



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

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Calendar

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, Heritage Junction is closed until further notice.

Thursday, April 1

Deadline for the May-June *Dispatch*

Check www.scvhistory.org for other upcoming events when Heritage Junction reopens.

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



In the Wild West of the 1870s, lawlessness was rampant on the Western frontier. Jesse James and his James-Younger Gang terrorized the Midwest from Missouri to

Minnesota. They gained nationwide fame but met their match against the townspeople of Northfield, Minnesota, in September, 1876. The citizens fought back against the outlaws, severely wounding the Younger brothers, who rode out of town with Frank and Jesse James but were shortly after captured in Madelia, Minnesota, and sent to prison. Jesse James escaped and subsequently participated in a few more train robberies before he was

gunned down and killed by Bob Ford in St. Joseph, Missouri, on April 3, 1882.

Billy the Kid

Billy the Kid became famous after participating in the Lincoln County War, a battle between competing merchants and their cohorts in Lincoln, New Mexico, in 1878. Billy met the same fate as Jesse James, when he was shot dead in the darkened bedroom of his friend Pete Maxwell by Lincoln County Sheriff Pat Garrett at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, on July 14, 1881.

Early Years of Tiburcio Vasquez

While he never gained the same degree of fame as James and "The Kid," California had its own legendary outlaw in Tiburcio Vasquez during the same period. Vasquez was born in Monterey, California, in

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1835 and grew up during the Mexican Rancho period. He watched in horror, with his fellow Californios, as the Americans took over California after defeating Mexico in the war ending with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February, 1848, which ceded California and what would become the American Southwest to the United States. And he felt victimized by the rapid influx of Americans from the East coast during and after the California Gold Rush.

Vasquez began his life of crime after being accused of shooting and murdering Monterey County Constable William Hardmount during a fandango on September 2, 1854. Vasquez and his friends started a drunken brawl that night, after which Vasquez likely shot Hardmount while he was trying to arrest his friend, the outlaw Anastacio Garcia. Due to conflicting accounts of the murder, Vasquez was never arrested or charged.

Garcia likely introduced Vasquez to his criminal ways. After the Monterey fandango incident, Vasquez fled the town, never to openly return there again. In the early days of his outlaw career, Vasquez robbed cattle and horses, freight wagons, and stagecoaches. He rode with Garcia until February, 1857, when Garcia was forcibly taken out of a prison cell in Monterey by a vigilante mob and lynched.

The San Quentin Years

Later that year, Vasquez was arrested for stealing horses from a rancho along the Santa Clara River in Los Angeles County and was sentenced to five years in San Quentin prison, a harsh sentence for a first-time offender. In June, 1859, he escaped from San Quentin during a massive prison break. The next month he was arrested again for stealing horses and returned to San Quentin two months after his escape.

After two more unsuccessful escape attempts, Vasquez was finally released from prison in August, 1863. He immediately returned to his outlaw life, committing many offenses before being caught again in December, 1866, after participating in a crime spree in Sonoma County. The next month, he was sentenced to two years in San Quentin prison on burglary and grand larceny charges. After serving his sentence, he left San Quentin for the last time on June 4, 1870.

Vasquez at Tres Pinos

But Vasquez was just getting started. After a multitude of crimes over the next few years, Vasquez earned his "fifteen

minutes of fame" when he led a sensational robbery in the town of Tres Pinos (modern-day Paicines) just south of Hollister, California, in the Monterey-San Jose area.

In August 1873, Vasquez led a gang of five to eight men into Tres Pinos, taking over the town and killing three men in the process. On September 4, 1873, the Bakersfield newspaper *Southern Californian* opined: "Last week a band of Mexicans, numbering eight, led by one Tiburcio Vasquez, a notorious character, perpetuated one of the most appalling and atrocious crimes which it has ever befallen to our lot to record... The diabolical scoundrels appeared at the place in the broad day, a portion of them went into the store, and, after engaging the attention of the clerk, drew their weapons and demanded money and other effects... While this was going on, the other portion of the gang went to the hotel, and their demands not being complied with, they shot and killed Mr. Davisson and two other men and then ransacked the premises".

