



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

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November - December 2021

Calendar

Due to ongoing construction, Heritage Junction is closed until further notice.

Wednesday, December 1

Deadline for the January - February Dispatch

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



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

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



Three men who fate brought together on September 14, 1924, Gus LeBrun, Jack Pilcher, and Ed Brown, shared one thing in common: They were all

to meet violent ends, two on that day and one shortly thereafter.

Gus LeBrun and the LeBrun Family

Augustine C. (Gus) LeBrun was known as the "black sheep" of the LeBrun family of San Francisquito Canyon, especially when he drank too much. He was born sometime in 1884, most likely on the LeBrun ranch, to French immigrant Constant LeBrun and his wife, Baja California native Matea Saiz LeBrun, the daughter of a Scotch-Irish pioneer. Before emigrating to America, Constant was a sailor in the French Navy and came from

the Bordeaux region on France's Atlantic Coast. He and his four brothers served aboard a French vessel in the early 1860s. They all jumped ship when the vessel came ashore near Monterey, California, and stayed in America. The brothers all parted ways to avoid knowing each other's whereabouts if any of them were captured. Constant roamed homeless across the western American frontier in the ensuing years as a prospector and miner.

Constant and Matea met when he worked as a miner in the Ensenada area, near her rancho home. Soon after their marriage in 1867, they moved to the Antelope Valley and had a son, Frank LeBrun, their second child. They would eventually have nine children, including Frank's brother Gus. The LeBrun family moved to San Francisquito Canyon from the Antelope Valley, where they

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President's Message

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homesteaded a ranch. Later, the ranch was sold to the City of Los Angeles and became the ill-fated St. Francis Dam and reservoir site. Constant died at age 64 in 1888 and was buried at the Ruiz Cemetery. Matea died in 1947. At the time, she was considered the oldest resident of Soledad Township at age 96.

Frank LeBrun

Gus' older brother Frank was renowned as the last of the Santa Clarita Valley muleskinners, a veteran driver of twenty-mule team wagons. Born in 1878 near Fairmont in the Antelope Valley, he moved with his parents to San Francisquito Canyon at the age of six. Over the years, his jobs included cutting oak trees, to burn the oak wood to make charcoal. He was also a cowboy and wrangler on the Newhall Ranch, herding cattle and horses on long trail drives from Newhall to Santa Maria through Ventura and over the San Marcos Pass. While on the Newhall Ranch, he also began driving mule teams pulling wagon loads of oil drilling equipment. When William Mulholland began constructing the Los Angeles Aqueduct in 1908, Frank was hired as a muleskinner leading twenty-mule teams in hauling lumber, cement, and other materials from Saugus to the ongoing project in San Francisquito Canyon.

In 1913, Frank homesteaded 160 acres close by his parent's farm in San Francisquito Canyon, but he moved to Newhall before the St. Francis Dam disaster in 1928. His son George LeBrun recalled visiting the dam site with his father one week before the dam's collapse: "We saw the red water leaking from the sides of the dam and didn't like the way it looked." Frank lost many friends and a sister in the disaster. He spent the next few days identifying bodies in Ventura, Fillmore, and Santa Paula. Starting in the 1930s, Frank raised cattle on leased land north of Castaic and collected honey from his beehives. He continued grazing and rounding up cattle until age 85. Frank LeBrun died in Newhall in 1974 at the age of 95. He and his wife, Clara Ashby LeBrun, are buried at the Catholic cemetery in Piru.

Constable Jack Pilcher

John Samuel "Jack" Pilcher was Newhall's famous Constable in the early 1920s. Born in 1880 at Port Townsend, Washington, he married childhood sweetheart Emma Bader at age 17. The Pilchers and their three children moved to Kern County in 1902, where Jack worked as an oil driller. In 1906, Jack bought a ranch in Chatsworth and became a lawman. He was transferred to Newhall in the

Soledad District in 1922. Five years before Pilcher arrived in Newhall, Congress passed the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution, establishing the nationwide Prohibition of alcohol. By 1919, 36 States ratified the Amendment, and Prohibition became the law. Later that year, Congress passed the Volstead Act, prohibiting the manufacture, importation, sale, and transport of alcohol in the United States. The Volstead Act went into effect on January 17, 1920, the official beginning of the Prohibition era. As the new Constable at Newhall, Pilcher was responsible for enforcing the Prohibition law. By all accounts, he took the job seriously. According to Santa Clarita historian Jerry Reynolds, illegal stills had proliferated in the Newhall area in the early days of Prohibition. In his first week on the job, Pilcher turned in \$2400 in fines to the local court for illegal bootlegging of alcohol. In fact, Pilcher was kept so busy fighting bootleggers that Deputy Constable Ed Brown was brought in to assist him in January 1923.

