



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 41, Issue 1

January - February 2015

Calendar

Monday, January 26

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Monday, February 2

Deadline for the March-April
Dispatch

Monday, February 23

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Future Events

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Check www.scvhistory.org for other upcoming events.

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

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



“Residents of the northern area of Los Angeles County found themselves under rocket bombardment yesterday afternoon....” (Los Angeles Times, August 17, 1956). They called it the Battle of Palmdale.

It was likely the only military “engagement” ever to take place in the skies over the Santa Clarita Valley. It occurred in the midst of the Cold War.

THE BATTLE OF PALMDALE

At 11:34 AM on the morning of August 16, 1956, a radio-controlled drone took off on a routine missile test from the Point Mugu Naval Air Missile Test Center. Described as an obsolete World War II fighter plane built by Grumman Aircraft, the unmanned F6F-5K

Hellcat, on its final mission, was supposed to route seaward to the missile test range off the coast of Point Mugu. The plane would be controlled by ground radios until airborne, when a “mother plane” would take over. But something went terribly wrong with the mission that day. Instead of heading for the sea, the drone spiraled out of control and headed southeast towards Los Angeles. An immediate alert was sent out by Navy officials, resulting in two Northrop F-89D Scorpion twin-jet interceptors’ of the 437th Fighter Interceptor Squadron being scrambled on an intercept mission from Oxnard Air Force Base. The two aircraft were piloted by 1st Lts. Hans Einstein from New York, and Richard Hurliman hailing from Des Moines, Iowa. In the cockpit with Einstein was 1st Lt. C.D. Murray of Miami, the radar observer. Hurliman was accompanied by 1st Lt. Walter Hale, a Texan from Houston.

Tagging behind the uncontrolled drone, Einstein and Hurliman crossed over the city
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Christmas Open House; see page 7

President's Message

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of Los Angeles at 30,000 feet from northeast to southwest, then back to the northwest. The goal was to follow the craft to an uninhabited area...and shoot it down. That "uninhabited" area turned out to be the areas surrounding and in the Santa Clarita Valley! The drone first circled around Santa Paula and then headed towards Frazier Mountain. The jet pilots took their first crack at shooting down the wayward aircraft in the mountain area near Castaic. In spite of the firing of 208 rockets in three passes, the drone remained unscathed. Fortunately it crashed a few minutes later and was destroyed in a field between 110th and 120th Streets East near Avenue P east of Palmdale.

208 ROCKETS OVER NEWHALL, SAUGUS AND PALMDALE

Now scattered throughout the area were the 208 rockets. Thirteen had been found by nightfall and were placed under guard, waiting for a team of demolition experts from Edwards Air Force Base. The next day the Los Angeles Times reported, "It was believed that many more of the 208 rockets are scattered over the hillsides and canyons of the area, and all persons were warned not to handle them but to call the nearest Air Force or Navy installation immediately." The Air Force reported that the missiles were designed to arm themselves when fired, but if they missed their target, they were supposed to disarm themselves when they flew below a certain speed.

Shrapnel from the missiles were sprayed throughout areas of the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys. J. R. Hingle of 4th Street in downtown Palmdale reported his house bombarded by metal, almost hitting Mrs. Lilly Willingham, who was sitting in the house. Mrs. Edna Carlson of 3rd St East in Palmdale saw a chunk of shrapnel go through her front window, bounce off the ceiling, go through a wall, and end up in a pantry cupboard. Driving west on Palmdale Blvd., Larry Kempton and his mother Bernice were surprised by a rocket which struck the pavement in front of their car. While they both escaped injury, the car took direct hits from flying fragments which broke the windshield, tore a hole in the hood, blew out the left front tire, and punctured the radiator. Mrs. H. E. Boyes witnessed a rocket sliding across Placerita Canyon several hundred yards south of the Oak of the Golden Dream park: "It came out of the sky and hit, then bounced all the way across the canyon. It left a string of fires behind it." After evacuating her daughter, boxer dog Bob, and bulldog Susie, Mrs. Boyes returned to the area to help fight the fires. Coworkers J. R. Johns and J. C. Babbit narrowly escaped their demise as they were eating lunch in their work truck, parked in Placerita Canyon.

They decided to finish their lunch under a shade tree, when moments later, rocket fragments tore through the bed and windshield of their parked truck and completely destroyed it. The fire in Placerita Canyon burned between 75 and 100 acres before being brought under control.

