



# The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 37, Issue 2

March-April 2011

## Calendar

### Sunday, March 13

Free lecture on the St Francis Dam Disaster  
11:00 AM Saugus Station

Bus tour to St Francis Dam site  
12:00 PM Leaves from Heritage Junction. \$35. See below and page 3

### Monday, March 28

Board of Directors Meeting  
6:30 PM Saugus Station

### Friday, April 1

Deadline for the May - June Dispatch

### Saturday, April 16

Annual Spring Tea  
11:00 AM, Saugus Station  
See page 8

### Monday, April 25

Board of Directors Meeting  
6:30 PM Saugus Station

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

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

## President's Message

by Alan Pollack



It never ceases to amaze me what we have right here in our own backyard in the SCV! Another example of this was demonstrated during E.J. Stephens' exciting and colorful "Newhallywood" movie class tour in

January. After an interesting visit to Vasquez Rocks in Agua Dulce, where we learned about some of the film-making history at the Rocks, a caravan of movie history buffs drove down Sierra Highway to the historic Half Way House Cafe. The Cafe has been a popular filming location since the 1930's. There we met up with William Fix, property manager of S.O.S. Filmworks. From there, Mr. Fix led us on a magical safari to an isolated plateau in the mountains southwest of Agua Dulce called Mystery Mesa. Located

off Vasquez Canyon Road, the 380 acre property happens to be one of the major locations for filming of movie and television productions in the Los Angeles area. It is located within the entertainment industry's popular "30 Mile Zone", an area within 30 miles of the intersection of West Beverly Boulevard and North La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles in which TV and film productions can pay lower "studio rates" to their employees, thereby holding down the costs of their artistic endeavors.

Mr. Fix unlocked a chain link fence along Vasquez Canyon Road which allowed us to traverse a steep winding dirt road leading up to a gateway with a sign simply stating "Mystery Mesa Sanctuary". There before us laid a nondescript grassy plain embedded within the surrounding mountains, which has been the setting of countless and well known movie and television productions over the years. According to Michael

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## ANNUAL TOUR OF THE SITE OF THE ST FRANCIS DAM

MARCH 13, 2011

CALL 661 254-1275 FOR RESERVATIONS



SEE PAGE 3

## President's Message

*Continued from page 1*

Ballard, author of the Santa Clarita Geology Page ([www.scvresources.com/geology/](http://www.scvresources.com/geology/)), Mystery Mesa, also known as Cruzan Mesa, is an ancient remnant of the Santa Clarita Valley which has survived millions of years of uplift and erosion. The Cruzan Mesa contains vernal pools which are one of the last remaining habitats of the fairy shrimp, a fact which has saved this plain from proposed home developments in the area.

Being a remote location with no neighbor closer than 500 feet away, Mystery Mesa is a popular site for productions which require loud and fiery explosions. As related by Mr. Fix, one explosion, during the production of Steven Spielberg's 2005 movie *War of the Worlds*, was so large that it was seen from the 14 freeway, resulting in numerous 911 calls to the authorities! The valley war sequence of *War of the Worlds* with star Tom Cruise was also filmed at the Mesa. More recently, a scene from the 2010 movie *Iron Man 2*, starring Robert Downey Jr., was filmed at the Mesa, which involved huge pyrotechnics as 40 cars were unceremoniously blown up!

For aficionados of vehicles driving off cliffs with fiery crashes in the depths below, Mystery Mesa has been the location of one of the more famous crashes in Hollywood history. In the Steven Spielberg 1971 movie *Duel*, the final scene featured the movie's star killer truck driving off a Mystery Mesa cliff. That same cliff, which is actually only 120 feet tall, was used in a recent commercial promoting Conan O'Brien's new show. According to E.J. Stephens, in the promo a Dodge Dart filled with explosives, illegal fireworks, and un-popped popcorn is driven off a "900 foot" cliff to a fiery inferno below. O'Brien emerges from the flames, looks at the camera and exclaims "That was expensive!!" Stephens also says about the mesa: "It was later used as the desert airport in *The Aviator*, and around the same time it doubled for ancient Egypt in *The Scorpion King*. More recently, the mesa became the island of Iwo Jima in the South Pacific for Clint Eastwood's *Letters From Iwo Jima*."