To his dying day, Vasquez denied ever killing anyone, but his testimony was contrary to that of eyewitnesses from Tres Pinos and his gang member Abdon Leiva.

The Betrayal of Abdon Leiva

After Tres Pinos, Vasquez became a sensation and a most-wanted outlaw. Sheriffs' posses were chasing him all over the state. He had fled to a ranch at Lake Elizabeth near the Antelope Valley. There he had a fling with Abdon Leiva's wife Rosaria. Leiva caught them together, angrily quit the gang, and turned himself in to Castaic land baron William Jenkins. Jenkins brought him down to Lyon's Station and turned him over to Los Angeles officers. Leiva would eventually testify against Vasquez at his murder trial in San Jose.

Leiva, a 29-year-old native of Chile, later spoke about his life with Vasquez to a reporter for the *San Francisco Daily Morning Call* newspaper. In the interview published September 30, 1873, Leiva relates that he first participated with Vasquez in the attack of a store in Firebaugh's Ferry. In that raid, they came away with around \$500 in cash and some jewelry.

Leiva claimed that this robbery spooked him, and he refused to join Vasquez on a subsequent theft of the Twenty-One-Mile House and an aborted train robbery near Gilroy. If successful, it would have been the first train robbery in California, shortly after the Jesse James gang infamously derailed a train near Adair, Iowa.

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After those heists, at a picnic in New Idria on August 18, Vasquez and Leiva's wife persuaded Leiva to participate in the Tres Pinos raid. Planning for Tres Pinos had taken place the day before at Leiva's house. They originally planned to rob the stage at New Idria and the store at Tres Pinos simultaneously, then escape to Sonora, Mexico, after a rendezvous at Elizabeth Lake. Vasquez later called off the stage robbery when he learned that New Idria mines boss Thomas Williams and family were passengers. He did not wish to rob Williams.

With their pursuers close at hand, Vasquez and Leiva made it to Elizabeth Lake after the Tres Pinos robbery. Vasquez asked Leiva to go out for provisions and not to return until the next day. But Leiva grew suspicious, came back that night, and caught Vasquez in bed with his wife. If not for gang member Clodoveo Chavez's intervention, Vasquez's life and career may have ended that night at the end of Leiva's gun.

Vasquez at Kingston

Vasquez committed another infamous robbery, taking over and sacking the town of Kingston in Fresno County in December, 1873. As reported in the Los Angeles Evening Express of December 29, 1873, "*Further particulars from Kingston, Fresno County, show that the robbery of that village, last evening, was perpetrated by Vasquez' band... They tied their horses on the bank of the river opposite Kingston, crossed the bridge on foot, and took possession of the hotel and two stores, they tied down about thirty-five men by covering their weapons in detail, and then proceeded to rifle the safes and money drawers of their contents, after which they robbed their victims of watches and other valuables*". Unlike Tres Pinos, the citizens of Kingston put up a valiant fight against the outlaws. They opened fire on the Vasquez gang with guns and revolvers from across the street, forcing them to retreat out of town. One of the robbers was captured and brought back to town, but as usual, Vasquez escaped.

The following month, California Governor Newton Booth offered an award for Vasquez's capture - - \$2000 dead, \$3000 alive. He subsequently increased the amounts to \$6000 and \$8000.

During the next few months, Vasquez eluded capture as he fled from the posses of Los Angeles County Sheriff William Rowland and Alameda County Sheriff Harry Morse. He robbed a stagecoach at the Coyote Holes stage station on the road between the Cerro Gordo silver mines in the Owens

Valley and Los Angeles. He then headed south, eventually ending up in Soledad Canyon, where he may have hidden out in or at least passed by a strange appearing geologic formation that today bears his name - Vasquez Rocks.

