he was buried with full military honors which included a flyover by a Condor Squadron, seen throughout the Valley.

He was my friend. On the night of his passing, I had actually emailed Duane seeking his help and guidance on a Historical Society issue. I never heard back from him. That was unlike Duane, for he was always there, ready to lend a helping hand and impart his words of wisdom when they were needed. I will surely miss that about him. Godspeed Duane...and thanks for the memories.
January at Rancho Camulos
by Maria Christopher

During December and January, Rancho Camulos Museum suspends its scheduled tours and offers tours only by appointment. The resumption of the scheduled tours at the end of January has been marked with a celebration of Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1883 visit to Camulos, which was inspiration for one of the settings for her 1884 novel, Ramona. This novel had a major impact on California history and is one of the reasons Rancho Camulos was designated a National Historic Landmark.

On Sunday, January 31 at 1:00 PM, we will again celebrate “Helen Hunt Jackson Returns.” This year’s historical reenactment will be followed by a presentation by author and historian Patricia Clark Doerner, whose research provides a unique look at the life of Helen Hunt Jackson who, on her death was described by The Century Magazine as “the most brilliant, imperious, and thoroughly individual woman of her time”.

In anticipation of this event, I decided to take a closer look at Ms. Jackson’s work, using the magical Internet to time travel back to the original publications. She is best known for her two books: A Century of Dishonor, about the government’s mistreatment of Native Americans; and Ramona, a romantic novel written for the same purpose but which also caused the first tourism boom in California. However, H.H. as she was known, was a prolific writer of short stories, travel, and poetry. Much of her work was published in The Century Magazine and in its predecessor, Scribner’s Monthly. I invite you to explore the online archives as I did. One source is ebooks.library.cornell.edu, in their “Making of America” collection.

For example, you can read “The Wards Of The United States Government” in the March 1880 edition of Scribbler’s Monthly, which is the seminal Century of Dishonor.

Another fascinating piece is “Father Junipero and His Work,” published in May and June, 1883. However, my favorite find was “Echoes in the City of The Angels,” published in December, 1883, a unique perspective of the city’s history and the life of Don Antonio Coronel. Several other articles about California appeared in the 1883 editions of The Century Magazine.

The Century December 1885 article, “Mrs. Helen Jackson” details the life of the recently departed writer and contains several of her poems including “The Last Prayer,” which she wrote a few days before her passing. She was truly a remarkable woman and writer. Hopefully, I have piqued your interest in exploring her life and work and perhaps joining her as she returns to Rancho Camulos on January 31, 2016. See details about this event and Rancho Camulos at www.ranchocamulos.org.

Join the SCV Historical Society Today!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Type</th>
<th>Membership Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Member</td>
<td>$350.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Member with spouse</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>$55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Member</td>
<td>$30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Member (60+)</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior (18 &amp; under)</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memberships make great gifts for your historically-minded friends and family! To join or renew online, visit http://www.scvhs.org.

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

Weekend Docents:
- Sandra Cattell
- Sioux Coghlan
- Evan Decker
- Sara Floyd
- Anna Kroll
- Barbara Martinelli
- RuthAnne Murthy
- Alan Pollack
- Brent Roberts
- Anna Schindler
- Gordon Uppman

Those who open and close for the docents:
- Evan Decker
- Cathy Martin
- Barbara Martinelli
- RuthAnne Murthy
- Alan Pollack

Weekend Questers*
- Nancy Cordova
- Barbara Harris
- Roberta Harris
- Linda Hinz
- Judy Holland
- Linda Likins
- Johnsie Manlow
- Cathy Martin
- June Myers
- Dee Roche
- JoAnne Vestal
- Sue Yurosek

*Don’t know who the Questers are? See www.questers.org
How do we kill squirrels in Newhall?

by John Boston

“Early one June morning in 1872 I murdered my father — an act which made a deep impression on me at the time.”
— Ambrose Bierce

I had friends visit. At the dinner table, the question lazily flew toward me. At that moment, I knew what Hank Aaron meant when he said there were days when he could see the stitches rotating in slow motion on a 100-mph fastball. Like a home run pitch that started poorly and only got worse, the question drifted toward me in a straight line, slow, high and outside.