The Jenks Harris Robbery

On December 11, 1922, a gang of four bandits robbed the Fillmore State Bank in Piru. Three bandits entered the bank as Bank President C.E. Spencer was alone, closing up for the day; all had large-caliber revolvers, one had a suitcase and the other a handbag. After locking the bank doors and drawing the shades, the robbers scooped up \$5000 in currency, \$900 in silver, and \$300 worth of stamps, using the suitcase. Spencer's six-year-old daughter Mary Ella, having just arrived from school, was sitting at her father's desk. Spencer later recounted, "they started to lock Mary and me in the vault, but the leader demurred. He said it might hurt the little girl, and because the bank was about to close anyway, the robbery might not be noticed until morning. Threatening to shoot me if I yelled, they threw me into the auto, and we sped toward Los Angeles". On the ride to Los Angeles, the robbers politely put away their revolvers when Mary began to cry. They dumped Spencer and his daughter in Westlake Park, at the home of his sister-in-law, changed their license plates, and sped off. Spencer's wife notified authorities when he didn't return home that night.

The leader of this outlaw gang turned out to be a Western film actor named Jenks "Jinx" Harris. In addition to the Piru robbery, Harris and his crew were suspected of many other bank robberies, streetcar hold-ups, bootlegging, and the smuggling of Chinese people, liquor, and narcotics from

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Mexico. On December 19, 1922, a series of raids by Federal and county officers and private detectives rounded up six of the Harris gang members. They recovered much of the loot from the Piru robbery. The arrested suspects included 28-year-old Harris, Henry and Lucy Loggins, Virgil B. Moore (President of the Pacific Autoplane Company), George F. Pruitt, and film actor Harold Gillette. Henry Loggins and Pruitt confessed to participating in the bank robbery at Piru. They implicated Harris and Gillette as the other participants that day.

Harris was captured at the Sequoia Hotel in Los Angeles. He admitted to conceiving of the bank robbery while working on location in Piru on the Herbert Rawlinson movie "Confidence," in which he played a "hardy mountain marshal protecting payrolls with a ready pistol." Harris told his captors, "Dad always told me if I did something to do a big job and I thought I saw my chance at Piru. Now don't bother me cause I'm hiring out to the government." While imprisoned at Santa Monica Jail, he claimed that he robbed the bank to help lift the mortgage on his parent's home in Blanchard, Oklahoma. Harris had met Gillette, the driver of the getaway car, at Universal Studios. Loggins was his childhood friend.

Another member of the Jenks Harris gang was captured in a house in Castaic Canyon on December 24, when Newhall Constable Jack Pilcher organized a posse after being tipped off to a man suspected of participating in the Piru robbery hiding at the house of Jack McAlester. Members of the posse included Newhall Deputy Constables Wertz and Brown, Port Miller, Ralph Carr, G.T. Doelle, J.H. Pennywitt, and Pete Daries. Later in the day, they were joined by a group of County lawmen. All the men were heavily armed, in preparation for a fight with the fugitive. That morning the agents found and arrested O.J. Carlson without any resistance. Carlson was not later charged in the bank robbery incident.

Harris, Loggins, Gillette, and Pruitt pleaded guilty on December 26 to charges of bank robbery when arraigned before Ventura Superior Court Judge Merle Rogers. They were sent to San Quentin Prison to begin sentences of one year to life each.

But probably the most famous, or infamous, incident of Jack Pilcher's career involved the aforementioned Gus LeBrun, who several years earlier had shot A. G. Thibadeaux.

The LeBrun-Thibadeaux Feud

LeBrun had developed a reputation as a "bad man." He had previously made news headlines after gunning down A.G. Thibadeaux in Newhall on October 7, 1916, ending a

longtime feud between the two men. The feud had started during a "friendly" poker game four years prior. During a dispute over an ante in the game, Thibadeaux shot and seriously wounded LeBrun. He was placed on probation after a preliminary hearing. Shortly after recovering from his injury, LeBrun moved to a home across the street from the Thibadeaux family. For three years, the two men lived next to each other without incident.

