



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 44, Issue 4

July-August 2018

Calendar

Monday, July 23

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Wednesday, August 1

Deadline for the September-
October *Dispatch*

Monday, August 27

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Check www.scvhistory.org for
other upcoming events.

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



The history of Los Angeles is replete with a number of tragic rise and fall stories: William Mulholland and the St. Francis Dam disaster. Thaddeus S.C. Lowe and Mount

Lowe. Thomas Thorkildsen and the Sterling Borax Mine. Yet another story involves what some might consider the crown jewel of the heyday of the famous Ridge Route, the Hotel Lebec. At its peak, the opulent hotel, situated between the town of Lebec and Fort Tejon along what is now Interstate 5, was a favorite hangout of Hollywood celebrities like Clara Bow, Buster Keaton, Clark Gable, and Carole Lombard. It later went through years of decline leading to its deliberate torching in 1971.

The First Hotel Lebec

The story begins with the Ridge Route, a winding road that was completed in 1915 along the crest of the Tehachapi Mountains, thus becoming the first direct route between Southern and Northern California. As early as 1916, Bakersfield saloonkeeper Thomas O'Brien had opened a Hotel Lebec and advertised Sunday chicken dinners from noon until 8:00 PM in the local newspapers. This predecessor to the more famous Hotel Lebec advertised in the Los Angeles Times on January 18, 1920, "Hotel Lebec in the Heart of the Tejon. 82 Miles from Los Angeles and 42 miles from Bakersfield. It is situated in the mountains near the old Fort Tejon and in a country ripe with historic lore of the early West. Hunting and fishing may be had here and only a few minutes' hike from the hotel, the real Wild West begins. Being located on

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President's Message

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the main highway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, it is an ideal place to break a motor journey. Every service is offered. The hotel is noted for its mountain dinners and people come from miles around for the special Sunday spread. There are individual cottages, equipped for day and night service. A large modern garage is operated in conjunction with the hotel where the motor tourist may have every want supplied. In fact Lebec offers all that is demanded by the 20th century motor tourist in service, scenery, restful surroundings and a variety of out-door entertainment. An ideal place to spend a week-end... The Eldorado stages give perfect service every day."

The Hotel Durant

The Los Angeles Times reported a new Hotel Lebec to be built, in an article on March 27, 1921. The new hotel was said to be fireproof, with 100 rooms and built at a cost of \$200,000. It was a joint project financed by automobile heir Russell Clifford (Cliff) Durant and Thomas O'Brien. The original plan called for nearby Lake Castaic (near Lebec, not the one we know in the town of Castaic) to be dammed and improved for boating and fishing, a nearby aviation field, an observatory on a prominence that was allegedly a lookout for mountain man Peter Lebec, who was said to be a "one-time officer in Napoleon's army, who was the first settler in the valley, which he called the 'Valley of the Clouds'". (In reality, we don't really know who Peter Lebec was, other than an inscription on a tree at Fort Tejon stating that he was killed by a grizzly bear in 1837 at that site). Built in the form of a letter Y, the new hotel was to include a billiard room, banquet and private dining halls, and a dance floor. Water, gas, and electricity were to be supplied to the hotel and surrounding area by modern plants in the vicinity. The article concluded, "Mr. O'Brien, who owns large acreage around Lebec, has been engaged in farming and stock raising. For years he has been extending his restaurant and hotel accommodations, and the new hotel is the outgrowth of the demand for a comfortable overnight stopping place. It is the intention to create a mountain resort with its own amusements."

An ad in the LA Times on May 8, 1921, announced that the hotel, initially named Hotel Durant, would be ready for occupancy on May 21st with "80 rooms, all with bath, heated by steam, lighted by electricity, and has telephone in every room." Twenty four bungalows, with a "large living room, and equipped with shower baths and kitchenette, with gas for cooking and heating, also lighted by electricity" would be ready on June 1st. The proprietors were listed as O'Brien and Durant, with manager Charles A. Cooke at the helm. That same month, Frank Peebles laid out a new nine-hole golf

course for the hotel. The greens were temporarily made of sand until water could be piped in.

Curry's Lebec Lodge

In October, 1922, Foster Curry, formerly manager of Camp Curry in Yosemite valley, purchased the Durant Hotel from R.C. Durant and later purchased the adjacent general store and garage from O'Brien. The now renamed Curry's Lebec Lodge would be run by Curry and Wallace Curtis. Curtis formerly ran the Curtis Publishing Company, which published the Saturday Evening Post. An article in the LA Times in 1923 stated "Such a stopping place as Foster Curry's Lebec Lodge is one of the best examples of what the automobile has helped to create in the way of fine hotel accommodations along the main highways. It has become a sort of division point on the Valley Highway for travel between Los Angeles and San Francisco."