In earlier days, Mystery Mesa was used as a site for Christian tent revivals in the 1920's. Famous silent movie actor (and Newhall resident) William S. Hart used the Mesa for location shoots in some of his movies. Want to see film sites like this for yourself? Join us in March as E.J. Stephens leads us on another odyssey through movie and television history in the next edition of his popular class "Newhallywood On Location: History of Film/TV in the SCV". The class series will begin on March 5. Call 626 483-1205 for enrollment information.

### HAPPENINGS AT THE JUNCTION

This month marks the launch of our 2011-12 Capital Campaign for the Historical Society. Our goal is to raise \$200,000 for the restoration of the Pardee House, and the establishment of a new state of the art museum of local history within that historic building! We know economic times are hard, but now is our chance to leave a legacy for future generations. **WE NEED YOUR HELP!** Every dollar you donate will bring us closer to creating a local history center that will make you, your children and your grandchildren proud of the Santa Clarita Valley! In appreciation for your tax-deductible donations, various honors will be available for your generosity. Honors (depending on the level of contribution) may include having your name and/or dedication placed on a "virtual brick wall of fame" on a new website dedicated to the Campaign, honorable mention in the Heritage Junction Dispatch newsletter and listing on the donor page on the new website, having your name or dedication placed on a brick in the new "Walk of Fame" area in Heritage Junction on the ground in front of the new history center, having your name placed on a plaque on the "Donor Wall of Fame" in the new history center in the Pardee House, having your name placed at the entrance to a room in the new history center in the Pardee House to signify principle sponsorship, and sponsorship for the new history center with associated plaque and name on the exterior wall of the Pardee house. Other honors will be available when our new Capital Campaign website goes live in the near future. Stay tuned for further details on making your contribution to this important mission for the Historical Society.

In January we welcomed three new members to our Board of Directors. Congratulations to Mike Jarel, Paul Duryea, and Ed Marg, Jr.! We know you all will make significant contributions to the mission and goals of the Society. We would also like to thank Nancy Cordova and John Boston, who left the Board in January. Your dedication to the Society will not be forgotten.

We also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute and give special thanks to long time Board member Laurene Weste. Laurene has given many years of dedicated service to the Board and Society. Her wisdom and contributions to the Board will be sorely missed. The preservation of the history of Santa Clarita is extremely important to Laurene. We know she will continue to participate with the Society and help protect the heritage of our historic valley.

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## President's Message

*Continued from page 2*

March 12, 2011, marks the 83rd anniversary of the second worst disaster in California history. On this date in 1928, the St. Francis Dam experienced a catastrophic collapse in San Francisquito Canyon, and the resulting flood caused the deaths of up to 600 people in the Canyon and along the Santa Clara River Valley. To mark the anniversary, local dam expert Frank Rock will be giving his annual talk on the disaster and leading a tour to the site of the dam. Don't miss our most popular event of the year. The event will be held on Sunday, March 13, starting with a free lecture at 11:00 AM. The bus tour to the dam site will leave at 12:00 PM and return to Heritage Junction at 3:00 PM. Tickets for the bus tour are \$35 per person. To sign up for the bus tour, make your reservations now at 661 254-1275.

We will be sending out more details on our 2011-12 Capital Campaign as soon as they become available, along with a link to the new Capital Campaign website. Please contribute what you can to bring a new history center to the Santa Clarita Valley. Thank you for your support of the Historical Society!! See you all at the Train Station.

Alan Pollack

## ChaplinFest, Take 2 by Ayesha Saletore



A few years ago, E.J. Stephens approached the Hart Museum with an idea of celebrating silent films in Santa Clarita. That first year happened to be the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of Charlie Chaplin's "The Pilgrim" which was partially filmed at the Saugus Train Station, now located within William S. Hart Park.

On March 8, 2008, a team from the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society, William S. Hart Museum, and Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County launched *A Celebration of Chaplin*, highlighted by an evening event including a display of Chaplin costume pieces from "City Lights" and props from "Modern Times", as well as Buster Keaton's pork pie hat. Following dinner, guests watched a screening of "The Pilgrim" preceded by a showing of Keaton's short film, "The Paleface," which was partially filmed at nearby Beale's Cut.

Now, in 2011, our team took "the next step" which was ChaplinFest, as described on page 7. Our team's ultimate goal for this programming remains to keep silent films and Hollywood history alive. With your collaboration, we will be able to further the expansion of Hollywood history events. Our team looks forward to next year!