PUTTING OUT THE FIRES

As a matter of fact, in spite of all the mayhem over a wide area of Newhall, Saugus, and Palmdale, miraculously no one was injured. There were other fires started 7 miles north of Castaic along the Old Ridge Route, and in Soledad Canyon, west of Mt. Gleason. The Ridge Route fire was brought under control in the late afternoon after burning 50 to 75 acres. The largest blaze in Soledad Canyon had burned over 300 acres by sundown, requiring an army of 350 men, four tractors, fifteen tankers, and two helicopters from the Forest Service. The blaze became more complicated when several oil sumps caught fire in the Placerita Canyon oil field. After burning an estimated 350 acres, the Soledad Canyon fire was finally controlled by 3:00 PM on August 17. Five hundred fire fighters were ultimately required to bring down the flames. A greater disaster almost occurred when the Placerita fire blazed within 100 yards of the Bermite Powder Company plant. The conflagration was stopped before any fireworks were to occur.

THE AFTERMATH

Not unexpectedly, there was outrage in Los Angeles County over the incident. Supervisor Roger W. Jessup proposed a resolution urging the "utmost care" by Navy officials in sending the robot planes skyward. By August 21, the Los Angeles Times reported that 175 rockets were still unaccounted for. Air Force officials warned that the rockets were still armed, meaning even a slight jar could explode any which had not already exploded on impact with the ground. The Mighty Mouse rockets were described as being five feet long and 2.75 inches in diameter. The cause of the missile mishap may have been a failed ground transmitter or a breakdown in the aircraft receiver. It wasn't until 1997 that Edwards Air Force Base NASA archivist and historian Peter Merlin along with fellow wreck finder and graphic designer Tony Moore tracked down the undisturbed remains of the drone eight miles east of Palmdale. Among the objects found were metal plates with inspection stamps and serial numbers, aircraft rudder trim and fragments from camera pods.

Ironically, this unarmed, unmanned and obsolete prop-driven aircraft manage to elude two of the most advanced jet interceptors of their time!

Author Helen Hunt Jackson to Visit Rancho Camulos by Maria Christopher

Noted author Helen Hunt Jackson is visiting Southern California. Mrs. Jackson, of Denver, Colorado, is well known for her poetry and travel writings in such publications as *Century Magazine*. Her most recent book, *Century of Dishonor*, has raised some controversy, as it details allegations of mistreatment of the Indians in what Jackson terms the government's "shameful record of broken treaties and unfulfilled promises".

Imagine if you will the above article appearing in the local paper in January, 1882. Seemingly insignificant, Helen Hunt Jackson's visit **would** have an impact on the history of California and specifically on the Santa Clara River Valley. Her visit provided the foundation for her best known work, the 1884 novel *Ramona*, which she wrote to call attention to the mistreatment of Native Americans. However, it also resulted in the first tourism boom to California, and the popularization of a romantic view of early California culture.

Just who was Helen Hunt Jackson? Helen Maria Fiske was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1830 to strict parents. Her father, who was a professor at Amherst College, and her mother both died when she was a teenager. She attended Ipswich Female Seminary and the Abbott Institute in New York, along with her lifelong friend, poet Emily Dickenson. Helen's first marriage, in 1852 to US Army Corps of Engineers Lieutenant Edward B. Hunt, ended in his tragic death in 1863, when a submarine-like device he had invented and was testing exploded. She also suffered the loss of their two sons, one as an infant in 1854 of a brain disease, and the other at age nine in 1865 of diphtheria. Her grief led her to take up writing poetry, short stories, and travel essays. She was a prolific writer of the 1870's, publishing anonymously, also under the name HHH, and even under a male nom de plume. She traveled extensively and met and in 1875 married banker and railroad executive William S. Jackson of Colorado Springs, CO.

Her life changed dramatically in 1879 while visiting in Boston, when she attended a lecture by Chief Standing Bear, of the Ponca Indian tribe, who told of the mistreatment that his people in the mid-West had experienced because of Government agents

and policy. She became what she herself had once described as one of the most onerous things in the world, "a woman with a cause". She campaigned relentlessly for that cause both publicly and privately. In 1881, she published "A Century of Dishonor" and sent a copy to every member of Congress, inscribed with a quote from Benjamin Franklin printed in red on the cover: "Look upon your hands; they are stained with the blood of your relations". Although the book was largely ignored, she decided to travel to Southern California to write a supplement focusing on the former Mission Indians.