Even in those early days, the hotel suffered through some bad times. A fire swept through the facility on November 4, 1923, destroying the garage, restaurant, golf clubhouse and store, and a number of houses. The fire was thought to have been caused by an explosion of a stove in the restaurant's kitchen and ended up causing up to \$60,000 in damages. The 150 guests in the hotel that night had to hastily leave their rooms in scanty clothing in the cold early morning hours and shivered outside until it was clear that the main hotel building would not be consumed by the flames. Ironically, an association of insurance adjustors had just left the hotel the day before the fire after completing a three-day convention.

O'Brien remained a co-owner of the hotel along with Curry. This led to a lawsuit between the two in June, 1924. O'Brien was trying to sell the hotel due to an allegation of indebtedness. Curry filed suit to get an injunction preventing O'Brien from selling the hotel, claiming that all payments on the hotel's mortgage were up to date. O'Brien argued that the payments from Curry were in arrears. Curry eventually sold his portion of the hotel to Jack Wooley, a wealthy former Oakland saloon man, while O'Brien ironically did not sell his half. At that time, the hotel was renamed the Hotel Lebec. Curry eventually died of leukemia in 1932.

By 1925, the hotel was increasing in popularity. Movie companies were frequently making the hotel the center of their activities, particularly when they needed to film mountain scenes. During the filming, the entire cast and crew would stay at the hotel.

We'll conclude the story of the Lebec Hotel in the next issue of the *Dispatch*.

14 Things To NOT Do If You're An SCV Yuppie Confronted By A Mountain Lion

by John Boston

As our Santa Clarita civilization expands into what was once the wildlands, confrontations between man and beast increase. Most of the vast number of new residents to the SCV are woefully ignorant of the ways of the woods. One of our riparian neighbors is *Puma concolor* — the mountain lion. Called “the Lord of Stealthy Murder” by president Teddy Roosevelt (who used to hunt them out here), pumas can stretch 10 feet from nose to tail and weigh as much as 220 pounds.

It's very rare that a puma will attack a human. Of course, word on the street is that in the last 40 years, as locals stop carrying weapons while they're foraging through the chaparral, lions are getting bolder. Also, protecting yourself is out of the question, should you accidentally hurt the predator while it's mauling you. Pretty much, you're toast. All we can do is share with you 14 last-resort strategies to do when confronted by a mountain lion:

14 — Try panicking. Face it; your hippie parents and public education raised you to doubt and be afraid of your own shadow. Who knows? A heartfelt sharing of unbridled terror and your complaint that the confrontation is triggering fear in you just might discombobulate the big cat's attack mechanism.

13 — Assume a professional wrestler's pose. While growling, start circling the creature. Then yell: “Look! What's that behind you! Global Warming!!” When the big cat turns to look, leap on its back, get it in a full nelson, and choke the beast to submission.

12 — If you're more the non-confrontational SCV type, run as fast as you can away from the potential man-eater, pretending to trip every once in a while. Maybe it will be embarrassed by your reticence to defend your life and leave you alone.

11 — Call PETA's Emotional Support Hotline.

10 — Tell the predator you have some pull with your local HOA and would it be interested in allowing you to put a large dog collar around its neck and take it back to your condo as your pet and BFFL.

9 — Be proactive. If, like many new residents who experiment with nature-empathy-cult therapy, stop jogging right before sun-up while wearing a deer suit. Ditto with running kind of goofy in an Al Gore deer suit, like you're injured.

8 — Do not venture into the SCV's deep woods while eating fried chicken. More so, when face-to-face with the cat, do not take a bite out of a fried chicken leg, chew it slowly and make big circles around your tummy while going, “Ummmm. Yum!” Nor should you wag a greasy, aromatic chicken leg in front of the lion, then start skipping while singing to it: “You Can't Have Any... You Can't Have Any...”

7 — DO NOT grab the puma by the tail and rub said tail the wrong way. However, if you belong to a gym, or, can do Pilates, you MAY swing the cat by the tail several times. If the creature snarls, assert your dominance and ask: “Is that all you got?”

6 — If you're a professional dog, cat, hamster, or ferret walker, at night, in Sand Canyon — quit. Right jolly now.

5 — Again, be proactive. Mountain lions are attracted to certain sounds and can hear things even through a set of earbuds 25 miles away. While jogging or biking, do NOT listen to wounded rabbit sound effects, hepcat experimental rap music with sheep bleating in the background, or to Pearl Jam.

4 — If you happen to stumble upon a mountain lion in the wild, or at the end of your paseo, while it's munching on a deer, do not, I repeat — DO NOT — grab the carcass by the hooves or antlers and announce: “I'm going to give this a proper burial.”

