



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 42, Issue 5

September - October 2016

Calendar

Monday, September 26

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Monday, October 3

Deadline for the November-December *Dispatch*

Monday, October 24

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

OutWest Concert Series at The Repertory East, 24266 Main St in Newhall. 8:00 PM

Thursday, September 22: An evening with Eli Barsi; yodeling. \$20 for SCVHS members

Thursday, October 27: An evening with Kerry Grombacher. \$20 for SCVHS members

Check www.scvhistory.org for other upcoming events.



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



On July 5, 2016, a bill introduced by Congressman Steve Knight was unanimously passed by the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. The bill, HR 5244, the Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial Act, proposes to make the site of the tragic St. Francis Dam break on March 12, 1928, into a National Memorial and National Monument. We at the Historical Society, along with the Community Hiking Club of Santa Clarita, proposed this bill first to Congressman Buck McKeon, and then to his successor Congressman Knight, as a way to honor the memories of the over 400 people who lost their lives in

the horrific flood which followed the dam break. We are now working to get the bill passed through the Senate and on to the President's desk.

As a historian, I normally try to stick to the historical facts and avoid editorializing, but a recent reader's comment to a news article announcing the House passage of the bill brought to my attention the ongoing need for us as an organization to remind our communities of the importance to the fabric of our society of recognizing our historic roots.

The reader George (name changed to protect the innocent), made the following statement:

"Help me understand why is this important?? Wouldn't a bigger place to

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President's Message

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serve the homeless be more practical? I think honoring the dead is great but serving the living is a better use of time and resources. Why is closure from a 1928 disaster needed? A near century old disaster. Were you even alive then, or have a relative connected to this event alive still? If it was SO important to the people of the SCV valley, why did it take 88 years to produce a bill to create a memorial. This is a waste of resources. It is NOT important to the people in the SCV valley, vast majority of the people didn't even know it had happened, or care to be truthful.

The memories of those lost are held in the families of those who lived here. A better use of funds, resources, and time could be allocated somewhere else useful to the people who are living."

And here is my response:

Hello George,

Let me see if I can help you to understand. You are absolutely right that it is important for us as a society to help the homeless. Likewise, it is important that we allocate resources to cure cancer, feed the hungry, and help out all those who are less fortunate than ourselves. But part of what makes life meaningful, fulfilling, and joyful is our connection with our history, art, and culture. Life is not only about our immediate survival. History, art, and culture are not necessary for our survival, but they are part of what makes us human beings.

To honor the memory of people who died tragically 88 years ago, may not seem relevant to you, but it is part of our American culture, part of the American way to do so. That is why we have a National Memorial system established in this country as part of our National Park system. Many of our National Parks are dedicated to some event or person of importance in history. Are they all to be forgotten because they are no longer relevant to our immediate survival?



In the last decade there have been National Memorials established at Oklahoma City to honor the victims of the Oklahoma bombing, and in Pennsylvania to honor the heroes who died trying to save Flight 93 from terrorists. Should we not spend resources and time to honor these people because they are not relevant to our immediate survival? There is a National Memorial in Johnstown Pennsylvania to honor the memories of over 2000 people who died in a dam break in 1889. Are the victims of the St. Francis Dam flood any less important or relevant than those who died before them? For that matter should we de-fund and tear down the Statue of Liberty, Independence Hall, Mount Rushmore, the Washington Monument because these icons of American liberty are no longer relevant to our immediate survival?

George, do you like to travel? Most people do, and many of those people travel to historic destinations like our National Parks, or Rome, or Athens. These places are filled with the remnants of people who are now deceased and of no importance to our immediate survival. What would the world be like without these places? I suspect it would be a much emptier and depressing world. I'm truly sorry, George, if none of this has meaning to you. And by the way George, the St. Francis Dam National Memorial, if established, will be totally privately funded, no public money. So if you feel it is a waste of your money and time to donate, we will miss you, but we hope and pray that there will be many others out there to take your place.

Alan Pollack

Did Broncho Billy Shoot the SCV's First Movie?

by John Boston

Especially in show business, it's often difficult to separate truth from fantasy. For decades, a questionable tidbit has been passed along about the very foundation of our local film lore.

At issue? Was "Broncho Billy's Christmas Dinner" in 1911 the first movie ever filmed in our valley?

An innocent remark originally printed in an early edition of *The Signal* newspaper in the 1920s noted that Broncho Billy Himself, aka, Gilbert Anderson, had once lived in Newhall and shot "BBCD" in one of the canyons.