During her first of two trips, she met Don Antonio Coronel and his wife, who encouraged her to visit various locations including Rancho Camulos, which was owned by the del Valle family. Her visit there lasted only a few hours, but it made such an impression that it would become one of the settings for her 1884 novel, *Ramona*. In 1882 she had been appointed as an Indian Affairs agent, which enabled her to further her documentation. Her research and travels further inspired her to write a romantic novel which she hoped, in the manner of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, would engage people to support the Indians' cause. She was right. During a three-month period beginning in December, 1883, she completed *Ramona*. However, Helen Hunt Jackson did not live to see her enduring impact on Indians' rights and California tourism. She died of stomach cancer in San Francisco in August, 1885.

Want to know more about Helen Hunt Jackson? On January 31, 2015, at High Noon, experience Helen Hunt Jackson's January, 1882, visit to Rancho Camulos, now the Rancho Camulos Museum and National Historic Landmark, which inspired her to include this vestige of the California lifestyle as one of the settings for her novel *Ramona*. Re-enactors will engage and delight you as they portray this event which

forever changed the peaceful life at Rancho Camulos. Reservations are suggested but not required (info@ranchocamulos.org or 805 521-1501). Until January 31, Rancho Camulos Museum is open for tours by appointment only; please call for reservations. It is the perfect place to take your winter visitors or begin your new year's resolution to learn more about local history. Check our website, www.ranchocamulos.org for more information.



Docent Connie Tripp portraying Helen Hunt Jackson

Birthdays Last for Months

by Rachel Barnes



The birth of a new child. In the 1860's, it wasn't accompanied with all the pomp and circumstance that comes today. In fact, it was such an everyday occurrence, births often went unrecorded.

Which is why it had been a challenge – for many a' year – to determine exactly when silent movie star William S. Hart was born.

It didn't help that being a movie star, he often lied about his age in his later years. But the mystery has been solved, and we have established a gospel date of birth: December 6, 1864.

Which means this past December, our beloved movie star turned the big 1-5-0. A momentous occasion here at the Hart Museum, where we celebrated with a day-long birthday party, and an evening gala featuring the jazzy cowboy musicians, Cow Bop, and candlelight tours of Hart's hilltop home.

If you missed the fun on December 6, don't worry! Luckily for Bill Hart – and for us – birthdays have a lot more celebration associated with them today, and we continue the movie star's sesquicentennial celebration into the new year with a special display that looks at the *Man Behind the Movie Camera*.

Come on up for a free guided tour and see what international celebrity Bill Hart liked to do in his spare time. Among other notable artifacts, take a close look at the trophy and medals he won for speed-walking races. Yes, speed walking. A teenaged Bill was living in New York City and working as a hotel messenger to help support his family. Being a messenger meant a lot of running back and forth between different city hotels. Hart became so adept at rushing along, he started competing in walking races... and he won! A lot!

You will also see Hart's "point-and-click" alongside many of his personal snapshots. Okay, the Speed Graphic camera the man used to take photos isn't quite a "point-and-click",

but just like many of us, Hart loved snapping photos of family, friends, pets, vacations, and key moments in his life (like the construction of his dream home at the top of a hill on his Newhall ranch). Come take a look at the type of camera he used, and a sampling of those personal snapshots. It's like following a celebrity on Instagram! Only it's analog.

And in the days before light pollution, the stars must have sparkled with a pure brilliance in the skies above Newhall... a treat Hart definitely didn't take for granted as evidenced by his binocular telescope! Yes, this unusual telescope, with its two optical tubes, may have been the telescope that Hart's only son, William S. Hart, Jr. fondly recalled "playing with" on visits to his dad's hilltop mansion. When he wasn't riding up and down in the house's dumbwaiter, that is.

Or swimming in his dad's larger-than-Olympic-sized pool! A luxury still seen on the hillside next to the mansion, the pool was bricked in following the 1971 Sylmar earthquake and today resembles an outdoor patio with a fountain in the center. But swimming pool it once was, and a tour through Hart's home offers a chance to see the movie star's very own wool swimsuit. Doesn't sound like comfortable swim wear, but photos of Hart goofing off with the beloved horse, Fritz, and starlets from the *Ziegfeld Follies* in the swimsuit may prove otherwise.

