



# The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 44, Issue 5

September-October 2018

## Calendar

### Monday, September 24

Board of Directors Meeting  
6:30 PM Saugus Station

### Monday, October 1

Deadline for the November-  
December *Dispatch*

### Monday, October 22

Board of Directors Meeting  
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Check [www.scvhistory.org](http://www.scvhistory.org) for  
other upcoming events.

## President's Message

by Alan Pollack



We continue the story of the Lebec Hotel with some incidents in the 1920s.

### The Alcohol Heist

The advent of alcohol Prohibition in the 1920s led to an incident at the hotel in August, 1925. Jack Wooley had a stash of forty cases of choice pre-war liquor, under a government permit, valued at \$5000. In the early morning hours of August 22<sup>nd</sup>, while Wooley and Thomas O'Brien were away in San Francisco, manager James Bryant and his wife were awoken by four heavily-armed men claiming to be federal officers and demanding access to the room with the liquor. After threatening to kill Bryant, the hijackers, who turned out not to be federal agents, proceeded immediately to room 101, where they carted off all the liquor and sped off in four high-

powered touring cars toward Los Angeles.

Five days later, Wooley chose to sell his entire portion of the hotel to O'Brien, who became the sole owner. O'Brien held on to the property for another two years before selling the hotel and adjacent 4400 acres in November, 1927, to Louis Bernstein, J.C. Stewart, and Henry Weise of the Sales Development Company of Los Angeles for \$400,000. The new owners planned to subdivide the 4400 acres into mountain cabin sites. O'Brien died at the age of 73 in 1942.

### The Linden Killing

Another strange incident occurred near the hotel in September, 1929. Late in the evening of September 24<sup>th</sup>, Department of Justice agent A.M. Moody went to the home of Frank R. Linden, a laundryman for the Hotel Lebec, to question his 23 year old niece and foster daughter regarding a white-slave prostitution and gangster ring criminal case. Moody was

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Articles and inquiries regarding  
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## President's Message

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threatened by Linden and called in four deputy sheriffs to assist him. They knocked on Linden's door demanding admittance to the home. Upon learning that the Sheriffs were from the Bakersfield office, Linden threatened them, swore, and retreated back into the house. He was apparently armed with a .45 caliber automatic pistol, according to the deputies. Deputy Al Renfro tore a hole in the screen of the front door with his revolver and shot at the retreating Linden. Renfro then stepped backward, which another officer, Al Welch, interpreted as his being shot by Linden. Welch fired at Linden with a shotgun and struck Linden under the left arm. The buckshot penetrated through Linden's heart, and he fell to the floor dead a few seconds later. Subsequent testimony brought to light that Linden had mistakenly thought that Moody was a fugitive from justice who had previously threatened to kill his niece. Welch was eventually cleared of all blame in the shooting by an inquest which resulted in a verdict of justifiable homicide in self-defense.

### Changes in Ownership

Over the years, ownership of the hotel continued to change hands. At some point, A.F. Kennedy, representing the Signal Hill Gasoline Company, became the manager and proprietor. He sold the hotel and coffee shop in 1936 to a group of Los Angeles and Pasadena residents organized into the New Lebec Hotel Corporation. The new group included M.C. Kress and Charles F. Hale of Los Angeles, and George O. and Grace G. Relf, and their son William F. Relf of Pasadena. Mrs. Relf was the sister of the first wife of Governor Alfred Landon of Kansas, who ran for President against Franklin D. Roosevelt that same year. The purchase price was \$79,000, to include 2000 surrounding acres. Relf sold his interest in the hotel to Los Angeles businessmen Alfred W. Wakeman and C.E. Chapman for \$100,000 in 1938. The remaining members of the New Lebec Hotel Corporation held on to the hotel until 1948 when they sold out to Burk Enterprises for \$190,000. Mr. and Mrs. Frank C. and Barbara J. Cotter leased the hotel from Harry Burk, Jr. in 1953.