Just before midnight on October 7, 1916, Thibadeaux went to a tamale wagon for a meal. LeBrun crossed the street and met him at the wagon. Another man produced a bottle of whiskey, resulting in an argument over Prohibition. As they discussed the subject, both Thibadeaux and LeBrun agreed that they would vote dry because whiskey had caused their previous incident at the poker game. After further discussion, Thibadeaux turned to go home. Without warning, LeBrun declared, "You'll not go home this time." With that, he pulled a revolver and shot Thibadeaux three times before fleeing the scene. A Sheriff's posse tracked LeBrun through Bouquet Canyon to a ranch four miles above Newhall and eventually caught up to him at his home. He was captured and brought back to Newhall, where the still conscious Thibadeaux identified him as his assailant. From there, LeBrun was taken to the County jail. Thibadeaux later recovered from his injuries, and LeBrun, who was initially charged with murder, pleaded guilty to assault with a deadly weapon on February 26, 1917.

The deaths of Jack Pilcher, Ed Brown, and Gus LeBrun will be described in the conclusion of this report in the January - February issue.

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Camulos Connections - Charles Fletcher Lummis

by Maria Christopher

Charles Fletcher Lummis was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1859, nearly nine years after California became a state. However, he became a leading advocate for early California historical preservation, and he played a leading role in promoting the romantic fantasy heritage of “Old California” and the Californio lifestyle, as interpreted today at the Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark.

Lummis grew up in Massachusetts and dropped out of Harvard (where he had been a classmate of Theodore Roosevelt) in his senior year. He relocated to Cincinnati, where he married and worked at a newspaper. A job opportunity with the *Los Angeles Times* literally sent him walking across the American southwest in 1884, his first encounter with the Native American and Hispanic cultures. He chronicled his travel in numerous dispatches. Once in Los Angeles he worked as the first city editor of the *Times* under the reportedly demanding pace set by publisher Harrison Gray Otis.

A “Renaissance Man”, Charles Lummis became known as a journalist, prolific writer, historian, photographer, collector of artifacts, ethnographer, archaeologist, poet, and even the Los Angeles City Librarian. He was a founder of the Landmarks Club and also the Southwest Society (which became the Southwest Museum and is now part of the Autry Museum restoration of the Spanish California Missions). Charles Lummis also played a role in establishing the legacy of Rancho Camulos, The Home of Ramona, which is the focus of this article.

Charles Lummis may have heard about Helen Hunt Jackson’s story of *Ramona* when it first appeared serialized in the *Christian Union Magazine* around the time of his cross-country walk, but most certainly when it was published as a novel in 1884. As its popularity grew, inquiring minds wanted to know, where was the real “Home of Ramona”? Helen Hunt Jackson had never revealed the exact location of the fictional Moreno Rancho in the golden hills of Southern California. Enterprising

businessmen, and operators of the competing Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroads, each promoted their preferred location, Rancho Guajome (north of San Diego), or Camulos Ranch (west of Los Angeles) both of which Jackson had visited before writing the novel. There is no record of Lummis ever visiting Guajome; however, documentation exists that he did visit Camulos. He became an advocate for promoting Camulos as “The Home of Ramona”. It is not clear if he was dispatched by Otis or was influenced by former California State Senator Reginaldo del Valle, son of the widow Ysabel del Valle (mistress of Camulos). Perhaps it was just Lummis’ journalistic inquisitiveness that initially drew him there. An



Charles Lummis

article in the December 18, 1886, edition of the *Los Angeles Times* chronicles Reginaldo del Valle’s hosting a group of distinguished Angelinos on the first excursion to Camulos on the Southern Pacific. Perhaps the unidentified “representative of the *Los Angeles Times*” was Lummis. In 1887, he spent about a week at Camulos, and numerous photographs of Camulos exist with the copyright “Charles Lummis 1887”. He incorporated about 10 of these cyanotypes into a hand-made limited 1888 self-published book called “*Home of Ramona*”. His subject matter identified unique items at Camulos Ranch that he felt clearly matched the fictitious Moreno Ranch in Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel. One of the copies of that rare book can be seen

by appointment at the Marie Wren Research Library at the Rancho Camulos Museum.

Del Valle family history says that while there in 1887, Lummis fell in love with Camulos, and he also fell in love with one of the del Valle granddaughters, Susanita. That alliance was discouraged by her family because of their differences in age and religion, and because he was currently married. However, he did give her an expanded version of his photographic compilation, including several poems dedicated to her. The “*Susanita del Valle album*” was cherished by her descendants for many generations, and now is preserved in the Huntington Library.

