One of the great legendary residents of the Santa Clarita Valley was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame on October 9, 1989.

Cliffie Stone and the Palomino Club

Cliffie Stone became familiar to me long before I moved to the Santa Clarita Valley in 1991. In fact, I knew him as the Master of Ceremonies of the Thursday night talent shows at the Palomino Club in North Hollywood in the 1980s. Los Angeles is not known as a country music town today. However, the roots of this musical genre's popularity in Southern California began with the migrants from the Oklahoma dust bowl in the 1930s and continued as many more people arrived in California from places like Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and the Deep South to seek jobs in wartime factories such as Lockheed and Hughes Aircraft during World War II. It was in this setting that country music singer Hank Penny noticed a broken down club called The Mulekick while driving down Lankershim Boulevard in the summer of 1949. Penny envisioned this rotting structure as becoming a future mecca for country music singers in the San Fernando Valley. He purchased the building and after a short period of renovations, the Palomino Club was born. Penny's vision indeed came to be, as the Palomino became one of the premier country music clubs in America, drawing talent such as Linda Ronstadt, Emmy Lou Harris, Bob Wills, and Merle Haggard. But none was more beloved than their emcee,
President’s Message

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Cliff Stone. When asked about the Palomino, Stone stated in a 1980 interview “You had a natural audience for the music setting here, and the roots were ready to be tapped by people who could manage good clubs and country performing halls. The Palomino is a classic example of that”.

The Early Years

Yet the story of Cliff Stone goes far beyond his activities at the famed Palomino. Clifford Gilpin Snyder (aka Cliff Stone) was born in Stockton, California, on March 1, 1917. After his family moved to Burbank in 1926, Cliffie became involved in the Los Angeles music and radio scene, playing bass for the big bands of Freddie Slacks and Anson Weeks and appearing on numerous radio stations such as KFI, KFWB, and KFOX. He married his first wife, singer Dorothy Darling, in 1939, and had four children. They eventually became longtime residents of the Rolling Stone Ranch” in Sand Canyon in the Santa Clarita Valley. Cliffie would go on to have a decorated sixty-year career as a television and radio producer, talent manager, publisher, author, singer, and songwriter.

Eighteen-year-old Stone joined pioneer country radio personality Stuart Hamblen’s show Covered Wagon Jubilee on KFVD in 1935 as a bassist and comic billed as Cliffie Stonehead. He worked with his father, long hair and bearded musician Clifford Herman Snyder, aka “Herman the Hermit”, on the show. Cliffie eventually became host of that show and later stated “I lost my ‘head’ and became Stone.” While playing in Hamblen’s band, Cliffie took classical music lessons. He later played in the Glendale Symphony Orchestra and then branched out into various swing and pop bands. After stints at the Pasadena Community Playhouse and Ken Murray’s Hollywood Blackouts, Stone became more involved with radio, working as a deejay, emcee, and performer on shows such as Lucky Stars on KFVB. He also formed a band and had an 18-year stint as a comedian on the CBS radio show Hollywood Barn Dance. In 1942, Stone started his first record label, Lariat Records, where he recorded Merle Travis, Tex Williams, Lee Gillette. There, he helped sign Merle Travis, Tex Williams, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Hank Thompson, Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Stan Freburg, Tommy Sands, Ferlin Husky, and Dallas Frazier to Capitol.

Stone became more famous within the country music community when he co-wrote three songs which reached the top five on the country and western music charts in 1946. They were “No Vacancy” with Merle Travis, “New Steel Guitar Rag” with Bill Boyd and the Cowboy Ramblers, and “Divorce Me C.O.D.”, versions of which were recorded by Travis, the King Sisters and Johnny Bond. Other hits he co-wrote included “ Shotgun Boogie”, “So Round, So Firm, So Fully Packed”, and “Anticipation Blues”.

Tennessee Ernie Ford

But perhaps his most important contribution to country music was in the promotion of other country artists who became famous in their own right. The biggest of these was Tennessee Ernie Ford. While working as host of Dinner Bell Round-Up, Stone’s first introduction to Ford was hearing him as a morning disc jockey, while driving to Palm Springs for a meeting. He saw something in Ford’s delivery, and convinced him to join his show as a comic and vocalist in 1947. After Ford recorded a hit country tune in 1950 with Kay Starr (“I’ll Never Be Free”) and was asked to perform in Las Vegas, he hired Stone as his manager, even though Stone had never

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Saturday night stage show at the American Legion Stadium in El Monte. As the country transitioned from radio to television, Hometown Jamboree was introduced on KLAC-TV/ KCP-TV in 1949, and later became a staple show on KTLA Channel 5 from 1953 to 1959. Regulars on the show included Tennessee Ernie Ford, Eddie Kirk, Johnny Horton, Molly Bee, Ferlin Husky, and Cliffie’s father Herman the Hermit. Stone would later reflect on the unpopularity of country music in Los Angeles at that time: “For a long time it was almost like racial discrimination when you said you were country. It used to be if you were listening to country music on your radio at a boulevard stop, you’d turn your radio down so nobody would know you were listening to it. It was looked down on by the musician’s union, everybody. We were like second-class citizens, which is OK because we did nothing but make money.”