Hiding Out at Greek George's Home

By April, 1874, Vasquez emerged from his hideouts to take up residence at the Rancho La Brea home of Georgias Caralambo, better known as Greek George, a former camel driver for Edward Beale's camel experiment in the 1850s. Modern historians think that the ranch stood in present-day West Hollywood, near the intersection of Fountain Avenue and Kings Road. It was here that Vasquez's penchant for romancing women got him into trouble and ended his outlaw days.

After one final robbery at the Repetto Ranch in modern-day Monterey Park, Vasquez was chased by Sheriff Rowland's posse up the Arroyo Seco into the San Gabriel Mountains. He crossed over the mountains and possibly camped out at Vasquez Rocks before returning through Lyon's Station to Greek George's ranch.

The Capture of Vasquez

It was May, 1874; Vasquez made the tactical error of remaining at Greek George's ranch to continue a liaison with a lady after his friends had urged him to flee to Mexico. Sheriff Morse had gotten word of his whereabouts and relayed the information to Rowland.

On May 13, Rowland sent a posse led by Under-Sheriff Albert Johnson to capture Vasquez at Greek George's. The Sheriff's men hid out and observed the ranch from present-day Nichol's Canyon in the Hollywood Hills.

The next day, they apprehended a wagon driven by two Mexican men and forced them to go to the house occupied by Vasquez. They surrounded the house just as Greek George's wife opened the door and shouted a warning to the outlaw.

George Beers, a reporter with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was part of the group that captured Vasquez and described what he saw. "*Vasquez was eating his dinner, wholly unarmed, and there was no way for him to reach his arms... He sprang like a panther through an open window, only about eighteen inches square, and alighted on his feet, intending to flee towards the willow thicket; but, discovering his enemies springing towards him from that direction, he hurried up the west side... to get his horse*".

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Beers was outside waiting for Vasquez: *"I took a step to the right, and the moment I did so discovered a bareheaded Mexican in the act of bounding towards me, I fired upon him. I saw him throw up his hands, and those of our party to the right and from behind rushed upon him, and two or three other shots were fired"*.

In the aftermath of the shooting, Beers attended to Vasquez's injuries. *"Vasquez is a remarkable man. While looking for his wounds I placed my hand over his heart and found its pulsations gave no indication of excitement. His eye was bright, and there was a pleasant smile on his face and no tremor in his voice. He was polite and thankful for every attention...Although he thought and said that he was about to die...his expression of countenance was one of admiration of our determined attack and our good luck. 'You are good men - good men'. Someone said, 'We are sorry to have had to wound you so, but it could not be helped'. 'It is not your fault', he replied; 'I do not blame you. It was my own fault, and there is no one to blame. I should not have attempted to escape'"*.

The Sheriff's posse brought Vasquez to a Los Angeles jail where he spent nine days as an instant celebrity, with crowds of reporters and women clamoring to see him. Vasquez was charged with the murder of hotelkeeper Leander Davidson at Tres Pinos and was brought to San Jose to stand trial.

The Chronicle Interviews Leiva

After his capture, Vasquez tried to lay the blame on Leiva for the murders at Tres Pinos. In an interview with the *San Francisco Sunday Chronicle*, published on May 24, 1874, Leiva refuted Vasquez's claims and pinned two of the murders back on Vasquez. The first murder occurred at Andrew Snyder's general store. Leiva described: *"Our band consisted of Tiburcio Vasquez, myself, Teodoro Moreno, Clovaro Chavez, and Romulo Gonzalez. We came down to Tres Pinos from the New Idria road...We road up to Snyder's and entered the store... Gonzales and myself drew our pistols at the same time. After all the men had stretched themselves on the floor, Moreno handed me his pistol and proceeded to bind them. While this was going on, Vasquez and Chavez rode up...I saw Vasquez and Moreno chasing George Redford, the teamster, who had refused to lie down when ordered to do so. Redford had got near the stable when Vasquez shot him with his Henry rifle"*. Redford, who was deaf, had actually not understood the order to lie down and fled for the barn when he saw guns drawn.