Many, many more incredible artifacts round out this special display on Hart's personal pastimes, which means you won't want to miss it. So, come on up the hill sometime between now and May, 2015, when the display comes down, and learn a bit more about the *Man Behind the Movie Camera*. It will be worth it!

The Hart Mansion is open for free guided tours Wednesdays – Fridays from 12:00 to 3:00 PM (tours start on the hour and half hour; the last tour starts at 2:30 PM) and Saturdays – Sundays from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM (tours also start on the hour and half hour, and the last tour starts at 3:30 PM).

Election Time

Nominations were taken at the last meeting for the for the next election to Board of Directors of the Society. Because 9 candidates were nominated for the 9 available positions, they will be approved by acclamation under the following section of the bylaws at the annual meeting on January 26 at 6:30 PM in the Saugus Station:

Article II, Section 4-Nomination and Election of Directors

A. The Nominating Committee shall prepare a slate of names equal to the number of vacancies on the Board, and will present the slate at the November membership meeting. At the November meeting only other nominations may be made from the floor, or received in writing. If the nominee is present at the meeting, has given written permission for the name to be submitted into nomination, and has at least one sponsor, his name may be added to the list of nominees to be presented to the general membership at the election the following January. If the proposed nominee is not present at the November meeting, his name may also be added to the list of nominees only if the nomination is in writing, signed by five sponsors, and contains his written permission for his name to be submitted into nomination. The nomination must include a biographical sketch and the written permission of the nominee.

B. The members will be notified of the names in nomination not later than 30 days prior to the annual membership meeting.

C. If, at the annual meeting, the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies to be filled, they shall be elected by resolution of the members present. If there are more candidates than vacancies, election will be by secret ballot.

D. There will be no cumulative or proxy voting; those candidates receiving the largest number of votes will be declared elected.

Board Members Up for Re-election to Two-year Terms Are:

Duane Harte-As the current treasurer of the SCVHS, he runs the mailing house, tracks the society's income and expenses, acts as bartender for special events, is the voice of fiscal reason, and he also transforms into Santa Claus. Although active on several other boards, he can be counted on to show up at almost all of our events or any emergency, no matter how small.

Barbara Martinelli- Currently serves the Board as Correspondence Secretary. Other responsibilities include School tours and Docents. "I really enjoy interacting with our Docents, the third graders, and with the Questers who assist with the school tours. I continually come across ideas for improvements to these endeavors and would like two more years to implement some of these ideas."

Cathy Martin- Is our Gift Shop manager and provides assistance with events held at the Train Station. Born and raised in Saugus, CA, she currently lives in Newhall and has been a board member since 1996. Cathy is the chairperson of Cowboy Festival at Heritage Junction 2015, co-chairperson of the "new" museum in the Pardee House, and chairperson of filming at Heritage Junction.

Ed Marg- Is a fiber-optic engineer. He started Heritage Haunt in 2007, brings a great deal of enthusiastic energy to the many tasks he performs here at the junction, and also brings a wonderful technical background. This has helped the society greatly.

Sue Yurosek- Is a current board member who is a retired farmer's wife, but hardly idle: She is our restoration chair in charge of work done in the buildings, plus the Kingsbury House and Edison House at the junction. She is also a Quester, active in speaking about the historical values and historical importance of these houses. She is currently working on restoration of the Pardee House. One of her many talents is her leadership of the annual Tea Fund Raiser she organizes in the spring of each year.

Al Frisch-Is the owner of Hollywood Guns & Props. Al is a retired Lieutenant from the LA County Sheriff's Department and is a recognized western historian and firearms expert. He has consulted with and trained numerous groups involved in overseeing the use of fire arms in film production. Recently, both the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the U.S. National Park service sought his input and training regarding safety issues and practices for the use of firearms and motion-picture blank ammunition. From 2003 to 2005, Al was a technical adviser on The History Channel's "Wild West Tech" series as well as a regular on-screen historical expert. Al has been a volunteer for the SCVHS since early 2011, and played a significant role in producing our "Wild West Days", being responsible for attracting elite talent for the event at no cost to the SCVHS. Al has also continually donated numerous things and has been quite helpful in organizing SCVHS artifacts.