Possibly. Possibly not.

Perhaps a short course in the life of Mr. Anderson is in order. In 1903, one of the most significant films in motion picture history was created. By today's standards, it looks like a bad version of "Blair Witch Project" left out on the back lawn for a few months. The silent film is choppy, grainy and, worse — rather corny. But at the turn of the 20th century, "The Great Train Robbery" had an amazing impact on America and the world.

Movies were in their infancy and the few around were basically "moving pictures." They featured such exciting things like a woman dancing (rather poorly) or someone riding a bicycle. "Train Robbery" had such new-fangled attachments — like a story (about a train robbery out West), theme (Crime Doesn't Pay), cutting and editing and something called a close-up.

The film was made not in the Wild West, but the wetlands of New Jersey and our very own (*maybe*) Gilbert Anderson applied for a job as a cowboy on the film. When asked if he could ride, Anderson replied: "Why, I was born in the saddle." Gilbert was fibbing. He had a few near-death experiences falling off his horse and was given other duties.

In the opening scene of *The Great Train Robbery*, it's Gilbert Anderson who aims his pistol at the audience and fires.

The effect was amazing. Seeing, for the first time, a giant person aiming a gun at them, fans across America went wild. Women fainted. Men drew guns and fired back at the — well, not screen, but white walls on which the film was projected.

The entire film was not quite 15 minutes long. To see the opening shot, you wouldn't think that this rather homely

man with the funny moustache would go on to become the Worlds First Movie Star.

Gilbert Anderson was actually born Max Aronson in Arkansas, in 1880. He left his Jewish family to start a career in vaudeville, theater, photography and the budding film business. He went to New York to become a "poser." They didn't call it "acting" back then. They called it, "posing." With 50 feet of film per reel, these staid documentaries lasted about four minutes.

Gilbert would later take credit for inventing the modern film. He told biographers that he went to his boss in the new century with an idea for moving pictures that were a thousand-feet long — and longer. His boss was outraged. People wouldn't sit that long. Anderson countered that if

they brought action, love, and stunts, fights and story to the vehicle, people would mob the theaters.

After "Train Robbery," Gilbert made several films in Chicago at their new Essanay Studios (for his partner's name, Spoor, and Anderson. S&A. Get it?). They cranked out dozens of flicks, then moved the company to the more forgiving all-year-round shooting climes of Northern California.

Gilbert was actually mostly white collar in those early years. But one day, an actor refused to do a stunt. Gilbert fired him, did the stunt himself and found out he had "That Something." Paul Newman had "That Something." So did Marilyn Monroe. So does

Ryan Reynolds. It's that indefinable quality that no matter what's blowing up or who's dancing around you, the audience's eye is focused on you, the star.

Gilbert Anderson would take the stage name of Broncho Billy and would crank out somewhere between 350 and 700 Westerns from 1908-1915. Most had his name in the title. Not only that, he became the very definition of a movie star.

What is the definition of a movie star? Seriously, it means your name appears ABOVE the title of the movie.

The new Essanay company was located in Niles, California, a train stop between Oakland and San Jose. Charlie Chaplin



Gilbert Anderson

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John Boston Article

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developed his “Tramp” character there. And Broncho Billy made Westerns on an unheard-of scale, while becoming the most recognizable face in America. His fortunes fell after World War I. He managed a hotel in San Francisco, and opened an unsuccessful stage theater in New York and drifted outside the cusp of success the rest of his show business days.

He did receive an Oscar in 1958 for his life’s work. His last role was a cameo in the 1967 flick, “The Bounty Killers.” He died at the Motion Pictures Home in Woodland Hills in 1971. In 1998, his likeness was put on a postage stamp.

But was Max Aronson, aka, Gilbert Anderson, aka Broncho Billy, a Newhall resident sometime during the early 20th century?

Some filmographers print that his “Christmas Dinner” oater was filmed in Niles. And a local eyewitness nearly a century ago swears he made at least part of it here. After looking up Broncho Billy’s shooting schedule up in Niles, I can’t imagine why he’d leave his film factory to shoot one movie in Newhall. But, maybe they were having the sets painted or something.

It would be an astonishing heritage if Broncho Billy Himself — the first cowboy Western star — joined the likes of William S. Hart, Hoot Gibson, Tom Mix and Gene Autry in claiming the Santa Clarita as a home.