### The Gambling Operation

During Burk's ownership, the hotel was used for a gambling operation for 3 ½ months in the spring and summer of 1953. Around midnight on October 2, 1953, a team of five state agents raided the Lebec Hotel with false membership cards for a casino run at the hotel. They were delayed admittance due to doubt over the authenticity of the cards. By the time they reached the second floor casino, all activity had ceased. According to the LA Times, "The dozen or so customers stood foolishly idle in a large room appointed with a roulette table, two crap tables, a blackjack table, and four card tables. The agents were unable to establish use of the equipment. They returned to Bakersfield for a search warrant to confiscate the equipment. When they returned, they found the saloon empty

except for a few non-gambling tables and occasional chairs." Authorities claimed that the casino was run by Burk, Howard Mooney and Max Travis of Long Beach. A spokesman for law enforcement stated that the second floor of the hotel was as elaborate as "anything in Vegas". He further described the operation as "an attempt by three Long Beach gamblers to set up an establishment that could be reached by Los Angeles residents but not the Los Angeles police". Burk eventually sold the hotel to Al Pearlman of Columbus for \$300,000 in 1955.

In July, 1956, the Cotters sued in Los Angeles for \$53,400 in damages, claiming that the hotel had decreased in value due to Burk's gambling operation while they were leasing from Burk. They further claimed that the casino was run with the permission of the California attorney general's office. Cotter stated that Burk had told him that state Attorney General Edmund G. (Pat) Brown and Kern County Sheriff Tom Kelly had "sanctioned gambling" in the hotel, "received a portion of the revenue" and that "no embarrassment would befall" Cotter. Stating "actions speak louder than words", Brown denied the allegation by Cotter, pointing to the 1953 raid on the hotel as evidence that the state had not cooperated in the gambling operation. The 1953 raid was led by Harold G. Robinson, then California's deputy director of the Department of Justice. In response to the Cotter suit, Robinson stated that five days before the Cotters signed their lease, a letter had been sent to Burk warning him that the Department of Justice had "heard that he was proposing to violate the penal code at the Lebec Hotel" and that "any violations would be prosecuted". Based on this letter, Burk would later be convicted in 1954 of giving the undersheriff of Kern County a \$600 bribe.

### The Decline

Following the Burk gambling debacle, the Lebec Hotel went into a death spiral of disuse and decline. Attempts to revive the hotel by bringing in big name bands in the fifties failed. The completion of Interstate 5 contributed to the hotel's demise as motorists would now pass by the landmark without noticing it. The hotel closed its doors for good in March, 1969. By March, 1971, the Newhall Signal was holding a photo contest entitled "Beauty and the Blight". First prize was a weekend for two at the beautiful Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite Valley. Second prize was a weekend for two at the now-blighted Hotel Lebec. The Signal stated "Unpublicized for many years, the hotel promises our guests a get-away-from-it-all weekend of solace, unhampered by crowds of vacationers".

Finally, in April, 1971, the Lebec Hotel was condemned by the Kern County Health Department. In response, the hotel was burned to the ground on April 27, 1971 by employees of then owner of the property, the Tejon Ranch Company. It was truly the end of an era.

## Rudyard Kipling's Short Lunch in Acton

by John Boston

The old Acton Rooster newspaper carried a snippet in the 1890s about a noted writer getting off the train. I couldn't tell you if Rudyard Kipling was headed toward, or away from, Los Angeles. But, witnesses report seeing him avoiding the bustling hayseed mining town and parking himself under a great oak. There, he patiently unfolded a napkin and dined on tea and a sandwich. He dined alone. No one bothered him.

Rudyard Kipling still haunts me. At 7, I read the good poet's *The Jungle Book*. It was in those glorious days before Walt Disney ruined everything and glued great literary themes to brainless music. There were no pictures in the classic version I read. I didn't understand many of the words, but I asked whoever was next to me, and literate and taller, what they meant.