The beautiful red-haired woman from Florida asked me, in deadly seriousness, how we killed squirrels in Newhall and, from her standpoint, I suppose it was a perfectly legitimate question. She had just survived a weekend of miniature horror in which she and her boyfriend found a half-dead squirrel in the San Fernando Valley.

The wildlife prognosis was that a hawk had kidnapped the squirrel, flown to the upper reaches of the stratosphere, then dropped the little rodent. Not being a flying squirrel, it found the earth’s pull undeniable. They say it isn’t the fall that kills you. It’s the sudden stop. Not so with this telephone wire nibbling mammal. He lived.

My friend enlisted the aid of some neighbors, who, from her description, floated in a drug-induced state pretty much 24/7. Three outlaw biker males eagerly volunteered to put Rocket J’s distant nephew out of its misery by shooting it. Six times.

The Rasputin of squirrels, it still lived. The magic seventh bullet proved to be most Kevorkian.

The next day, miles and miles away from the mercy killing, Red asked me: “How do you people kill squirrels in Newhall?”

I’ve had ex-wives tell me the one thing they found particularly chilling about our brief parentheses together was that I could lie so convincingly with a straight face. “Like Ted Bundy,” the analogy was once made.

I looked into the trusting eyes of my red-haired friend. I said the word, “Well,” nonchalantly, thoughtfully. Then I told her: “We take more of a veterinarian approach to killing squirrels in Newhall,” I said. “We take a little teeny squirrel-sized handkerchief. We douse it in chloroform. We cup the squirrel’s fuzzy little head firmly in the back, then, we hold the handkerchief over their nose and mouth until it passes out. And we keep it there. And we keep it there. And we keep it there.”

I made my eyes go both dead and detached as I looked not so much at her, but into her. She froze in horror for the longest time, mouth open, eyebrows carefully defined and stuck near the hairline and there comes that time when you’re messing with someone’s mind where you either let them up and allow them to reclaim their soul or you send them to a priest or some sort of avant garde therapy because if you go too far in a practical joke, normal lines of psychoanalysis are no longer an option.

It was mine for the choice. Good or evil.

I could have smiled. Not the warm, friendly smile letting a fellow human know that all is right, terror has been averted. No. Not that kind. I could have smiled the superior smile you offer from behind a sterile white lab coat, the knowing, gloating smile of being quite mad.

But no. I allowed her to float back gently to a benign planet where people don’t fill a large casserole dish full of water, place the half-dead branch-jumper comfortably in the smallish tub, then throw in a squirrel-sized electric hair dryer to put said varmint out of its misery.

I did not tell her that were it I, I’d lock the chattering, injured creature with the big bushy tail into a room with 1,200 life insurance salesmen until such time the squirrel pressed its face to a window pane and screamed in silence to an indifferent world, “Kill me.”

I did not tell the red-haired woman of the ways we deal with squirrels in Newhall. How we tied them to chairs with squirrel-sized duct-tape. How their eyes went wide as we ate pistachios in front of them. How they looked at their 10 little toes with finality when we said: “You’ve been a very naughty squirrel and I’m afraid we’re going to have to punish you.”

At that point, I turn on the first video in the stack of Jerry Lewis movies. “Whoooa, Dean,” Jerry pleads, annoyingly, through his nasal passage. I play it over. “Whoa, Dean. Whoa, Dean. Whoa, Dean.” The squirrel tries to look away but his struggles make the duct tape only tighter.

“How do we kill squirrels in Newhall?” a beautiful red-haired woman once asked me.

“Thoroughly,” I should have said. “And certainly not with kindness.”

(Having penned more than 10,000 columns and blogs, John Boston is America’s most prolific essayist. He has earned more than 100 major awards for writing, including being named, several times, America’s best humor, and, best serious columnist. He is launching a brand new website with his columns — thejohnbostonchronicles.com — on Christmas Day. © 2015 by John Boston)
Will this happen again this year?