



# The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 41, Issue 2

March-April 2015

## Calendar

### Saturday, March 14

Lecture and tour on the St Francis Dam Disaster  
11:00 AM Saugus Station  
See page 7

### Monday, March 23

Board of Directors Meeting  
6:30 PM Saugus Station

### Saturday, March 28

Symposium on the St Francis Dam disaster  
10:30 AM-12:30 PM Saugus Station  
2:00 PM Newhall Library  
See page 5

### Wednesday, April 1

Deadline for the May-June *Dispatch*

### Friday, April 17 through Sunday, April 19

Cowboy Festival, See page 9

### Monday, April 27

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, March 26: Midnight Radio with Katy Moffatt; \$17.00 for SCVHS members

Wednesday, April 15: Kristyn Harris and Jim Jones; \$22.00 for SCVHS members

Check [www.scvhistory.org](http://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



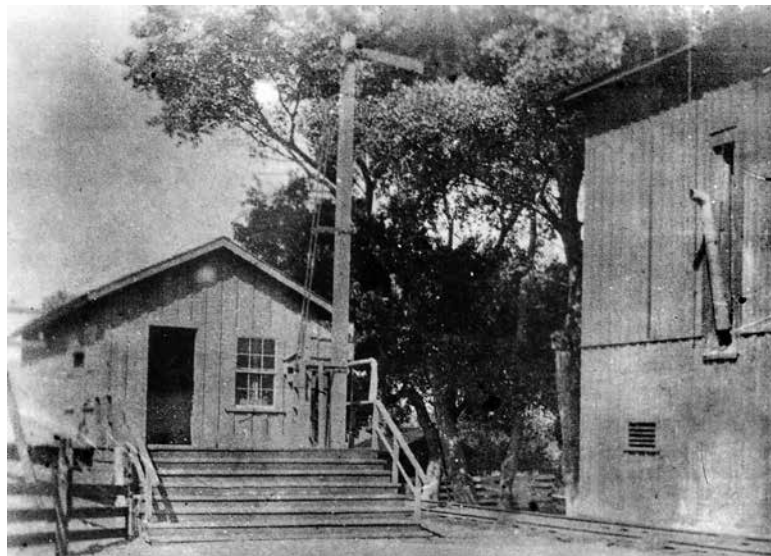
After mere 6 months the greatest disaster in California history decimated San Francisco with earthquake and fire, a huge conflagration in the fall of 1906 almost dealt the same fate to the Santa Clarita Valley. It all started in the hotel at Lang Station, in Soledad Canyon along the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Much like the fire which destroyed the elegant Southern Hotel in Newhall in 1888, it was believed to have been caused by a defective flue or a spark from the chimney. Across the tracks from the hotel, a new train depot had recently been built. At 8:00 AM on the morning of October 5, 1906, station agent Slayton noticed smoke curling up from the roof of the large frame hotel and sent out an alarm. Slayton stated,

"Instantly the hotel became a roaring mass of flames". Sleeping in the hotel that morning was the night operator, McReynolds. He barely escaped with his life, still in his white robe. According to the Los Angeles Times, "Other inmates were eating breakfast. The house seemed to explode with fire, so dry was the structure, and these people were forced to abandon it without saving any of its contents. C. H. Clayton of Los Angeles owned the hotel."

### FROM LANG STATION TO PLACERITA CANYON

Driven by a strong north wind, the flames from the hotel leaped over the tracks and quickly consumed the new train depot. The flames then spread along the railroad tracks westward down Soledad Canyon. Three miles down the canyon, they reached the ranch of Deputy Constable Youngblood. The constable lost five buildings and an olive orchard. The

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*Lang as it appeared at the time of the 1906 fire. The station dated from 1888, after the second depot burned. Note the water tank and standpipe for locomotives on the right.*