## Recent Docents

Thank you to the following members who served as docents during December and January:

Frank Adella	Barbara Martinelli
Phyllis Berman	Barbara Milteer
Jeff Boultinghouse	RuthAnne Murthy
Laurie Cartwright	Alan Pollack
Sioux Coghlan	The Questers *
Sarah Floyd	E. J. Stephens
Francesca Gastil	Konrad Summers
Harold Hicks	Gordon & Marlene Uppman
Karen and Bill Limbaugh	Michelle Veasman

Don't know who the Questers are?  
See [www.questers1944.org](http://www.questers1944.org)

### 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	\$50.00
Regular member	\$25.00
Senior Member (60+)	\$15.00
Junior (18 & under)	\$9.00

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

## 40 Years Ago ... by Gordon Glattenberg

This February 9th marked the 40th anniversary of the 1971 Sylmar Earthquake. The fault broke the surface in Sylmar, causing the worst damage there, but the epicenter (the surface location above the starting point of the earthquake, was actually in Canyon Country. Santa Clarita Valley was isolated for a couple of days due to the collapse of freeway bridges, but damage was relatively light here.

I was living in Newhall then, and on the night of February 8 I had a major case of insomnia, lying awake until after 2:00 AM. Hardly had I drifted off to sleep, when I awakened shaking violently. When the shaking stopped, I rushed to a window and saw a red glow, coming from a gas fire in a nearby sidewalk. I rushed outside, thinking of San Francisco in 1906.

Ever since then, I've wondered about the insomnia that night.



*The gas fire at Newhall and Lyons Avenues burned all day*



*Most of the damage on San Fernando Road was broken glass*



*A sinkhole swallowed a car. This is just across the tracks from the present location of the Saugus Station*



*Old brick buildings were especially vulnerable*



*Nancy Cordova, who just left the Board of Directors to have more time with her family, was the lead in obtaining this storage container. We also need to thank Curtis Sand and Gravel for donating the rocks that form its foundation and Manny Santana for grading them to the proper level.*



*Newly elected Board Member Paul Duryea sitting in his "office" upstairs in the Saugus Train Station has been working for months getting our loose papers sorted and categorized. You can't really appreciate what he has accomplished without realizing that for 30 years we have been collecting paper, pamphlets and other pieces of odd paper with little attempt at organization. Putting order into this chaos will not be a small task.*

*Several of our volunteers have been working on boxing up books from the "library" upstairs to get them ready to move to their new home in the Pardee House. Here you see Kelly and Ashley.*

## Not a Great Average: Just Two Cats in a Half Century

by John Boston

I saw a bobcat. Walking in the forest near my home this week, I saw a bobcat. These fierce wild creatures so rarely seen look like cats who have been lifting weights and taking steroids. I have lived here forever, since back when there was more dirt than concrete, and this is the second time in nearly 50 years I have seen a bobcat.

The first time I enjoyed an actual wild cat sighting was several years ago. I couldn't place the exact date, but it would be somewhat easy to look up. It was during the near-total eclipse of the sun. I had hiked up to the top of Hart Park with my dad. We both had extra-thick shaded welder's glasses for the viewing. Didn't want to go blind staring at the sun. Boy that was an eerie day. It was like the whole valley — people, animals, even plants — were confused. After craning our necks toward the orb of Apollo for so long, Pops and I started hiking down the back dirt trail toward the truck. Right in the middle of the road, about 50 yards away, there was this bobcat.

It was just sitting there, apparently mesmerized. It just lay there on the trail, back to us, looking around at the eerie mid-day darkness. We tip-toed. Step after step after step, we got closer and closer and closer and this was really rich. Two non-Indian white guys sneaking up on a bobcat. We got to within maybe eight feet away and we just stood there, watching it. I mean, if we were hunters, we could have bopped it on the head with a rubber clown mallet.

After several minutes, Dad let out a yell and startled it, and I wondered then if wild creatures ever suffered heart attacks. To step into its paws, imagine. Imagine you're lazily catching some mid-day rays, you hear a noise and there's the equivalent of a 200-foot tall, multi-ton predator **STANDING RIGHT BEHIND YOU**. I'd get the vapors.

The bobcat sprinted down the steep ravine and I don't think he touched the ground for the first 200 yards. Years later, I'm betting it's still hyperventilating.

I saw a bobcat a couple of days ago, and this time, he scared the Sweet Baby of Mary and Joseph out of me.