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Elections

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Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel – Is interested in legislatively protecting the St. Francis Dam site via a National Memorial and Monument. She has worked in the past in protecting wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and the San Gabriel National Monument. She is currently working to protect areas in the Sierra Pelona, the Mojave Desert, and the Angeles National Forest. She is interested in archeological and historical protection and restoration. She is currently restoring a trail in the Angeles National Forest that began as a Tataviam footpath. She has a background in biology, botany, archeology and languages.

Philip Scorza – is in his second term as a board member of the Historical Society. He is a high school teacher at Canyon High School and hosts a cable television program called “Points of Interest”, where he takes you around and shows you where our local history occurred. This program may be seen locally on Channel 20, S.C.V.T.V., as well as on the Internet.

Leon Worden - is president and CEO of SCVTV, the 501c3 nonprofit corporation that operates the Santa Clarita Valley's public television channels and provides multimedia services to all education and government agencies, and to the 120-plus nonprofit organizations that serve the Santa Clarita Valley. An SCV resident since 1970, UCLA graduate, and award-winning journalist (Associated Press, California Newspaper Publishers Association, National Newspaper Association, Numismatic Literary Guild awards for investigative reporting, business writing, opinion pages, Websites), Leon has produced local television programming since 2002 and has served as president of the SCV Historical Society, chairman of the City of Santa Clarita's Newhall Redevelopment Committee, founding member of the Los Angeles County Small Business Commission and the county's Ad-Hoc Committee on Homeless Services (SCV), founding member of SCV Habitat for Heroes, founding director of the Friends of Mentryville, and co-creator of the SCV Sheriff Station's first Haunted Jailhouse. Leon established the Old Town Newhall Gazette in 1994 and was editor of The Signal newspaper until 2007, when he left to prepare the reorganization of SCVTV. Today he is chief administrative officer of the Santa Clarita Public Television Authority and manager of SCVTV.com, SCVNews.com, SCV History In Pictures (SCVHistory.com) and other local websites. He is a member of the Hart School District's Measure SA Bond Oversight Committee and Career Technical Education (CTE) Advisory Group, the SCV Historical Society board, the Friends of Hart Park board, the Rancho Camulos Museum board, and he continues to serve as president of the Santa Clarita Valley Fourth of July Parade committee. As a past contributor to COINage, the largest U.S. numismatic monthly magazine, he has won multiple awards including best numismatic article in any medium, worldwide.

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

Weekend Docents:

Sioux Coghlan	RuthAnne Murthy
Evan Decker	Alan Pollack
Rick Ferrante	Jared Shiplett
Harold Hicks	Lashae Smith
Barbara Martinelli	Gordon Uppman

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

Those who open and close for the docents:

Duane Harte	RuthAnne Murthy
Cathy Martin	Alan Pollack
Barbara Martinelli	Roberto Torres

Weekend Questers*

They helped at Heritage Junction the first weekend of November.

Grounds:

Marcial Herrera	Gerry Sokolowitz
Kathleen Lucan	Glen Terry
Ed Marg, Sr	

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

New Members

We welcome Jeff Robin and Darryl Manzer to membership in our historical society.

Join the SCV Historical Society Today!

Life Member	\$350.00
Life Member with spouse	\$500.00
Corporate	\$200.00
Non-profit	\$50.00
Family Member	\$55.00
Regular member	\$30.00
Senior Member (60+)	\$20.00
Junior (18 & under)	\$10.00

Memberships make great gifts for your historically-minded friends and family! To join or renew online, visit <http://www.scvhs.org>.

Christmas Open House 2014 – So Many People to Thank!