After selling Lariat Records, Stone joined the Bel Tone label to produce records for Frankie Lane, Dale Evans, and Eddie Dean. In 1945, Capitol Records took Stone away from Bel Tone to play bass on records by artists such as Tex Ritter, Johnny Mercer, and Riders of the Purple Sage. Label boss Mercer then hired him as assistant to country A&R executive Lee Gillette. There, he helped sign Merle Travis, Tex Williams, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Hank Thompson, Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Stan Freburg, Tommy Sands, Ferlin Husky, and Dallas Frazier to Capitol.

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done that job before. When Stone informed him of his lack of managerial experience, Ford replied: “Well we’re even. I’ve never had one before”. They confirmed their contract with a handshake on a pickup truck on a hunting trip.

Their partnership lasted for over ten years. In 1956, Cliffie became producer of Ford’s NBC television variety series The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show. He retired as Ford’s manager after The Ford Show ended in 1961. Stone is also credited with the discovery of country stars such as Molly Bee, Hank Thompson, and Stan Freberg.

Over the years, Stone and his band recorded hit country songs such as “Silver Stars, Purple Sage, Eyes of Blue” (1947), “Peepin’ Thru the Keyhole (Watching Jole Blon)” (1948), “When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again” (1948), and “Little Pink Mack” (recorded with Kay Adams in 1966). Perhaps his most successful song was “The Popcorn Song” which reached number 14 on Billboard’s pop music charts in 1955. In total he recorded six albums of his own. His band went through five name changes: Cliffie Stone & His Orchestra, Cliffie Stone & His Barn Dance Band, Cliffie Stone & His Hometown Jamboree Gang, Cliffie Stone & His Hepcats, and Cliffie Stone’s Country Hombres.

In the early 1950’s, Stone started a music publishing company called Central Songs, along with Ford and Capitol producers Lee Gillette and Ken Nelson. The company was sold to Capitol Records in 1969. He later became head of Granite Records, where he recorded Molly Bee and Tex Williams.

This report will conclude in the next issue of the Dispatch.
Helen Hunt Jackson Returns Once More
by Maria Christopher

On January 25 at 1:00 PM and 3:00 PM, experience Helen Hunt Jackson’s January 23, 1882, visit to Rancho Camulos, which inspired her to include this vestige of the Californio lifestyle as one of the settings of her 1884 novel Ramona. Re-enactors will engage and delight you as they portray this event that forever changed the peaceful life at Rancho Camulos.

Rancho Camulos Museum near Piru is a National Historic Landmark. It received this designation because of its role in California history, Californio history, California agriculture history, and because it is acknowledged as the “Home of Ramona”. Ms. Jackson, an activist for Native American rights, wrote this novel after her book, “Century of Dishonor”, failed to rally attention to the mistreatment of Native Americans, particularly through government policy. While the novel did have some impact on policies regarding Native Americans, its major impact was that it caused California’s first tourism boom. People fell in love with the beautiful Señorita Ramona, who fell in love with the handsome Indian Allesandro and lived in California’s golden hills. The novel’s popularity, paralleling the expansion of the nation’s railroads and the promotional efforts of the railroad entrepreneurs, put the “Home of Ramona” on the map.

Therefore, the reenactment has become an annual tradition at Rancho Camulos. Visitors can share the living history experience as costumed docents portray Ms. Jackson and members of the del Valle family as they welcome her to their 1853 adobe. However, the visitors won’t meet Ramona. Why? Because Ramona was a fictional character created by Ms. Jackson, as she wove together stories gathered as she traveled throughout Southern California. They will hear these stories as well as have an opportunity to experience 19th century Californio Rancho life.

Meet Helen Hunt Jackson who, on her death was described by The Century Magazine as “the most brilliant, impetuous, 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 mentioned above. However, she was also a prolific writer of short stories, travel articles, and poetry. Much of her work was published in The Century Magazine and its predecessor, Scribner’s Monthly. I invite you to explore on-line archives as I did. A possible source is ebooks.library.cornell.edu, in their “Making of America” collection. An example is “The Wards of The United States Government” in the March, 1880, edition of Scribner’s Monthly, which is the seminal Century of Dishonor. Another fascinating piece is “Father Junípero and His Work,” published in May and June, 1883. However, my favorite 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.

By popular demand, this year’s annual re-enactment will have two performances, and a meet and greet reception with Helen Hunt Jackson and the Del Valle family will follow each one. The suggested donation is $10, and tickets can be purchased on line (recommended) at ranchocamulos.org, or at the gate.