That rascal Rudyard could write, so fluidly, the pace so perfect. Outside a blizzard could be howling. Kipling's descriptions of the Indian rainforest would make you want to shed to a loincloth. Rudyard was pre-word processing. The chap wrote long hand.

*The Jungle Book* is one of those simple templates, a babe in the woods story. Part of me wouldn't mind being the hero, young Mowgli, the little infant who ran with the wolves and was tutored by bears and panthers. Mowgli's schedule was his own and he grew to be a fine fellow.

*The London Financial Times* recently reported that today, Englishmen have sliced their traditional lunch hour nearly in half to an average of 36 minutes.

Many London workers just buy a sandwich from floating carts that roam desk to desk. Others brown bag it. Many don't even break for the noon meal, preferring to work through. Take a bite. Hit a key. Swallow some tea. Scroll down the computer screen.

"Caught up in a society that demands more of its workers and regards time as an expensive commodity, the lunch break is for many an inconvenient fuel stop," wrote the London paper.

Italy, Spain, and Portugal — I guess they've gotten over this world power/domination thing centuries ago. They go home or meet friends and family for a three-hour lunch which usually, but not necessarily, contains a siesta.

A nap after lunch: Is that a concept from another planet?

Can you imagine? Having a multi-course meal with enough wine to make you sleepy at mid-day? Then a snooze, then maybe a little more work.

There are days I eat lunch in the car. I'll nibble on a bean and cheese burrito, extra green sauce, 44-ounce Coke, while driving. I'll make business calls from behind the wheel — while eating.

Efficient, isn't it?

I'm not always a Lunch Psycho. One of my favorite secret pastimes is to head over to a local restaurant (that's closed to the public) for a mid-afternoon respite. A proper lunch, all by my lonesome, save for the company of iPhone headlines or Netflix movie, it takes 90 minutes or so.

Isn't it grand to take a nap in the middle of the day?

What's gone wrong with my life? They trained me, the so-and-so's.

At elementary school, junior high and high school, bells would chime insanely, followed by bedlam. A thousand Pavlov dogs disguised as children and I would race for chow. The schools looked like prisons. We ate like the condemned.

My dad Walt used to light up like Christmas, laughing when he recalled *Modern Times*, an old Charlie Chaplin silent movie he saw as a boy. The famed silent comic was handcuffed to an assembly line in an ultra-modern facility. Instead of breaking for lunch, two mechanized arms descended, with a cob of corn in between their pinchers. The corn spun furiously in Charlie's mouth as he tried to bite precious morsels.

I smile, thinking of when Dad recalled this story. Sigh.

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## Obituary: El Rey Nogal of Camulos

By Maria Christopher

On July 20, 2018, El Rey Nogal, collapsed and died at Camulos after a long illness.

“El Rey Nogal,” the Walnut King, was the only survivor of four “Black Eagle” California black walnut seedlings planted by Juventino del Valle sometime during the 1860s. Juventino, the eldest of Ignacio del Valle’s children, and his wife, Susanna, were part of the del Valle entourage of 13 that moved to Camulos at the western end of the the family’s 1839 Mexican land grant, Rancho San Francisco, in 1861. The descendants of Ignacio del Valle held on to Rancho Camulos until 1923, when the approximately 1,800-acre ranch was sold to August and Mary Rubel. The Rubel descendants still own the property today.

El Rey Nogal grew tall and strong at Camulos as the ranch flourished. In the King’s youth, he saw the Vaqueros tend the herds of cattle and wild horses. Later, he witnessed the ranch’s agricultural evolution, including the success of the brandy and wine making operation, the years of olive production and olive oil pressing, the cultivation of the wheat fields, the commercial walnut production, and the growth of the citrus and avocado industry, which is still the mainstay of the ranch today.

During El Rey’s approximately 150-year life span, he was a friend to generations of del Valles and Rubels, and a witness to history. Hundreds of children climbed his limbs, hundreds of workers rested in the shade of his broad arms, and untold numbers of family and visitors gathered round in celebrations, memorials, private and public events, and quiet visits. He saw the likes of notable visitors such as, *Ramona* author Helen Hunt Jackson, California preservationist Charles Lummis, Western artist Charlie Russell, and actor Harry Carey. He was loved and admired by all.

