



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

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May-June 2021

Calendar

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

Tuesday, June 1

Deadline for the July-August Dispatch

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

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



Los Angeles has been rattled by many ground-shaking events throughout its history. 1857, 1933, 1971, 1987, and 1994 are some of the famous earthquake years which were seared into the minds of many present, past, and long-gone Los Angeles and Santa Clarita residents. But a lesser-known earthquake occurred locally in Pico Canyon near Newhall in April, 1893. On April 4, 1893, an earthquake with its epicenter in Pico Canyon, and with an estimated Richter Scale magnitude of 5.75, rocked the Santa Clarita Valley at 11:40 AM. It was felt as far away as San Diego, but was particularly strong in Mojave, Ventura, and San Bernardino.

As reported in the *San Francisco Examiner* of April 9, 1893: "LOS ANGELES, April 8 – Alarming reports of seismic disturbances have just been received from the residents of the oil region of Newhall, thirty-five miles distant from this city". Starting with a slight shake in Los Angeles itself, the quake was followed by "a terrifying series of temblors, accompanied by subterranean explosions". The shaking caused many dangerous landslides in the mountains surrounding Pico Canyon. An eyewitness to the quake related this account to the *Examiner*: "I was driving this morning when my horse became frightened without apparent cause, and there came a rumbling sound which grew terrifying. I looked up and saw an awful site. Landslides from every peak in sight came tumbling down with huge boulders. The mountains appeared as if myriads

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

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

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President's Message

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of volcanoes had burst forth and were combining their efforts towards universal destruction. When I got to the long bridge, I saw Mr. Thomas standing dazed, holding to the railing, and others came running across the bridge. The earth opened in a number of places and the scene was indescribable. Men cried, prayed and swore, and one kept shouting 'My God, we are all going down to hell'. When I reached my house, I found everything upset. Pictures, dishes and everything breakable were smashed, and two stoves were broken all to pieces. All the afternoon, lighter shocks continued, and also through the night."

Another witness related, "On Wednesday night, just as I had gone to bed, 'Crash!', came another great shock. All night long they continued, keeping us up until morning; and all day Thursday they continued, each preceded by a heavy subterranean explosion. The house the foreman lived in was demolished this time. Last night was less exciting, and at three o'clock this (Friday) morning, we had another, which was fully as terrifying as the first. The shocks were worse in the canyon here than elsewhere, but at Newhall and all around this part of the county they have been terrifying." (The "underground explosions" were actually the quake's P-waves, which can be heard and which arrive before the S-waves, which can be felt.)

By the next day, the *Examiner* and *Los Angeles Herald* reported at least 40 to 50 aftershocks from the initial earthquake. "A *Herald* reporter went up to Newhall and the canyon today and found the occurrences of the past week the principal topic of conversation, and the accounts first given not at all exaggerated." Interestingly, although only eight miles from Pico Canyon, the residents of the town of Newhall did not feel many of the aftershocks. Shaking was more pronounced out at the Newhall Ranch, Saugus, and throughout the mountains north of Newhall near Piru and Castaic.

The *Herald* further stated: "Just what connection the oil region has had with the earthquakes is something that scientists may have theories about, but it is a fact that the greatest disturbance was in and around the oil wells of the Pacific Coast and San Francisco Star Oil Works companies at the head of Pico Canyon." This fact was not lost on nearby neighbors of the oil region. Historian Leon Worden, in his pamphlet "*The Story of Mentryville*" noted "many folks

in 1893 believed [Alexander] Mentry's drilling works set off the earth's movement. Mentry dismissed the notion." John Boston, in his history column in the *Newhall Signal* in 2003, stated that the earthquake "caused an angry mob to march from Newhall to Mentryville. Locals blamed the drilling for oil in Pico as the cause of the quake, and some demanded they stop." There was, however, no clear evidence that the earthquake was caused by the oil works.

The 130 residents of Mentryville in Pico Canyon experienced a hellish week following the big earthquake. The *Los Angeles Herald* opined: "A temblor that would, as it did, tilt up great oil tanks full of oil, detach immense boulders from the mountain sides weighing tons, and cause big surface fissures in the ground in various places, was not calculated to make people rest well at night, and when these disturbances continued at irregular intervals for five days it is a wonder that the women and children in the cañon especially have borne the ordeal as bravely as they did."