(With some 10,000 essays and opinion pieces, SCV author John Boston is one of America’s most prolific writers. He also writes his regular Mr. SCV column for the new SCV Reader. Weekly, he pens The Time Ranger & SCV History for the SCV Beacon. Every two weeks, he writes the SCV History for your SCV Gazette. Don’t forget to check out his national humor, entertainment & swashbuckling commentary website, THEjohnboston.com. You’ll be smiling for a week...)

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Miscellaneous Happenings

by Cathy Martin

New Interns: Welcome Robert and Mandee

We finally have a new group of archivists that are eager to start organizing and recording all of our artifacts! There has been a large time gap in the archiving area and both Robert and Mandee are quite qualified and ready to fill the void. Robert has already started and Mandee will be joining him soon.

There were mountains of photos that have been recorded so far; thank you Pat, Leon and Ed, but there is another mountain in the wings just waiting it’s turn to be scanned. Organizing the collection will be the top priority, along with eliminating the extra junk we have stored upstairs. Good Luck you guys, and thank you for joining the SCV Historical Society!

Filming: SCV Diet anyone?

This past July we had some filming taking place at Heritage Junction. The museum’s gift shop and agent’s office turned into a funky book store for the Netflix series “The Santa Clarita Diet”. The transformation was incredible. I didn’t even recognize the area when the art department was finished. It’s amazing how quickly they can move things in and out of the building and be gone: Poof! Let’s hope they need to check out another book and have some more filming done in the future.

Weddings at the Ramona Chapel

What fun! That cutie-pie Ramona Chapel has been discovered as a “new” wedding venue site. We have hosted 2 weddings thus far, and another one is waiting in the wings. It’s just the right amount of outdoor wilderness and local accessibility. Again, a big thank you to the Questers for putting down those paver bricks in the court yard area. It enabled us to seat 215 people for the last wedding alone.

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Papier-Mâché Bulldog

by Margi Bertram



When you visit the William S. Hart Museum, a favorite room for many is the last room on the tour. With the appearance of a den or sitting room, it seems comfortable and homey. Only on further observation does a visitor

start to notice the numerous references to dogs in this room. There are photos, drawings, life-sized cutouts, and custom-built dog beds. Yes, Hart provided his two Harlequin Great Danes with *their own bedroom*. And when you compare it to his bedroom, you can see that he gave them the better of the two rooms. What lucky dogs! Another dog-related item in this room is a Bulldog pull toy, which is eerily life-like. We believe it was a gift to Hart in honor of his favorite English Bulldog, Mack, who I'm sure was extra special to Hart because Mack was the dog who accompanied the actor on his adventure out West to break into the film business.

Bulldogs have been around since the 1600s, and the first wheeled, painted, papier-mâché Bulldog "Growler," appeared in 1880s France. Following the ban on bull baiting in the United Kingdom in 1835, a great number of Bulldogs who were then jobless were exported to France as well as America. The Bulldog emerged as a breed and was popular with well-to-do families. This status led to the production of these friendly life-sized toys, since if one couldn't obtain a Bulldog, the next best thing was a Bulldog toy. It is said that they used to be hired out at resorts on the Riviera for children to pull alongside them. Various different designs were created, including French Bulldogs, but they are all instantly recognizable and have features in common.

Typically, the body of the Growler from the neck down is a single piece of papier-mâché, attached to a papier-mâché head that had a hinged jaw and glass eyes. The feet have wheels, and a chain or cord from the neck allows it to be pulled along a hard surface, much like a dog on a leash. The leash is connected to a mechanism inside the toy that

results in the dog's head moving, its mouth opening, and the emitting of a growl or bark as the toy is walked.

The joint between the head and neck is concealed by a wide collar fringed with badger hair. These collars were almost ubiquitous on real French Bulldogs of the era (and up to the early 1930s). The outside of the body and head is covered in a plush coating to simulate the look and feel of the short haired breed.

Due to their papier-mâché construction, and their habit of getting accidentally crushed, dropped, or chewed by real dogs, original 19th century Growlers in good condition are comparatively rare, and as a result there are clever, but recent, reproductions.

Did you know?



- Although the breed is a national symbol for the UK, and closely associated with the famous British statesman Winston Churchill, he did not have a pet Bulldog. He actually owned a Pug.
- The smaller, more delicate-looking 'Frenchie's' are actually descended from their bigger English cousins. In the mid-1800s, terriers were mixed with English bullies to produce the smaller French specimen.