There is this well-kept secret where I live. It's a comforting last strand of woods, hidden between oil fields and one of the last remaining ranches in town. I'm so lucky it's my back yard. I hike through it several times a week and I can sometimes tell there have been wild things there before me — bear, cougar, coyote. I see tracks in the woods, scat, a tuft of fur every once in a while. I saw a small herd of deer, about seven of them, prancing away in the hills maybe 50 yards away. The head buck kept checking me out, in a challenging, measuring fashion, as if to figure out if I could run faster than they and, if so, could

he kick my butt. I whistle back at hawks and answer the hoot of owls. Not every time out, but frequently, I see possums, raccoons, skunks, and lots of rabbits. Twice I've seen a rare fox.

But the other day, I was leisurely walking on this dirt trail and about 25 feet in front of me springs this big, huge, giant bobcat. A mighty leap and it cleared about 15 feet, bounced and bounded for another huge vault. The black-tipped ears were pointed back for aerodynamics, the front paws stretched like flying superhero fists to break the air. I hadn't seen anything in front of him. Nothing came from behind. I don't know if he was hunting or being hunted.

It was such a beautiful, refreshing autumn day - again, that was the odd part. I've seen two bobcats and both in the middle of the darn afternoon.

At first, I marveled. That is such a magical, exciting parenthesis in your life, one you'll never forget. Dumbbell I was, I marched over to the brush-filled hillside to see if I could spot where he had exited in such great haste. I'm standing there on the trail's edge, hands on my hip, looking up. It didn't hit me until 15 minutes later that maybe something was chasing him, which could be a pack of feral dogs, a bear, puma or Bengal tiger. Granted, if push came to shove, I could beat the crap out of any of them (except for maybe the tiger) and besides, facial scars from major predators are kind of sexy and make for great cocktail party conversation.

It's been such an interesting few months, as far as the woods go. I just saw four bears in the woods back in September and again, those seven deer. I'm thinking had my pace been just a pinch faster, that darn bobcat would have just about bowled me over.

I told this story to a fellow back roads hiker and pal, and darn if he didn't one-up me. He had been out strolling with his strand of hunting dogs and came upon a carcass of a partially devoured bobcat a week ago on the other side of the valley. Said he thought coyotes hunted the creature down.

It's interesting. We're surrounded by the yuppie concentration camps of townhouses and condos. We dash off to drop off kids at soccer practices and pick up lattes and dry cleaning. Just off the road, in a few surviving wild canyons, without malice or blame, pity, revenge or certainly conversation, creatures practice the ancient art of stalking and eating one another.

I think the Santa Clarita Valley would be a terribly uninteresting place if it were not so.

*John Boston has 119 major writing awards. To read more of his articles, please visit [thebostonreport.net](http://thebostonreport.net). This essay was penned in 2001. Since that time, the author has seen many, many more bobcats...*

## 2011 ChaplinFest a Huge Success; New Film Class by E.J. Stephens

With a wink to *Field of Dreams*, "If you commemorate it, they will come." This was borne out at the 2011 Santa Clarita Valley ChaplinFest on Saturday, February 5, 2011, at Heritage Junction and Hart Park. On that day, hundreds of spectators witnessed the dedication of a monument commemorating the 75th anniversary of the release of Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* between the Newhall Ranch and Pardee houses. The ceremony was hosted by SCVHS board member E.J. Stephens, and attended by several elected officials and celebrities, including Hollywood legends Tippi Hedren and Leonard Maltin.

The gorgeous monument, which was created by Charles and Maria Sotelo of High Desert Monuments in Hesperia, will eventually be placed at the site of the final scene of *Modern Times*, which Chaplin shot on Sierra Highway near Agua Dulce. This scene was the final screen appearance of Chaplin's Little Tramp character, and brought the curtain down on the entire silent era.

The 2011 SCV ChaplinFest began on the evening of Friday, February 4, with a screening of the 1992 film *Chaplin*, starring Robert Downey, Jr. Before the film, Pam and Jim Elyea from the North Hollywood prop shop History For Hire were joined by David Totheroh in a discussion of what it was like working on the film. David is the grandson of Rollie Totheroh, Chaplin's longtime cameraman.

On Saturday, Hart Hall hosted several vendors and authors, as well as actual props Chaplin used in *Modern Times*, including his overalls, wrenches, and oil can. These priceless items were on display from the Natural History Museum of L.A. County.