The second murder occurred when Portuguese sheepherder Bernard Bahury approached the town's hotel and failed to understand an outlaw's order to lie down since he did not speak English. As per Leiva: *"Moreno was then standing in the passageway between the stable and the hotel, with his rifle in his hand, and soon after I saw Gonzalez come around from the other side of the store, inside of the fence, after the Portuguese sheep-herder. Gonzalez had a revolver in his hand. The sheepherder was about to jump over the fence when Gonzalez shot him. The man was not killed and made another effort to get over the fence, when Moreno plugged him with a Henry rifle ball. He then fell back dead."*

Leander Davidson was the last to die at Tres Pinos, while trying to shut the door to his hotel to save those inside. According to Leiva, *"Vasquez then went out and started for Davidson's, and I saw him raise his Henry rifle and fire the shot that killed Mr. Davidson."* Vasquez fired a shot through the door, which pierced through Davidson's heart, killing him instantly as he fell into his wife's arms.

The Hanging of Vasquez

Vasquez's celebrity status continued in San Jose, especially among the Hispanic population, who treated him as a hero. The trial took place in San Jose in January, 1875, where he was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. As were to be the fates of Jesse James and Billy the Kid after him, Tiburcio Vasquez met his untimely end on March 19, 1875, when they hung him in San Jose. Live by the sword, die by the sword. Witnesses reported his final word to be "pronto."

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When the Air Force (ours) Attacked Placerita Canyon

by John Boston

(The following is a chapter from Volume I of Boston's upcoming SCV history trilogy, "Ghosts, Ghouls, Myths & Monsters — The Most Haunted Town in America." When the site gets up and running, you can order each or all at thejohnboston.com or johnbostonbooks.com).

Humans carry an unhealthy fascination about being attacked by things from the sky. We Santa Claritans? We're not different. Over the last century-plus, we've witnessed all sorts of sightings of things that really shouldn't be hovering over our oft smoky skies. Pterodactyls. UFOs. Strange glowing metals from deep space. Hollywood. The Japanese Air Force. Our — own — Air Force.

From 1948 to 1975, cartoonist Walt Kelly created one of America's most beloved comic strips — Pogo. On April 22, 1970 (the first Earth Day), the talking possum uttered the famous line: "We have met the enemy and he is us."

On the theme of being attacked by tentacled extraterrestrials, Pogo pretty much captured the story of The SCV vs. UFOs. The attack from the skies began the morning of August 16, 1956. To twist someone else's famous quote: "It will live forever in local infamy."

Sarcastically, this event is known as — **The Battle of Palmdale!!**

Wait. Hold it. Stop right here. Alleged scholars are constantly misidentifying Things Santa Claritan and misplacing them in other parts of the globe. Take the above headline for example. The World Wide Web is rich in erroneous articles referring to a famous 1956 incident as, "The Battle of Palmdale."

Go get a marking pen. C'mon. Get up, scoot. Scratch out "Palmdale!!" in the headline above and write in: "Newhall!!" Here's the story...

This one-sided war started quite innocently, miles away at Point Mugu. An old Navy radio-controlled unmanned and prop-driven slowpoke drone airplane was flying over Castaic on August 16, and, like modern day cellphone coverage, the Navy (ours) lost reception. Blare of trumpets, the Air Force (ours) flies to the rescue.

The next few hours were like the Air Force (ours) was trying to swat a mosquito in an overstuffed china shop, using a ballpeen hammer and a chainsaw. Blindfolded.

A pair of Northrop F-89D Scorpions from the 437th Fighter Intercept Squadron stationed at Oxnard AFB (in Camarillo) took off like a pair of flying superheroes from a Marvel comic book. History is fond of messing with nouns and pronouns and writes that the two super jets fired a total of 208 Tiny Tim

rockets, attempting to blast the drone out of the sky as it limped above the normally quiet 1956 Santa Clarita Valley.

It wasn't the airplanes firing the rockets, it was the jackass pilots.

Besides no apparent training in common sense, the jet commandos were flying aircraft that could pretty much hit Warp 11, and the drone had the top speed of a balsa wood glider. Simply, the jets were flying so fast, they kept wildly zipping past the drone. Then, like a cartoon bulldog, they were skidding in the skies until Oregon to turn around.