- English Bulldogs are one of the most common school mascots in America, including nearly 40 universities.
- Brigitte, the bulldog who plays Stella on *Modern Family*, has the distinction of being the first bulldog to win a Golden Collar award. She beat out dog performers from Chelsea Lately, *Hot in Cleveland*, *Entourage*, and *Suburgatory*. She also beat out the only human competitor, Jason Gann, the star of *Wilfred*.
- Two English Bulldogs have won Best in Show at Westminster: Strathtay Prince Albert in 1913, and Kippax Fearnought, who won in 1955.

Announcement of Tataviam Village at Rancho Camulos

By Maria Christopher

In 1841, Ignacio Del Valle named the 1800-acre westernmost portion of Rancho San Francisco Rancho Camulos, after the Tataviam Indian village, Kamulos, that had long existed at that location. Today, a bit of Kamulos is returning to Camulos. Recently, the Rancho Camulos Museum entered into a partnership with the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians to recreate a portion of that village on the grounds of what is now the Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark.

Representatives of the Tataviam tribe, under the leadership of Rudy Ortega, are working with Rancho Camulos volunteers under the direction of Dr. Susan Falck to establish a Tataviam heritage site. Current plans call for the construction of an interpretive area that will include a Ki'j

(Tataviam home), Sweat Lodge, and a Ramada (storytelling and dance area), as well as traditional native plants. The site will be used for school tours as well as included in the regular Rancho Camulos Museum tours which are available Sundays at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00 PM.

Members of the tribe and volunteers will begin work on the interpretive area soon. There will be a gathering of the Tataviam tribe in mid-September to facilitate the community effort. The general public will have an opportunity to see the progress on the Tataviam exhibit at the annual Fall festival at Rancho Camulos on Sunday, November 6, from 12:00 to 4:00 PM. Come visit this latest addition to Rancho Camulos—where the History, Myth, and Romance of Old California Still Linger.



Juan Jose Fustero, who died in 1921, may have been the last full-blooded Tataviam.

Death Valley in the Summer

by Gordon Glattenberg

When the Bennett-Arcan party of '49ers was stranded in Death Valley for a month, finally escaping to Rancho San Francisquito near Newhall, one hardship they did not have to deal with was high temperatures, for their ordeal was around the winter solstice.

I had been intrigued by Death Valley summers, whose record temperature was 134°F in 1913. My first venture there was in 1964, coincidentally the year I bought my first air-conditioned car. At first, I wondered if such a trip was survivable, but over the years they became more and more enjoyable.

How hot does it get? On most of my visits, the highs have been in the 115-118° range, but I encountered 125° twice and 126° once. The lows are usually in the 80s and 90s, but I saw a written record of a day in early September about 50 years ago with a low of 103°!

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were very few summer visitors to Death Valley, but that has changed, and the resorts are quite crowded year-round. However, most of the summer visitors are from Europe, using their long vacations to indulge their fascination with the American West. Furnace Creek Ranch has a wonderful warm-spring-fed swimming pool, and most of the people using it in July and August speak French or German.

During my earlier visits, there was a significant local population, supported by operating mines in the Furnace Creek area. A result was interesting July 4th celebrations, with fireworks, small parades, and rock-drilling contests. The photo below shows one of those contests, whose object was to drill as deep a hole as possible in two minutes with a pneumatic drill.



July 4, 1982

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

Weekend Docents:

Sioux Coghlan	Barbara Martinelli
Evan Decker	RuthAnne Murthy
Sara Floyd	Alan Pollack
Robert Harbeston	Jeff Prange
Harold Hicks	Anna Schindler
Anna Kroll	Gordon Uppman
Debra Martin	

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

Those who open and close for the docents:

Evan Decker	RuthAnne Murthy
Cathy Martin	Alan Pollack
Barbara Martinelli	Sue Yurosek

First-Sunday Questers*

Cathy Altuvilla	Jessie and Lisa Hoover
Nancy Cordova	Bill and Libby Hinze
Linda Cornella	Pat Horanberg
Ann and Fritz Grayson	Katie Issa
Lynn Grayson	

Grounds:

Mike Jarel	Cathy Martin
Robert Harbeston	

School Tour:

Ann and Fritz Grayson	Debra Martin
Cynthia Harris	Barbara Martinelli
Pat Horanberg	Jenewyn VanWie

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



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Photo by Gordon Glattenberg

Waterfowl in the Santa Clarita Valley? This pond, located along the Santa Clara River just west of McBean Parkway, attracted them in the Spring of 2012. It's been dry since then.