The museum is located on Highway 126, 10 miles west of the I-5 freeway, near Piru. Details are at 805 521-1501. Step back in time on Saturday, January 25, and join us as we welcome Mrs. Jackson as she returns to Rancho Camulos, where the history, myth, and romance of old California still linger.
We found this interesting article in the April, 1930, issue of Photoplay, subtitled “Will Gary Cooper take the saddle of Bill Hart?”

Born Frank James Cooper in Helena, Montana in 1901, he was a major movie star from the end of the silent film era through the end of the golden age of Classical Hollywood. His screen persona represented the ideal American hero.

From the article:

“In many ways Gary and Hart are alike. They are both tall and rangy and bear unmistakable the stamp of the West. More than anything else they love the ranges. Hart spent his boyhood in the old Dakota Territory with the Sioux Indians… Gary grew up on two thousand rolling Montana acres. Hart was homesick for the West when at twenty-two he was playing Armand to Modjeska’s Camille. Gary felt nostalgia for Montana when he was taken to school in England. He is homesick for it now that he is a star in Hollywood.”

Both Hart and Cooper were born to immigrants from Great Britain, and both spent formative years in the West. Both sought peace and quiet on ranches removed from the Hollywood scene.

In contrast, the article believes:

“Gary’s nature is a bit more tractable than Hart’s. In one way it is unfortunate. In another way it will save him from many of the heartbreaking experiences that fell to the lot of the older man. Hart believed devoutly he was right in his plan of making pictures. He would rather leave the screen than sacrifice an ideal by listening to the commands of producers who knew nothing of the West. Gary doesn’t ‘blow up.’ Never since he has been in pictures has he been ‘temperamental’ or hard to handle.”

From 1926 to 1930, Cooper made 23 pictures, an average of five a year from The Winning of Barbara Worth to The Spoilers. More than half of them are Westerns or military films, in which Cooper appeared as the shy young man, agile and athletic, who was sure of his moral position. In this pre-Depression era, Cooper represented an American who believed in the value of simple virtues and his commitment to them. In his own life, Cooper was, in fact, developing more and more confidence, was at the peak of his physical appearance and health, and was by the conclusion of this period not a tentative, shy man at all.

Written in 1930, the article waxes romantically about the fading of Hart’s fame, marked by the advent of the talking picture, suggesting that in the five years since Hart’s retirement from films, no one has approached Hart’s popularity. “But now, those who should know see the shadow of a new, young, two-gun hero outlined on the screen of the future. It is unlikely that he will ever take the exact place of Hart. No one ever takes the exact place of another. There will never be a second Valentino, or another Wally Reid.”
Three Nostalgic Winter Tales of SCV Bikinis
by John Boston

“If a woman has to choose between catching a fly ball and saving an infant’s life, she will choose to save the infant’s life without even considering if there are men on base.”
— Dave Barry

BIKINI TALE #1 —

There’s snow on the hills. It’s light years until summer. Oddest thing, I was thinking about bikinis the other day. No. Not the way you think I’m thinking about bikinis. There’s a small moment of sadness when the little girls in your life make that irretraceable step from childhood to womanhood, an infinitesimal twitch of embarrassment when you notice their bodies have morphed into hour-glass shaped potential reproductive shelters. Unfairly, it happens so fast.

My niece-like substance Stefanie, whom I just adore, is sneaking up on 50, which I don’t particularly like, because that means I must be sneaking up on More Than 50. Stef’s a heck of a woman. I can’t tell you the 60-pound sigh I released a seeming thousand years back when she married. My relief was not so much that she was finally hitched, but more so that her husband wasn’t some Palmdalian cheese monkey whom I’d have to perforate with birdshot. Todd’s just a peach of a guy. So far.

I remember all Stefanie’s stages. I held her when she was the tiniest button and gave her baths in the big Newhall kitchen sink. When she was 4, I accidentally slammed a car door on her finger. Stef still brings it up just to make me feel bad. I still do, but I never let on. She was a lost soul of 8, still sucking her thumb and not bothering to get out of that tattered bathrobe. Todd’s just a peach of a guy. So far.

And then there was that day in her living room. Her mother, aka my sister, whom we shall just call Lesby-Anne, and I were indulging in one of our all-time favorite pastimes — talking about people behind their backs. Stefanie uneventfully walked right between the two of us out toward the pool. Four confused, stunned and disapproving eyes followed that round, leggy figure out the back door. Like a Marvel super hero, Stefanie had stolen the body of a jungle woman Sports Illustrated swimsuit model and somehow applied it on herself. It was as if in that one moment, my little “Stefanie-Kokot-In-My-Soup” as I used to sing to her, had changed forever. No more headlocks or noogies. No more sitting on the lap and reading fairy tales, although just the other week she was visiting. After sushi, I cupped her still small face in my hands for a second to tell her how pleased I was at how she turned out. Continued on Page 7

BIKINI TALE #2 —

In one of my incarnations at the world’s most eclectic daily to serve a riparian community, we had an intern. Susan Deemer was old for a journalism intern - nearly 30. I can’t remember a single article the woman wrote, primarily because she was so disarmingly sexy.