by Cathy Martin

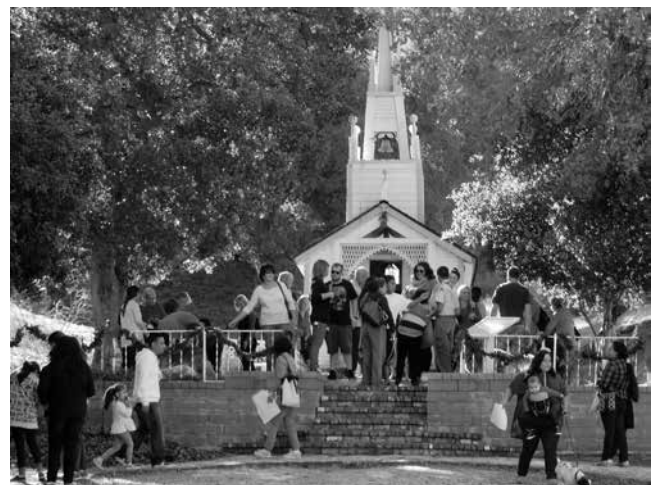
What a fun day December 6th turned out to be! We had the Trolley stop at Heritage Junction for the first time. We owe big thank you's to the following: The Old Towne Newhall Association for being our partner. My Christmas decorator sidekick, Laurie Cotton. Bret Cotton, who not only decorated the Mogul, but helped take pictures of the many visitors climbing on the engine for their Christmas photos. Harold Hicks, who was a terrific Santa as always. Francesca Gastil and Anne Kaulback, for handling membership. Jennie McKinley, for being brave enough to help with the kids' crafts - paint and all. The Questers for keeping the houses open and serving hot cider and cookies. Evan Decker docent and the SCVI Charter School's Choir for singing Christmas carols.

Thank you also to Father Craig from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, who was the officiant. The animal Blessing was a huge success. We had an all-dog audience

this year. A really big thank you to Copper Hill Animal Clinic and Vanessa Vandersande DVM.

Before all of the activities could take place, the LDS Young Adults, 27 of them, cleaned Heritage Junction from top to bottom. They pulled weeds and, with the help of two Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy volunteers, made sure the drains were clear and the water flowed where it was supposed to. Thanks also to Roberto Torres for having Christmas music playing outside all day, and for making signs so guests could know where everything was happening; to docent Rick Ferrante and Mrs Ferrante, and to Board member Barbara Martinelli, who helped with the Adobe and the museum's gift shop.

The Historical Society especially thanks Cathy Martin for organizing everything mentioned above!



Nobody, But Nobody, Can Play Ben Johnson...

by John Boston

Time softens things. Back in 2007, Noreen Isabella Jauregui Baer, my second volunteer mom, drifted off to that high chaparral in the sky. Noreen was an energetic, delightful gal and, in her day, just off-the-charts and stunningly beautiful. An actress, she has shared many stories with me over the years, including tales about the Oscar-winning actor, Ben Johnson. Noreen was a teenager living on a Placerita Canyon ranch while a lanky, shy and too-handsome cowboy worked for her father, Hall of Fame cowboy and local Western legend, Andy Jauregui.

Noreen confessed to being more than smitten by the wrangler and rodeo star and dreamed as young girls do of romance and marriage to Ben Johnson some day. Funny thing: Noreen would marry another handsome actor, John Baer

Ben was born June 13, 1918 in Foraker, Oklahoma. He cowboied much of his early years, but by the late 1950's, he was primarily doing films.

In his earlier days, Ben Johnson was a regular performer at the world-famous Wild West shows staged here at the old rodeo grounds, which today are the Saugus Speedway remains on Soledad Canyon. He was actually the world calf-roping champion in 1953, but there were days when Ben wouldn't be so lucky.

In 1954, Mr. Johnson took third place cash — five bucks — in the wild cow-milking contest. They don't host that event at too many rodeos anymore. For one thing, it's hard to find wild cows. For another, animal rights organizations frown upon the event where two men chase down a wild cow and hold it while a third tries to fill up a quart bottle with fresh milk. All that with the stopwatch running.

Johnson was inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma - next to his father, Ben Johnson Sr., an all-around champion wrangler in his day. And so was Johnson's grandfather. I find that just amazing.

But the cowboy who called many places his home — including Newhall — was much more famous on the big screen. He had many people to thank, including billionaire Howard Hughes.

"I'd been making a dollar a day as a cowboy, and my first check in Hollywood was for \$300. After that, you couldn't have driven me back to Oklahoma with a club. Sounded pretty good to me." Ben was in Hughes' controversial film, "The Outlaw," with the busty Jane Russell.

Johnson was well known around Hollywood. He had been a stand-in for John Wayne, Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart, Gregory Peck and Henry Fonda. When he saved several actors from being trampled by stampeding horses, he earned the eye of director John Ford, who gave him a 7-year contract.

"You know, I'd say that aside from Mr. Ford's help in my career, I'd lay any success I've had to not expecting too much," Johnson once said. "I never expected to become a star and was always content to stay two or three rungs down the ladder and last awhile. When I do get a little ahead, I see what I can do to help others."