Alexander Mentry himself, the superintendent of the oil fields in Pico Canyon, and driller of CSO Number 4 in 1876, the first commercially successful oil well in California history, gave his recollections of the quake to a *Herald* reporter shortly after the event. "It was a few minutes after twelve o'clock, and I was just starting down for dinner. The men had nearly all left the derricks. Suddenly there was a peculiar swaying of the ground and an explosion which I can hardly describe. It was heavier than any blast I ever heard. I was on horseback and the horse was frightened very badly. At first, I thought of a boiler, but looking along the San Fernando range, as far as I could see east and west, there was a blinding cloud of dust. It rose directly up from the top of the range and was thick. All around me the dust rose from the hills in the near vicinity and earth and boulders came tumbling down. The shock lasted between ten or fifteen seconds. I looked across the valley and saw the same thing in the Castac hills. That shock was the worst, and it was accompanied by a rumbling sound. The shocks since that time have been smaller ones. They have not affected the flow of oil by either increasing or diminishing it. There was not the slightest disturbance in any of the wells. I have been here for nineteen years as the superintendent of the oil wells, and this has been the first time there has been an earthquake in this vicinity."

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President's Message

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Residents of Pico Canyon and Mentryville related stories of broken and scattered crockery in almost all the homes, "and a lot of milk pans full of milk, a quantity of eggs and the stove and nearly every loose article in one house were thrown in a jumble on the floor and mixed up with the ashes." A cellar of one house was caved in at one corner, with the house nearly falling over. Another cellar in Mentryville caved in and almost buried alive a young man. The large brick chimney of the schoolhouse at Mentryville collapsed. "Women ran out of their homes nearly frightened to death, the chickens ran for cover as fast as they could, and the horses and cattle ran tearing up and down the roads." A large boulder came down a mountainside and smashed the pipelines and tanks below. Oil derricks which ranged from 40 to 70 feet high swayed violently, but none of them fell over. Roads became impassable as they filled with dirt and boulders. An old adobe house on the Newhall Ranch northwest of Newhall was completely destroyed.

The *San Francisco Examiner* report of April 10, 1893 concluded, "It will take but one more heavy shake to depopulate the canyon, for the effect of the strain on the people's nerves is extremely severe."

Sources used for this article:

San Francisco Examiner, April 9, 1893

San Francisco Examiner, April 10, 1893

Los Angeles Herald, April 10, 1893

Elesmerecanyon.com/Stan Walker

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More recent earthquakes were messy, too. This is San Fernando Road in Newhall, 1971



A building at San Fernando Road and Market St, 1971



The 1994 earthquake ruptured an oil pipe under McBean Parkway

Cultivating Camulos Connections

by Maria Christopher

The name “Camulos” first appeared in the diary of the Portolá Expedition of 1769. In early August, as the party made its way North, following the river they had named the Santa Clara, they encountered a Native American village they were told was called Camulos. That reportedly was the Chumash name for a Tataviam village that in the Tataviam language was known as Coaynga. The diary describes a friendly encounter where the travelers were given sustenance of acorns, seeds, and pine nuts. The name Camulos has been variously translated to including juniper berry, gathering place, place of refuge, or place of food. Camulos was one of several native villages thriving near the Piru Creek. In Mission times, Piru creek became the border between the San Fernando and San Buenaventura Mission lands.

In 1839, when Antonio del Valle received the roughly 48,000-acre Mexican land grant of Rancho San Francisco, the Westernmost portion of the San Fernando Mission lands was known as Camulos. After Antonio’s death in 1841, when the land was divided, his eldest son Ignacio inherited the roughly 1,800-acre parcel that continued to be known as Camulos.

Through the decades of the Del Valle occupancy, Native Americans continued to have a significant role at Camulos. In the 1850s, ancestors of current tribal citizens provided construction labor for the adobe hacienda, and they subsequently worked as agricultural laborers and domestic servants for the ranch owners.

The Del Valle family was succeeded in 1924 by the August and Mary Rubel Family. Their descendants still own

Camulos Ranch today. However, following the damage done during the 1994 Northridge earthquake, a 40-acre portion of Camulos Ranch became the Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark. The Rancho Camulos Museum was founded to provide historic preservation and restoration of the buildings and grounds, as well as provide access to and tell the story of this place of cultural heritage.

It was Alan Salazar, chairman of the tribal Elders Council, along with other members of the Fernandino Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, who recognized that an important piece of the story was missing. They reached out to the museum with the idea of creating a Tataviam interpretive area at Camulos.

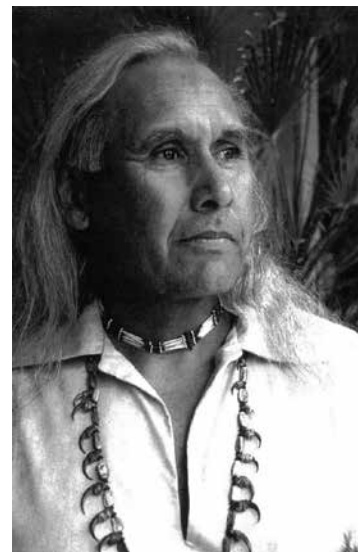
Built at the direction of tribal citizens, the resulting village provides a cultural space that can be utilized by the tribe for cultural and spiritual purposes, as well as an educational space that can be enjoyed by the public. All of the work was done by volunteers over about a two-year period, using traditional methods and materials. It was dedicated in 2019.