The only conversation I remember having with Deemer was a short one. The Signal offices were then on Creekside, squished amongst all the car dealers. It was August, about four degrees warmer than necessary to boil water. I was coming out the back door and Deemer was coming in. We nearly bumped into one another. I stammered, then said something charming and witty, like, “Boy. Gosh. Golly. Sure is hot out there! Ugmgblaugrttddd.”

No need to rush to the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language. “Ugmgblaugrttddd” is not a word. It was the imbecilic sound uttered as I manually attempted to reinsert my tongue into my mouth.

It got worse. Deemer smiled a sultry smile and said: “It’s bikini weather” and walked past, rainforest drums and saxophone music accompanying her as she strode past, confident as a runway model.

Later, I’m diligently working in my home office. It’s late. The TV’s quietly droning in the background. I get a call from a gal pal Signal reporter. We were both night owls, so the call was no surprise.

“Turn on Channel 45,” she said. I did. One of those eye-wateringly awful biker movies was on. A paunchy chopper monkey was having a knife fight with a fetching starlet dressed in .000036th of an ounce of a night gown.

“Little girl has to choose between catching a fly ball and saving an infant’s life, she will choose to save the infant’s life without even considering if there are men on base.”
— Dave Barry

“I’m sorry you can’t sleep and the cable is out on PBS,” I said. “Is there a reason why you’re calling me at 1:00 in the morning to share your television-viewing experience?”

“Look closer,” ordered my co-worker.

I did. I got up and sat down in front of the tube. It was a badly choreographed fight scene, primarily because the biker dude weighed about 3,000 pounds, and the actress was fighting like she was in a badminton match.

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John Boston Column

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“And?” I asked.


The actress was The Signal intern, Deemer. All those months
of working together, we never knew she was a “B” movie star.
Didn’t know she owned her own Harley and worked her way
through USC making straight-to-Albania biker/bikini movies.
This one was called, “Kill, Kill & Kill Again.”

Sigh. I had had an actual conversation with a movie star. And it
was about bikinis.

BIKINI TALE #3 —

Many years ago, that first summer Castaic Lake opened, the
waterway’s founding fathers held one of those hedonistic
The kind of bikinis guys ogle at when they’re on someone
to whom they’re not related. I couldn’t remotely tell you
the name of the young woman who won the flesh-’n’-flex
contest. I was working at a formerly mighty newspaper, and
I remember the photography department practically doing
Curly Joe 360s on the soiled linoleum floor as they howled at
her graven image.

And my heavens, this young thing did have the fire down
below. Born 3,000 years earlier, and I’m sure Paris would have
turned to Helen of Sparta and said, “Honey, no offense, but I
think I’m going to kidnap this little number in the skimpy two-
piece instead. We can still be friends.”

I still smile a yard across, remembering that we ran this girl’s
picture across the front page of the paper, and the next
morning every male in town was like to swoon.

I’m sure it wasn’t so precious back then to the girl’s father.

As the story goes, it seems Miss Bikini Contest Winner was,
appropriately, living at home and was quite grounded Juliet-
style in her second-story bedroom. Her friends snuck over,
out a ladder and broke her out of suburban prison. They
motoroed over to the nearest gas station ladies’ room and
changed into their dental floss swimwear.

At Castaic Lake, the girls caught some rays, giggled, flirted
then got their escaped prisoner and her ‘Best Undressed’
trophy back home before the girl’s parents were any wiser.

Until the next morning, when Mom and Dad opened the
local newspaper, Your Mighty Signal. The photo was big as a
billboard. And on the front page.

When Dad saw his baby girl’s giant pin-up over toast and
coffee, he hit the roof. There she was, his mostly naked beauty
queen/escaped daughter smiling sexily on 10,000 newspapers.

It wasn’t so much that the teen ditched her bedroom
confines and grounding. Seems the Castaic Lake Grand
Opening Bikini Contest Winner was only 13 years old.

That contest was about 40 years ago. If she were my daughter,
she’d still be grounded.

Santa Clarita’s John Boston has been named America’s best serious
and humorous columnist, several times. He is the recipient of The
Will Rogers Lifetime Achievement Award and has 119 major writing
honors. Having penned more than 11,000 columns, blogs and
essays, Boston is the most prolific humorist/satirist in world history.

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

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Debra Haynes  RuthAnne Murthy
Harold Hicks  Alan Pollack
Anna Kroll  Anna Schindler
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