He survived many earthquakes, droughts, and floods, including the St. Francis Dam Disaster of 1928. Reputed to be the largest Black walnut in California, the circumference of his trunk reportedly exceeded 25 feet, and his branch span was estimated at about half an acre. As he aged, various devices were applied to hold up his sprawling limbs, a common feature of California black walnut trees.

He stood proudly in 2001 when Ranch Camulos was designated as a National Historic Landmark. However, a few years later, his health began to fail. Arborists and botanists were called in, but they could not identify the cause or treat the ailing tree. Finally, in 2009, because of extensive deterioration of his limbs, there was talk of cutting down the tree and leaving the trunk at table height. Many rallied for his preservation. As a result, he underwent major surgery. For the next few years he seemed to rally, even bearing walnuts in his final years.

El Rey Nogal is survived by two seedlings planted in the last decade by the two youngest daughters of August and Mary Rubel. One of them was planted by the late Shirley Rubel Lorenz and the other by Nathalie Rubel Trefzger.

Visitors may call to pay their respects to El Rey Nogal, during docent led tours at Rancho Camulos on Saturdays at 10:00, 11:00, and 12:00; and on Sundays at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00. In lieu of flowers, the Camulos family requests donations be made in the name of El Rey Nogal to the Rancho Camulos Museum.

El Rey Nogal is gone but will not be forgotten. Rest In peace, thy good and faithful guardian of Rancho Camulos. You will be missed!



## Mystery Man

by Margi Bertram



The idea for this article started with one of my favorite pieces of art in William S. Hart's art-filled home. It is of a lone Western figure, and is hung over in a corner of Hart's bedroom. Few tour guides point out the painting and little is known about it. However it has connections to several figures in the Hart story that I hope you will find interesting.

The artist of the painting, John Norval Marchand, was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1875. His birthplace was western frontier country. His early years, spent among the cowboys and Native Americans, made such a positive impression on him that we see the origins of his love of all things west, and he was witness to the disappearance of this lifestyle. At the age of 16, his family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he attended high school and worked at the Minneapolis Journal. He studied at the Harwood Art School, spent two years studying in Munich, and at the age of 20 was a staff artist at *New York World* (a newspaper published in New York City from 1860 until 1931).

I consider Marchand to be part of what is sometimes called The Golden Age of Illustration, from the 1880s until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. During this time, a small group of illustrators became highly successful, with their imagery seen as a portrait of American aspirations of the time. Another artist found in the Hart Museum is one of the most well-known of these illustrators, James Montgomery Flagg.

Traveling west on sketching trips was where in 1902 he met Charles Russell. Marchand, along with fellow artist Will Crawford, had been invited by cowboy poet William Coburn to visit his ranch near Malta, Montana. During this time the demand for western illustration was growing. Marchand and Crawford had travelled to Montana to

absorb the scenery and gather artifacts to be used as props back in their New York studios.

During a chance encounter at the train station, Marchand and Crawford ran into Charlie and Nancy Russell, who were on their way to St. Louis. This meeting of eastern and western artists resulted in an invitation to visit them in New York, if Russell was ever in the neighborhood. A similar plea had been offered by Russell's friend, stage actor William S. Hart. Marchand assured Charlie that there was work to be had, especially as Marchand told a *Great Falls Daily Tribune* reporter, "Russell's work is all right. I have just been in 'cow country' and have been attempting to do what

he does. I don't think there is any one who can 'touch' him on his subjects." Crawford later recalled that Russell was reluctant to visit New York, feeling his work would not be taken seriously by the New York art establishment.