On Saturday, May 1, 2021, the Rancho Camulos Museum is honored to host Educator, Storyteller, Tataviam Elder and Activist, Alan Salazar at 2:00 PM via Zoom. He will share his new Children’s book, *Tata, the Tataviam Towhee: A Tribal Story*, and talk about Rancho Camulos’ historical connection to the Tataviam people. Don’t miss out on this impactful event!

Register in advance for this webinar at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_EyvWxebdTJ0c2J8GftxkLQ. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.



Tataviam Village at Camulos



Alan Salazar

Back in the Days of Undercrowded Schools

by John Boston

There are a lot of good hearts and butt ugly schools in Santa Clarita. I've always marveled at the pool of talent and wealth we have in this community. Yet, still, over the years, all the local verve, creativity and passion gets watered down. In the end, we keep creating these architectural eyesores and cramming our tiny alleged loved ones into them.

We're also pretty darn crowded. I look at the mess of trailer park bungalows crammed onto the front lawns of campuses and there's no finger of blame to be pointed at administrators, teachers or even Sacramento.

It's us; silly, constipated us.

I remember a story from years ago, about bonny, bonny Scotland; the few souls there had quite the opposite problem. On Papa Stour, one of the Shetland Islands, they built a perfectly nice new school. It was small, but had its own special art room, spacious classroom, secretary, three computers, satellite TV, one teacher, and — one student.

As a former class clown, that 1:1 ratio would have put a damper on my ongoing hijinks.

So what happens? The lone Papa Stour student ditched school, so, the campus was closed.

At the expense of British taxpayers, the government kept the school open just so the 6-year-old girl and only student on this lonely, fog-shrouded island, could have a decent education.

The school hired a new teacher. Then, get this. The mom kept her girl home from school because the mom wasn't in on the decision on who should be brought in as teacher. It's a long way away. I didn't know the mom. I didn't know the teacher. But the entire episode seems to be a mini poster on the absurdity of running a school district.

Here in the Santa Clarita, we've had our own interesting anecdotes about the other extreme of over-crowded classrooms. Granted, they all happened a long, long time ago. We've had the long-forgotten New Era Elementary, built in 1924 around the first serious bend of Bouquet Canyon. It was the last of our little red schoolhouses and was voted out of existence prior to World War II. Heck of an election. Locals voted 14-5 to abandon the campus during the Great Depression. There was Honby Elementary in Honby, which still exists on most maps. It's where Mike's Tire is on Soledad, but hardly a soul today could tell you what, exactly, is a Honby. Bee (after Bee Canyon) and San Francisquito elementaries were swept away by the monster St. Francis Dam Flood of 1928, as were many of the families and students.

One of the crown jewels of Santa Clarita history is Mentryville and its little red Felton Schoolhouse. The campus was named after an oil executive and United States senator, Charles N. Felton, financial backer of Demetrius Scofield. The little one-room Felton schoolhouse was built in 1885, and it was there the many children of the oil town workers studied.

When the oil boom went bust here in the 1920s, only four kids were enrolled in the tiny Felton School District. A state law then mandated you needed five kids in order to be a district. Walton Young was the principal and Alex Mentry's successor as manager of the oil business. Young was literally a day or so away to folding up the school and district when, one day, he hired a new worker from Canada. It's said that Walton got up from behind his desk and hugged the man. Hugging was a rarity prior to the late 20th century between men. Why did Young hire the new oil worker? The guy had nine kids. That one family kept our tiny school at the tail end of Pico Canyon from closing.

Here's another one cool story: The southwest end of Santa Clarita is the rugged mountain boundary separating our hometown from Chatsworth in the San Fernando Valley. It's called Oat Mountain. This area got its name for the abundance of wild oats that grow there. You can see all the way to the Pacific. It's part Simi, Chatsworth and Santa Clarita. It is a confusing mess with all sorts of trails, free-range cattle and horses, paintball war grounds, and lots of Don't Go Here's and Don't Go There's.

Oat is at 3,747 feet, and in many winters, it's one of the first places to see snow. Oat Mountain was originally homesteaded in the 1880s by an enterprising woman. The only name I've seen for her is the proper Miss Naud. She built her cabin and barn by herself, by hand. From time to time, over the years, men with guns came to visit, trying to force her off her land. Up until the 1960s, you could still see bullet holes in the wood ranch house from the gun battles between Miss Naud and would-be land thieves. It was a Nike missile base from the 1957-1974, used as a SWAT training ground, and today it looks like a long-lost hippie camp with graffiti walls. It's not to be confused with the pristine Orcutt Ranch Horticultural Center in West Hills today.