Ben would make more than 300 films. He found them a little less jarring and better paying than rodeo. He almost turned down the one that would earn him an Academy Award.

If you've seen a Western, especially a John Wayne one, you've seen Ben Johnson. Decades before Larry the Cable Guy, the country comedian with the beer barrel arms, was bandying about the phrase, "Git'er done!", it was Johnson who came up with the slogan. It was Ben Johnson who played the likeable bad guy in one of the greatest Westerns of all time: "Shane." Remember the tall cowboy Alan Ladd beat up in the bar fight who would later befriend Shane? That character Chris Callaway was Ben Johnson.

While giant monkeys are still big at the box office (ala "King Kong"), it was the stuntman and 14th banana Ben Johnson who had top credit in the 1949 mega-ape adventure, "Mighty Joe Young." It's a classic today, but was a box office disappointment then. Who knows? Had that film taken off, Johnson could have been a superstar.

Johnson was Sgt. Tyree in the Duke flick, "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon." Interestingly, he had the same name in another Wayne offering, "Rio Grande." Ben Johnson always had those manly-man names in the flicks. He played such characters as Montana Burriss, Luke Fargo, Travis Blue, Dwayne Birdsong, Tector Gorch (in "The Wild Bunch") and Buck Roan in the Steve McQueen rodeo film, "Junior Bonner."

But it was the character Sam the Lion that Ben didn't want to portray.

By 1971, at 53, he had successfully merged from a handsome outdoorsman buddy type to a chiseled mature man. That craggy and honest Western face and easy manner made him Peter Bogdonovich's only choice as the actor to play a noble storeowner in "The Last Picture Show."

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John Boston

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Ben didn't want to be Sam. He didn't complain to director Bogdonovich. He simply said he didn't believe bad language or nudity belonged in movies and he didn't want to be in one that had those elements.

Only after Bogdonovich agreed to let Johnson rewrite his own lines did Ben agree to play the memorable character who richly deserved Best Supporting Actor in the 1971 film.

He gave a short but memorable acceptance speech: "It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy."

I still get a yard-wide smile when I think about how Johnson and I share a small bit of trivia. We were both Newhall 4th of July Parade Grand Marshals. Johnson's stint was in 1981. He would be enshrined in both the Hollywood Walk of Fame and The Walk of Western Stars here in Newhall.

A man of mirth and insight, Ben Johnson pretty much summed up a career that spanned 55 years and made him one of the most recognizable actors in Hollywood. "Everybody in town's a better actor than I am, but none of them can play Ben Johnson."

The man who was so recognizable around the Santa Clarita of the 1950's and '60's would die of a heart attack on April 8, 1994, in Mesa, Arizona, while visiting his mother. Interestingly, they both lived in the same retirement community.

• *With more than 100 major writing awards and The Will Rogers Lifetime Humanitarian Achievement, John Boston is recognized as one of America's top humorists and writers.*

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Yee Haa! to All You Historical Society Members by Cathy Martin

As you have probably heard by now, the famous Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival that has been held at Melody Ranch has changed venues. This year, the City of Santa Clarita has moved the festival, scheduled for April 17-19, to Wm. S. Hart Park. This was not by choice, as Melody Ranch will be busy this go around.

So what does that mean for Heritage Junction? Well a whole lot! The City has asked the Historical Society to make the Cowboy Festival even better by hosting some of the events ourselves. I can't think of a better way to show off our beautiful historic park. We all know our buildings are the real deal, not a movie set. As of this date, we will be hosting the Buckaroo Books, doing a Friday Night Flickers, Saturday night concert/dinner, Civil War re-enactors, and we have just gotten started!

Lots more to come. To make all of this happen we need your help. Even if you don't think you can do much, that's OK. There will be a variety of things to do, from simple to more complicated. You can volunteer during the week to help set things up, during the event, or to help put things away after it's over. If you don't drive, how would you like calling the membership and asking for volunteers?

As you can see, this is going to take all of you to pitch in. We need to make this the best event ever for Heritage Junction. We need to remind everyone in Santa Clarita and beyond about how much of OUR history is linked to the history of our great state of California. We weren't just a stop on the railroad tracks on your way north!



Two participants at the Christmas Open House on December 6



The Heritage Junction Dispatch
P.O. Box 221925
Newhall, CA 91322-1925
info@scvhistory.com

Telephone (661)254-1275
Headquarters: Saugus Train Station
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