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Camulos Connections - Charles Lummis

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In 1888 Lummis suffered a mild stroke that left his left side paralyzed. He spent a long recovery period in the pueblos of New Mexico, and traveling in the Southwest and South America, collecting artifacts that would become the holdings of the Southwest Museum. On returning to Los Angeles, he continued his writings. He founded the Landmarks Club in 1895 to foster restoration of the missions, and several del Valle family members joined in that effort. In 1897 he constructed his home of rocks, El Alisal, in the Arroyo Seco area of Los Angeles. It became a mecca for artisans, scientists, writers, musicians, and historians. His guestbook indicated that many del Valles visited and joined in the frequent parties that he called "Noises".

He returned to Camulos in 1904 as part of a project he initiated to preserve Native American and Hispanic cultures using the Edison Wax Cylinder, a precursor of the phonograph. He traveled to capture the disappearing culture, and at Camulos he recorded 22 songs, primarily sung by the beautiful Susanita (the object of his affection about 15 years earlier) and her sister Nena. Those cylinders have been preserved and can be accessed via the Autry Museum's

website. A musical group called Los Californios has created a Songbook and a CD with their authentic rendering of the music Lummis recorded there, "Que Viva La Ronda?"

When Señora Ysabel del Valle died, Charles Lummis was a pallbearer at her services on April 1, 1905. It is not clear how frequently Lummis visited Camulos in the next two decades. When he learned the del Valle family had decided to leave the Rancho, he advocated for it to become a California State Park. That did not happen, and in 1923 Camulos was purchased by August Rubel from New York (the young son of wealthy Swiss immigrants) and his wife Mary. They had assured the del Valle family their legacy would be preserved as private property. A 40-acre portion of the 1800-acre Camulos Ranch that is still owned by the Rubel family was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 2000. Charles Fletcher Lummis's legacy and the story of his Camulos connections and efforts to preserve it live on where the History, Myth, and Romance of Old California still linger...

Charles Lummis died on November 25, 1928.



Southern Pacific caboose #1119 joins SP 2-6-0 #1629 at Heritage Junction on September 7, 2021.

The caboose had been in regular service on SP's lines in Southern California until the use of cabooses was replaced by automated End of Train devices.

The interior of the caboose contains some original items, but significant restoration inside and outside is planned.

*Photo by Peter Ely,
Santa Susanna Railroad Historical Society*

More UFOs in the SCV

by John Boston

Author, Signal columnist and SCV historian John Boston has launched his own publishing company, johnbostonbooks.com. Included in this growing online store is The Santa Clarita Valley section. The first book in the that aisle is "Ghosts, Ghouls, Myths & Monsters — The Most Haunted Town in America." GGMM is a 3-part series, and volume 1 is out right jolly now. The Dispatch ran the first section of the chapter on SCV UFOs in the previous issue. This is the next portion of that chapter. We advise reading this in a well-lit room with well-armed friends and family members, the kind you'd take to a bar fight. It lessens the change of alien abduction...

Odd, isn't it, how the passion and sightings come and go over the years. In 2021, the nation has been all abuzz over released armed forces radar footage from aircraft carriers and hypersonic fighter jets. Seasoned pilots tell of — things — that seemingly belie the rules of physics and nature.

Santa Clarita has had more than its fair share of — things — : Crafts or mirages, alien spacecraft, or sneak peeks into other dimensions or galaxies.

What follows are yet more strange eyewitness encounters with those objects or observations that hover below the stars, above our heads...

From the UFO Casebook: Ed Towers, a Santa Clarita man, reported that he was busy brushing the sides of his swimming pool in one of the valley's back canyons, when he spotted an alien spacecraft just 75 feet away from him. Here is Towers' account from that day in 1974:

"I knew right away that it was not a helicopter or plane. It seemed flatter and wider, and with lights in a circumference of the main frontal area. I ran toward the house and called my family to see it. Only my wife came out. By that time, it was directly over our house and pool.

It made no sound whatsoever, and it was at a complete stop over us for about 40 seconds.

The only motion was a slight wobble when it moved and tilted downward at an angle. I took this as some form of acknowledgment. During the entire time, we were frozen in disbelief. It is a strange sensation, knowing that what you are seeing is not supposed and very foreign. It was like seeing a Greyhound Bus floating over your house!