During the Depression of the 1930s, Miss Naud sold her land to the oil magnate, William Warren Orcutt. Actually, Orcutt was famous for being the petroleum genius who developed ground-breaking technology using scientific geology for California's oil business. He also was a paleontologist who brought the La Brea Tarpit's ancient skeletons to the world's

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John Boston Article

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scientific community. The California town of Orcutt is named after Bill, as is the Colorado town of Orcutt. He ran a gentleman's cattle ranch out of Oat Mountain as a hobby.

Orcutt hired a cowboy named Jonesy Willett, and his wife, Velma, to run the place in 1934. Jonesy had done a fair amount of cowboying in his early years and had even reportedly worked for Buffalo Bill in his Wild West Show. I have to admit, writing about the history of our valley for nearly 50 years now, a little ooch creeps in when someone boasts they rode with Buffalo Bill Cody. Jonesy said he did, but then, so did "Buffalo" Tom Vernon, the perpetrator of the great Saugus Train Robbery of 1929, and half the population of Ireland.

Anyhow, Orcutt was the millionaire with a heart of gold. Orcutt bought the huge spread as a hobby. The Willett family had three school-age children, and because Newhall or even Mentryville was a bit too far to travel to school daily, Orcutt built a small schoolhouse so the kids could get an education. Not only did Orcutt build the tiny campus, but he also somehow finagled the county of Los Angeles to supply a full-time teacher to man, or in this case, woman, the little elementary school and its 3-student student body. Orcutt paid the teacher — Miss Pearl Whitelock — out of his own pocket to live on the ranch and teach the Willett kids. The school would close, if memory serves, in 1937.

The school on Oat Mountain was the valley's forgotten campus and was called Mary Logan Elementary, named after Orcutt's mother's maiden name.

Back in those days, I don't think Jonesy or Velma would ever dare think about holding their kids and the entire student body out of class. It's kind of tough to do when the campus and the teacher, Miss Pearl Whitelock, are right across the driveway.

With 119 major awards, John Boston is America's most prolific humorist and satirists. Look for the launch of his new publishing company, John Boston Books. The first offering is the trilogy: "Ghosts, Ghouls, Myths & Monsters: The Most Haunted Town in America — The Santa Clarita Valley."

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A Railroad Recipe by Cathy Martin

Back around the turn of the 20th century, traveling by rail was often a luxury. To make the journey even more comfortable, the rail lines had a variety of cars with food and beverage service: Dining Cars, Buffet Cars, Cafe Cars, Grill Room Cars, Cafe Observation Cars, and Parlor Cars. All of them served food; some had limited offerings, while liquor service was available in others. The Cafe Car had a dining area and a card room located in the back of the car: Fancy!

Many railroads had their own distinctive china patterns, with each pattern tending to represent the region the railroad served. One of the most famous was the Santa Fe's Mimbrenño pattern, with each china piece having a different pictograph representing the Mimbres Tribe's pottery. This china was exclusively used on the Super Chief and was designed by architect Mary Colter. The Southern Pacific Railroad had California Poppies on its china. The SCV Historical Society has a few pieces of this Poppy-pattern china on display in the museum.

Like the china patterns, the rail lines had different food offerings on all of their routes. They used what food was readily available at each supply point. In California, we have avocados, so it would make sense that avocados would be on the menu in some form.

Here is a sample of what was offered on Southern Pacific's dining cars. The following recipe was taken from the pages of *Dining by Rail*, by James Porterfield.

Avocado Cocktail

Ingredients: 1 medium avocado, 2 Tbsp. catsup, 2 Tbsp. French dressing, and juice of 1/2 a lemon.

Cut the avocado in half and remove the pit. Use a melon-baller to scoop avocado from its shell. Heap avocado balls into cocktail glasses. Combine the rest of the ingredients in a bowl, mix thoroughly. Cover each avocado portion with a spoonful of the mixed dressing from the bowl. Serve chilled.

If you are interested in more details about the dining cars and the recipes that they served, we have copies of the book "Dining by Rail" for sale at the SCV Historical Society's Museum Gift Shop. Please email or call 661 254-1275 for details.



*Mimbrenño
China*

Replacing the Crossbuck at the Saugus Train Station

The original crossbuck (railroad-crossing sign) was destroyed by a truck in 2010. Mike Jarel and Manny Santana replaced it this winter. Its lower end is now protected by a square steel pipe which acts as a bollard.





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We live in earthquake country! The Sylmar Earthquake happened 50 years ago this February, on February 9, 1971. It ruptured a gas line on Newhall Avenue at Lyons Avenue, which burned all day. See page 1.