3 — In the foothills, holes in the sides of mountains are often called, “mountain lion dens.” Do not crawl into these seemingly inviting cavities in the earth to play with the cute puppies (what Yuppies call mountain lion babies).

2 — Kick it.

1 — Not to panic any of you newer SCV residents, but the best way to NOT attract mountain lions is to keep your windows closed and boarded up at night. Even better, always be home before dark.

Camulos Connections: How I Met Prince Aaggie

By Maria Christopher

It was a passion for history that, in 2003, led this transplanted Easterner to start volunteering at the Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark. However, it is the satisfaction of making a difference and the fun, adventures, and on-going learning experiences that keep me there. Hopefully sharing one of these learning experiences will inspire you to consider joining us. We need docents to help in carrying out our expanding operations. You, too, can become a part of preserving and sharing our local heritage at the Rancho Camulos Museum, where the history, mystery, and romance of old California still linger...

Shortly after becoming a docent, I found myself, flashlight in hand, as part of a group inventorying the contents of the main adobe's basement that had been hand-dug in 1862. Amid the furniture and old wine barrels, the beam of my flashlight reflected off a set of eyes. My initial fright, that I had encountered one of the Rancho's rumored ghosts, was quickly assuaged when the Board Member who was leading the group, exclaimed, "That must be Prince Aaggie!"

Thus, began a docent's voyage of discovery to find out the who, what, and why?

The object stowed away in the back of the cellar was, in fact, the taxidermist-mounted head of Prince Aaggie, a prize bull who was owned by the August Rubel family. The Rubels had purchased Rancho Camulos in 1924 from the del Valle family. (The del Valles were the original recipients of the 1839 Mexican land grant of the 48,000-acre Rancho San Francisco, part of the San Fernando Mission land that includes Rancho Camulos.) The trophy head of the Prince, whom I later found out had died in 1924, had presided over the veranda of the main Camulos adobe for decades, until the 1994 Northridge earthquake inflicted serious damage to the structure. He was then relegated to the basement, where he still awaited his proper recognition and display. I was curious to find out, just who was Prince Aaggie, and what was his connection to Rancho Camulos?



Prince aaggie

According to livestock records, Prince Aaggie was born Oct. 20, 1920, at Berylwood Stock Farm in the Ventura County town of Hueneme and registered to A.W. Morris & Sons Corp. He was sired by Sir Aaggie De Kol Acme (185724); the dam was Aralia De Kol Mead 2nd (326061).

August Rubel, 24-year-old son of wealthy Swiss immigrants, and his beautiful bride Mary (about 5 years his junior) had arrived in Ventura County in 1922. August had recently graduated from Harvard after having taken time off to serve as an ambulance driver in Europe in World War I.

The Rubels purchased and started operating the Billiwack Dairy in Aliso Canyon near Santa Paula. August started learning the dairy business and soon developed interest in developing his cattle herd. Thus, the pending auction of the highly regarded prize-winning bull, Prince Aaggie, caught his attention. It also attracted other bidders, including a livestock syndicate from Chicago. The bidding was vigorous and, in the end, the prize bull went to August Rubel for \$110,000, the highest price in the world ever paid for a domestic animal up until that time. According to tradition, many locals believed that the price had unrealistically been driven up for an animal previously valued much lower, and the greenhorn interloper from the East Coast had been taken. It was also said that the Chicago livestock group was infuriated by the outcome.

Mysteriously, a short time later, while reportedly at the Bard Ranch in Hueneme, Prince Aaggie died. An autopsy revealed he had ingested barbed wire. Rumors were rampant as to whether it was an accident or sabotage.

It was a hard blow both emotionally and financially. According to family tradition, they lost the dairy but were

able to complete their planned purchase and move to Rancho Camulos. They took Prince Aaggie along.

Prince Aaggie is still in the basement. If you come out on a tour you can see his picture. If you become a docent, you may get to meet Prince Aaggie. I hope this is an offer you can't refuse!

William S. Hart's Music of the FAR West

by Margi Bertram



In preparing for a special event here at the Hart, I wanted to do some research into the music William S. Hart may have listened to, based on the recordings in his collection. A few of the titles surprised me, and made me smile, “Hawaiian Melody Two Step,” “Sweet Lei Lehua,” and “Maui Girl” for example. This led me to explore the history of Hawaiian music. Perhaps you will find it interesting as well, just in time for summer!