Again, this is August. In Santa Clarita. The Air Force started several brush fires, totaling 1,000 acres and destroying everything from ranches to pick-up trucks. An army of 500 firefighters rushed in to battle these blazes.

Both pilots were lieutenants. One of the pilots? He was named Richard Hurliman. The other? Hans Einstein. Hans? He wasn't.

PLACERITA CANYON STRAIFED

As the drone fluttered mindlessly over Newhall, the hyper jets fired salvo after salvo. A couple of Newhall electricians, J.C. Babbitt and J.R. Johns, had taken a lunch break in Placerita Canyon. In one of those weird and fortuitous strokes, they discussed just staying in the truck to enjoy their midday meal. But it was August, and hot. Instead, Babbitt and Johns decided: Let's just sit under the shade of a nearby oak.

Good. Darn. Idea. The U.S. Air Force Scorpions emptied a tube, riddling the electricians' pick-up with ordnance. These weren't the only blue-collar workers attacked by their own armed forces. Oil workers, cowboys and a couple of handymen literally dove for cover as the jets reigned hell on Placerita Canyon and Sierra Highway. The jets caused fires in oil sumps on that hot August day. Several rockets landed just yards from an ammo factory building at Bermite on Soledad Canyon Road. After emptying their ammo, the crackerjack teams ran low on fuel and flew back to Oxnard, mission not so much accomplished.

The drone? Did we mention that as a bonus in being a target — it was painted bright fire engine red?

The sleepy little drone ran out of gas, banged into three giant electric poles, started another fire and crashed near the Palmdale Airport. Nearly 70 years later, it's still up for debate. Should the incident be referred to as "The Battle of Newhall" or "The Battle of Palmdale?" Garnishing a few sympathy votes, it should be noted the Air Force jets did actually fire directly into Palmdale residential areas, such as they were in 1956.

According to a 2015 recollection in The Los Angeles Times, those pilots (ours) put their final 30 rockets to good use:

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John Boston Article

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“As the drone passed over Palmdale’s downtown, Mighty Mouse rockets fell like hail. Edna Carlson, who lived in the home on Third Street East, said that a chunk of shrapnel from one Air Force rocket burst through the front window of her home, ricocheted off the ceiling, went through a wall and came to rest in a kitchen cupboard.”

Several people nearly died in this attack from not-so outer space. The Air Force said afterwards it was justified because they were the Air Force, and who was anyone to question them? Their justification of turning the SCV and Palmdale into a blackened, post-Apocalyptic battle ground, the drone might have crashed into someone and isn’t it better to be killed by a trained, non-communist pilot than an antique hobby craft kit?

Our U.S. Air Force was seriously embarrassed in this two-hour war. Against Palmdale and Newhall of all people, who, it should be pointed out, had but farm implements, framing hammers, and tea cozies with which to defend themselves. Millions of dollars had been spent to build state-of-the-art weaponry, especially for the Cold War.

But these modern weapons? Didn’t seem to work so hot.

I’ve searched without success to find out the career fates of those pilots who, after the automatic firing mode went berserk, switched to manual and couldn’t hit their rear ends with a tennis racquet and make-up mirror.

Probably ended up in the nosebleed corridors of the Pentagon. Ours...

(John Boston is earth’s most prolific satirist. He has penned more than 11,000 essays and has been named Best Serious or Best Humorous Columnist in America, several times to go along with 119 major journalism awards. Look for his SCV History series coming out shortly and the sequel to his bestselling novel, “Naked Came the Novelist.” And don’t forget to read his Time Ranger SCV History columns and Mr. SCV each week in The Mighty Signal.)



An Acorn a Day Keeps the Doctor Away by Cathy Martin

Also known as “weewish” or “wehish”, this is perhaps California’s oldest recipe.

The humble little acorn. This acorn dish was prepared and eaten by the California Indians; many still do enjoy this dish. Well, maybe the older members might. The recipe is from Elizabeth Lachappa of the Mesa Grande band (near San Diego).