Chaplin's Keystone Comedies were shown in the Saugus Train Station at Heritage Junction, with a special screening of Chaplin's 1923 film, *The Pilgrim*, which was partially filmed at the train station.

The monument commemoration ceremony took place in the early afternoon, and a lecture from film historian John Bengtson came later, which was followed by live music from Michael McNevin and Tracy Newman. A bus from the Mary Pickford Institute which doubles as a portable filmmaking studio was parked outside throughout the day.

A special dinner followed in Hart Hall, where the guests in attendance heard from David Totheroh, saw a newly-discovered Chaplin short called *A Thief Catcher*, and then were treated to a very special Q&A session between Leonard and Tippi, where Tippi spoke about working with Chaplin on *A Countess From Hong Kong*. Afterwards, the audience saw a screening of *Modern Times*. Everyone cheered when the final scene appeared where Charlie and Paulette Goddard walk arm-in-arm towards the dawn on our very own Sierra Highway.

"There were so many magical moments over the course of the event," said Stephens, who was one of the organizers of the event, along with Ayesha Saletore and Rachel Barnes of the Hart Museum, Beth Werling of the Natural History Museum, as well as his wife Kimi, also of the SCVHS. "But I would have to say that my finest memory is of seeing Leonard Maltin and Tippi Hedren mimic Charlie and Paulette at the actual site. We were able to take them up there between the monument ceremony and the dinner. They actually walked down the middle of Sierra Highway. We had to keep moving them out of the way whenever a car came by, but they were having a blast."

The 2011 SCV ChaplinFest was a collaborative effort between the SCVHS, the William S. Hart Museum, L.A. County Parks and Recreation, and the Natural History Museum of L.A. County.

Thanks to the success of our first event, there WILL be a 2012 ChaplinFest! Keep checking at [www.scvchaplinfest.org](http://www.scvchaplinfest.org).

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Greetings Film and Television Fans!

Have you ever wondered where the final scene of the silent era was filmed? Or where John Wayne first put on spurs? Or where Frank Sinatra, playing a professional killer in the film *Suddenly*, once tried to assassinate the president? Or where the Americans "fought" the Battle of Iwo Jima?

Learn the answers to these questions and more when the popular "**Newhallywood On Location: History of Film/TV in the SCV**" class returns to the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society for a new session in March, 2011.

The class features lectures, guest speakers, and clips from several of the films and television shows filmed around the area, as well as trips to the actual locations themselves.

The SCV has been used as Hollywood's backlot since the earliest days of cinema. It was such a common production site that early producers called the area "Newhallywood." Countless Westerns, dramas, comedies, action, documentaries, and science-fiction films were shot in our area. This tradition continues with some of Hollywood's biggest films and television shows being lensed locally to this very day.

Plan to attend one of the 2011 classes to learn more about the rich, exciting entertainment history that was created right here in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Dates: Saturdays, March 5, 12, 19, 26, 2011; 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Location: Saugus Train Station, Heritage Junction, Newhall

Cost: \$50 for each 4-session class, or \$15 per session

Instructor: E.J. Stephens

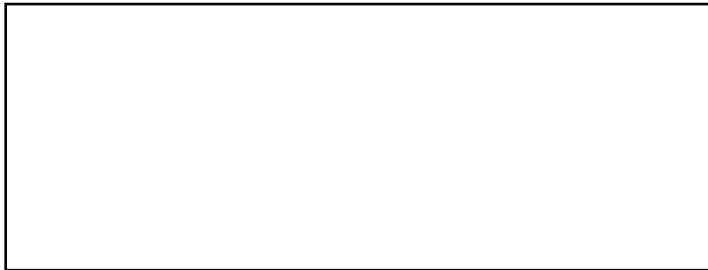
Information: Call 626 483-1205, or visit [www.scvhs.org](http://www.scvhs.org)

*Join us for our Annual Spring Tea*  
*April 16, 2011 11:00 AM*  
*Saugus Train Station*  
*Heritage Junction*  
*William S. Hart Park*  
*RSVP to 661 259-0810*



**If you are cold, tea will warm you.**  
**If you are too heated, it will cool you.**  
**If you are depressed, it will cheer you.**  
**If you are excited, it will calm you.**

*~Gladstone, 1865*



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 Open to the public each Saturday and Sunday  
 1:00 to 4:00 PM  
 Kingsbury House open the first Sunday  
 of each month from 1:00 to 4:00 PM

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*“Preserving the best of the past for the good of the future”*

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