There is apparently no documented record of Hawaiian music before non-Hawaiians arrived on the islands. In early Hawaii, *mele*, or a poetic form of song, was the most important means of remembering myths of gods and deeds of powerful people, as well as their daily life, their love of the land, humor, and tragedy. They recorded their literature in memory rather than in written records, maintaining a strong oral tradition. Starting in the late 1700s, various styles of European music were absorbed and blended with traditional local music, creating new unique musical forms.

Elizabeth Tatar, in George Kanahale’s 1979 book *Hawaiian Music and Musicians*, divided Hawaiian music history into seven phases, using influences from outside Hawaii that have impacted the practice of Hawaiian music. Starting with the arrival of Europeans, when forms such as hymns were introduced from the missionaries, stringed instruments like the guitar arrived with Spanish-speaking cowboys (or *paniolas*) who worked many of the cattle ranches, and it is thought that Portuguese immigrants brought the lute instrument, the *braguinha*, which may have led to the now-iconic ukulele.

It was her third period, from 1900 to about 1915, that made me think of William S. Hart. This period marks a time heavily influenced by American urban music. Think ragtime. Think two-step. Think fox-trot. This era saw the mixing of Hawaiian music into the broader field of American popular music, with *hapa haole* songs, with lyrics being a combination of English and Hawaiian (or wholly English) and elements of Hawaiian music. This period also saw the formation of the Hawaiian recording industry in 1906, when the Victor Talking Machine Company made the first 53 recordings in the state. By 1912, recorded Hawaiian music had found a place on the American mainland.

Also in 1912, a Broadway musical called *Bird of Paradise* ran from January to April and introduced Hawaiian music

to many Americans (ref. *Internet Broadway Database*). The play was a success, and *The New York Times* called the music “weirdly sensuous.” The play toured extensively and has been filmed twice.

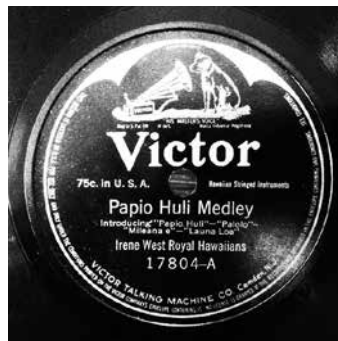
And then there was the transformative 1915 Pan Pacific International Exhibition, during which the Territory of Hawaii hosted a pavilion to promote tourism, where it is said the finest Hawaiian musicians of the time performed several times a day, attracting a reported 17 million people. The exposition’s board of directors felt that music should be central to the visitor experience, and built four outdoor bandstands and budgeted an amount equivalent to over 15 million dollars today for musical talent, so visitors could enjoy “music that would appeal to all classes...especially things that were new.” (ref. Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*) Every day was filled with music, song, and dance. Many fair-goers had their first taste of foreign culture. The runaway hit of the fair was not John Philip Sousa’s marching band, nor was it the famous composer Camille Saint-Saëns. It was the Kailimai Hawaiian Quintet, who played for as many as 34,000 people a day, and the ukulele became the fair’s – and the nation’s – biggest musical craze.

From 1915 to 1930, mainstream audiences outside Hawaii became increasingly charmed by Hawaiian music, though by this time the songs marketed as Hawaiian had only a slight connection to actual Hawaiian music. The following era, from about 1930 to 1960, has been called the “Golden Age of Hawaiian

music”, when popular styles were adapted for orchestras and big bands.

Suddenly, many writers of popular music decided to write Hawaiian songs. I’ve read that in 1916 Americans bought more recordings of Hawaiian music than any other style (ref. music historian Amy Stillman). And they came in all the popular styles of the day: in ragtime, blues, jazz, foxtrot and waltz tempos, but jazzed up a bit.

And this brings us back around to the recordings found here in the collection of William S. Hart. Seems likely he was part of the popularization of this new genre of popular music, perhaps even introduced to the music by his sister, Mary Ellen. It will be an eclectic playlist for the event here at the museum, where we will be giving visitors an idea of how it might have sounded on a summer evening when Hart was relaxing and listening to music. *A hui hou*, my friends.



Unusual Sights in Southern California

by Gordon Glattenberg



Oak trees on a ranch near Santa Maria are covered in Spanish moss, a rare sight west of the Mississippi.



A house in Los Angeles across from Echo Park, seen here in 1977, had two oil wells in its yard. The pumps were run by cables running from a motor in the house.

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

Weekend Docents

Evan Decker	Alan Pollack
Barbara Martinelli	Anna Schindler
RuthAnne Murthy	Gordon Uppman

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

Those who open and close for the docents

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Grounds

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*Don't know who the Questers are? See www.questers1944.org

Fundraising Help from Ralphs and Amazon

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Photo by Gordon Glattenberg

*The Lebec Hotel in 1967. Some time in the 1950s the sign had changed from "Hotel Lebec";
see Page 1*