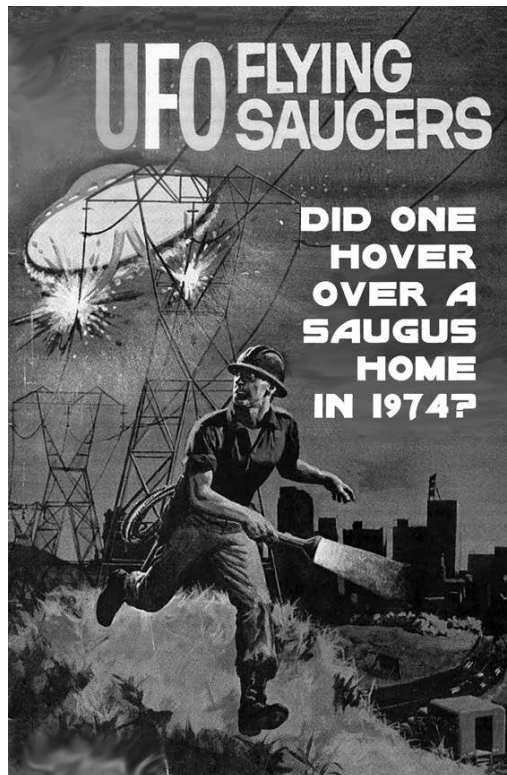
The craft was about 75-100 feet in diameter. It had small portholes and lights around it in the upper dome section; it was solid, metallic, and shiny. There was a dome in the upper section attached to the body with no visible separation, as if it were molded as one solid craft. The under section was

concave toward the center and had two rectangular shapes alongside each other and the length. The rectangular shapes were about 7-10 feet in width, and as long as the craft's concave underside center. I also noticed ski-like devices on the front, and on each side of the leading-edge window.

What caught my attention was that the devices were not in the center or the "center of gravity" for the craft's length and design, but very forward. The skis were S-shaped with the top of the S facing forward, but a design I could not replicate.

Upon the craft's leaning in a downward motion, we could see a window or cockpit-like glass that was situated in the underside, it was on the front lower edge of the round craft. The rectangular window was approximately 4 feet in height and possibly 12-15 feet in length. There was a glow of soft orange and blue lights from the inside, but we could not see anyone or any controls.

It remained at a forward and downward angle for about 10 seconds. We both had the sensation of being watched. As it was angled, I noticed that light was emanating from the upper section that was not facing the swimming pool lights. Thus, it seemed to generate light through the skin of the craft, as



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John Boston Article

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the lights that first attracted me faced forward and were much lower.

My wife and I did not say anything to each other during the experience, but she kept saying “oh my God” over and over. The craft then left slowly, at 30-40 MPH. I jumped on a wall around our property to continue seeing it for at least 7-miles. I instructed my wife not to discuss it, but to draw what she saw, and then we would compare drawings.

They matched, but mine had more detail and accuracy.

My background includes Group Propulsion Systems and later as an executive with several major computer companies. What we saw was close, real, solid, and a beautifully designed craft. I know from my aeronautical engineering background that mankind has no such technology.”

DOING THE UFO THING THE COMPLETELY WRONG WAY...

Hard to believe, but we lost not one, but two movie stuntmen in the same kind of bizarre accident in the early 1920s. On October 17, 1924, Dick Kerwood was performing a wing-walking stunt when he slipped and fell 500 feet. He was making a movie for the Franklin Farnum Co. The pilot postulated that Kerwood fainted. The plane was about three miles west of Newhall.

The other stuntman was unknown. He was performing a similar biplane wing-walking stunt. A movie crew watched in horror at Towsley Canyon as he fell from the wing to his death a few feet away from them.



Famed stuntwoman Gladys Roy barnstormed through SoCal in the 1920s, including making a few aerial passes across the Santa Clarita Valley. Taking off from what was then Newhall International Airport (it got the humorous title for the occasional mail run into Mexico), Ms. Gladys would wow the crowds with daring wing-walks, like this one. Did we mention she did this stunt — blindfolded?

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST'S MYSTERY ROCK OF SIERRA HIGHWAY

One of the strangest items I've ever come across was this snippet from *The Saturday Evening Post*. Santa Clarita's Signal newspaper had reported it in a late October 1925, edition. According to the New York magazine, a strange rock was discovered in Canyon Country. It was the size of an egg, yet, so heavy, several men couldn't lift it. The orb reportedly burned in a truck fire near present-day Sierra Highway.

Was this a tall tale in *The Post*? How could a rock that small and heavy, burn?

If this were one of those cheesy cable TV “Gee What If” pseudo-science shows instead of an august historical treatise on mutants, we might be tempted to speculate that perhaps the small but thick rock was vaporized by ray guns fired by invisible aliens. From Palmdale...

We'll look at some more spooky stories in the January - February issue.





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Photo by Peter Ely, Santa Susanna Railroad Historical Society

A Southern Pacific cabaose has been added to the display of SP 2-6-0 no. 1629 at Heritage Junction. The cabaose came from the former Fillmore and Western RR. See page 5.