However, the trip to New York did happen, perhaps encouraged by Nancy Russell, someone always on the lookout for chances to promote her husband's work. Using Marchand's studio as headquarters, Russell made the business and social rounds with Marchand. Wearing his usual outfit, including red sash and cowboy boots, Russell visited New York, meeting many artists, publishers, celebrities and others, some of whom, like a then little-known comedian, Will Rogers, became close friends.

Was Russell's trip back east worthwhile? Art historian Brian Dippie credits the "constructive

criticism of his artist friends," including Marchand, for "Russell...correcting the mistakes he had been unable to see." By 1905, Russell was receiving between \$200 and \$400 per painting. That year, the cowboy artist entered the prime of his career, which lasted through 1920, during which he created some of his most famous artworks.



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## Mystery Man

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Marchand illustrated 35 books, most featuring western themes and subject matter, including "Girl of the Golden West" and "Arizona: A Romance of the Great Southwest." Marchand died in Westport, Connecticut in 1921.

Now, let's look again at the painting that hangs in Hart's bedroom. It is signed "To my friend W. S. Hart, John Marchand 1910." 1910? What was William S. Hart doing in 1910? In 1909 Hart had been on tour for two years as the lead role in a smash Western Hit play, *The Virginian*, after which time he returned to New York seeking work. Eventually, he was offered the lead in another Western production, *The Barrier*. This time is memorable because shortly after the play opened, Hart received news that his mother was dying. Although Bill's sister Mary Ellen urged her brother to come home to Westport, Connecticut. Hart declined. There were no understudies to cover his absence, and if he left, the play would have been forced to close. It was a true heartbreak that Hart never forgave himself that he was not at his mother's side when she passed away. There were other Western productions during these years, and then it was during one of these in 1913 that Hart changed his career and came out West to make films.

Hart certainly could have met Marchand through his friendship with Charlie Russell. And since Hart owned a home in Westport, Connecticut, he may have been a neighbor to Marchand. Is the man in the painting supposed to be Hart as portrayed in one of his Western plays? It doesn't really look like Hart. What can we tell about him by his clothing? He's not portrayed as a working cowboy, rather he's wearing some pretty nice clothing. This is likely to remain a bit of a mystery, along with many other things we'd all like to ask Bill Hart if we were ever to get a chance to sit down with him for a few minutes.

Sources:

Charles M. Russell: The Life and Legend of America's Cowboy Artist by John Taliaferro

Charles M. Russell Sculptor by Rick Stewart

William S. Hart: Projecting the American West by Ronald L. Davies

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

### Weekend Docents

Evan Decker	Alan Pollack
Anna Kroll	RuthAnne Murthy
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\*Don't know who the Questers are? See [www.questers1944.org](http://www.questers1944.org)

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## John Boston Article

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Maybe that old silent movie isn't so funny. Maybe it's prophetic. My 15-year-old daughter is an eat-and-dasher. If there weren't such things as rules, she'd sketch at the dinner table and eat elsewhere.

I remember being a lad, reading Rudyard Kipling and his tales of Mowgli the Jungle Boy. Mowgli roamed the forest. He played when he wanted. Swam when he was hot. Slept when he was tired. Drank when he was thirsty and ate when he was hungry.

Whether Mowgli or Rudyard Kipling on that lonely day in Acton more than a century ago, took lunch for 36 minutes, or 42 or 97, I couldn't say. I hope both the good poet and the child raised by wolves took the time to take in the scenery.

*Having penned more than 11,000 columns, blogs, essays, books, stories and features, John Boston is the most prolific humorist in world history. He has 119 major writing awards, including The Will Rogers Lifetime Achievement. Starting in August, he has returned to write The Time Ranger/SCV History column in Sunday's Signal and Mr. SCV in Friday's. He is currently working on the sequel to his bestselling novel, "Naked Came the Sasquatch."*



*The Davidsons of Canyon Country showed their '28 Dodge at the Hot August Nights event in Reno, NV August 11, 2018*

## Rent Heritage Junction!

**by Cathy Martin**

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Poster in the Smithsonian's  
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Photo by Gordon Glattenberg