*She prefers the White Oak acorns. She states that when the acorns fall to the ground, they are considered ripe. Collect as many as you want or need.

*Next step, they must be dried. To do this they are arranged on clean dry flat rocks and baked in the sun. You must turn the acorns often, so an even roast is achieved; no black burnt spots.

*Once dried, grab a round rock and crack them open, or you could use a hammer. Your choice. Place the shelled acorns in a basket and keep them warm, preferably next to the stove. The skins will become dark and easy to peel off.

*Now you can pound and grind them until they are almost a powder.

*Put the meal into a basket lined with a clean cloth. Rinse with warm water as many times necessary, until the bitterness is gone. It might take a whole day!

*Put the meal into a pot with equal amount of water and cook it slowly until it turns into the consistency of mush.

*It can be eaten hot or cold

She suggests a nice way to enjoy it cold: Place the meal into loaf pans and let it set over night. It becomes a solid and can be sliced and enjoyed with beans or alone as a snack if you’re hungry. A little salt can be added if you like, but never, never add sugar. It’s a side dish, not a dessert.

She claims “When our people ate it all the time, they were always healthy and lived to be very old, with good teeth and strong eyesight”

This sounds like a cure for my failing eyesight....hmmm I have oak trees. Maybe my cure is just lying on the ground outside my window?

Camulos Connections to the St. Francis Dam Disaster

by Maria Christopher

The April 3, 1928, edition of the Los Angeles Evening Express addressed the rumor that Camulos, the “Home of Ramona” had been devastated in the St. Francis Dam disaster. August Rubel, the 28-year-old owner of the 1,815-acre agricultural spread, related the good news that all of the historic buildings and orchards were intact, and only a small corner of the property, containing orange groves, had been swept away. The article that appeared two weeks after the disaster, did NOT talk about how the young family had slept through the night as the raging floodwaters of the Santa Clara River passed not “far from the rancho”, but just a few yards away. It did NOT talk about how a large contingent of naked survivors from the Edison work camp at the Blue Cut on the Los Angeles-Ventura County Line arrived on foot and were fed and clothed. The article did NOT talk about Rubel’s weeks of cleanup activities searching for bodies and clearing debris by hand and with a bulldozer. The article gave no clue to what would end up as a \$209,029.25 claim settlement against the City of Los Angeles. In fact, this was the only dam related story on that newspaper page. Life had moved on.

Instead, August Rubel’s interview focused on other misunderstandings about the property. The Rubel’s were NOT tearing down the historic structures. Ramona curio seekers were NOT welcome. Camulos was NOT on public property, despite previous attempts to make it a state park.

He did pledge that, as “Californians by adoption”, they were committed to historical preservation and the hope that “some day soon we intend to build a museum, something on a small scale of the old California Mission”. In it he would put all the old del Valle family things they found around the place, what

“many old Californians would call junk.” Within a few years, August would set up a small museum on the upper level of the 1867 winery, but it was open by invitation only. The Rubel’s also took most of the paper artifacts the del Valle family had left behind and donated them to the Huntington Library in 1933. So, he never BUILT a museum.

However, about 66 years later his descendants would join with other local history preservationists to form the nonprofit Rancho Camulos Museum. Through their efforts, in the year 2000 40 acres of the “Home of Ramona”, that is still part of the 1800 acre privately owned Camulos Ranch, were dedicated as a National Historical Landmark. We are fortunate that it was NOT destroyed in the St. Francis Dam disaster. Now (pending reopening after COVID-19 closure) the museum is open to visitors only when accompanied by a volunteer or staff member, or for a private event. See Ranchocamulos.org for information.





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Photo by Gordon Glattenberg

February 9 was the 50th anniversary of the San Fernando Earthquake. While the epicenter of the earthquake was on the east side of the Santa Clarita Valley, the worst damage and loss of life were in Sylmar. In this view in Newhall on the morning of the quake, a gas line has ruptured on Newhall Avenue at Lyons Avenue, and the resulting leak burned through much of the day.