*Source: Bancroft Library, as shown in Serpico 2000:66.*

*See above.*

## President's Message

*Continued from page 1*

fire advanced past the mouth of Soledad Canyon toward Humphrey. It jumped across Whitney Canyon, destroying the houses and barn on the Nettleton & Kellner Ranch. As it proceeded into Placerita Canyon, the fire roared toward the Standard Oil Company's boiler house and pumping plant. Near the plant, residents of the canyon were eating lunch, including Dr. S. L. Wellington, who was visiting the canyon with his wife and granddaughter: "Our lives were spared by the narrow margin of five breathless minutes. When I saw those flames tear through the twenty foot growth of underbrush like spray dashing high over rocks, and consume great oak trees like the flash of lightning reaching into the sky, fear came into my heart. Fear for the women and children, who had been playing by the brook but a few moments before. Most of the men who live in this canyon were away on business. A man named Gibbs, A.M. Park, and I, alone had to drag the women to safety. It was terrible. . . We had no time to save anything. We were lucky to get out with the clothes on our backs. We ran along the road until the fire raced ahead of us and blocked our way. We crawled through the underbrush and struggled up the hillside, only to be driven back to the bed of the stream, where we threw water upon our scorched faces and cupped it up in our hands to moisten our parched throats. I saw the hair of Mrs. Reynolds [the wife of the superintendent of the Standard Oil Plant] singed until I thought it would be burned entirely from her head. The clothes of the women smoked. Had a skirt caught the flame, I fear that nothing could have saved the threatened life." Constable Ed Pardee saved the day when he rushed up the canyon road to the fleeing residents with horse and buggy. The women and children were packed into the buggy, with Mrs. Reynolds taking the reins to drive them out of harm's way. The men were able to escape the canyon on foot.

All of the buildings on the grounds of the Standard Oil pumping plant were destroyed, except for the residence of Superintendent Clay Reynolds. The loss of the pumping plant cut off the water supply to the town of Newhall. From Placerita Canyon, the fire raced into Elsmere Canyon and then headed towards Newhall. The flames passed just southwest of the town and turned towards Fremont Pass (now the Newhall Pass). There a stubborn group of firefighters led by the Superintendent of the Newhall Ranch managed to save the homes of Duarte, E. Humas, C. Price, and K. Rivera.

### THE PICO CANYON FIRE

A second fire that day wreaked havoc in Pico Canyon. As told by eyewitness Ernie Moore, "The fire is supposed to have

started from the gas in one of the wells. The place at once became a torch-light brigade as oil derrick after oil derrick leaped skyward in flame until twenty-four of them had been consumed. The residences of Will Hitchcock and Will Biscailuz were licked up along with a lot of employees' shacks, barns and outhouses. When the tank containing 60,000 barrels of oil tried to build a fiery ladder to heaven, we all thought that our fight to save the Standard Oil Company buildings was hopeless. In fact for a while it looked as if we would mount that ladder along with everything else. The heat was terrible, but we stuck it out and the flame, through God's will, stood straight. We saved the boiler house, the office building and the machine shop, and the residence of Superintendent Walton Young. . . Finally the fire flattened out and died a natural death in the hills about midnight, and we lay down in our clothes under the sky and slept until morning."

In the mountains between Rice Canyon and Chatsworth in the San Fernando Valley were roaming six thousand range cattle. Their lives were endangered as the flames leaped over the mountains between the two valleys. Cattle that had been evacuated from the burned district were taken over Beale's Cut in Fremont Pass down to the town of San Fernando. During the night, Martin Mahey and his wife rode up from Newhall into the dark canyons of the mountains to the south searching for their 150 head of cattle endangered by the flames. They found many of their cattle in clusters of two, threes, and fours. The frightened animals were herded through smoke and falling cinders into the lowlands near Newhall.

Section men and other gangs of the Southern Pacific Railroad were taken by special train into the fire district where, through their heroic efforts, several railroad bridges were saved between the San Fernando railroad tunnel and Lang Station. A section house at Lang managed to escape the flames. Here a crew of linemen worked to reestablish the telegraph connection. Late in the afternoon, Southern Pacific's Owl train crossed Fremont Pass through a dense cloud of smoke and flames as it approached the San Fernando tunnel. The train entered the tunnel's mouth through "walls of red flame. The heat smote passengers, and the pungent fumes of deep-brown smoke filled their nostrils" (Los Angeles Times, October 6, 1906).

### INTO THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Around 2:00 AM on October 6, the fire was eating its way along the western slope of the Santa Susana Mountains toward Chatsworth. Two hundred fire fighters fought heroically through the night to try to bring the fire under

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## Train-ing Days by Maria Christopher

On April 25 or 26, if you are driving on Highway 126 near Fillmore, don't be alarmed if you see a vintage train rolling through the valley. You are not having visions; this is part of RailFest 2015. RailFest is organized by the Santa Clara River Valley Railroad Historical Society to celebrate the history of the railroad in our area and is a free event for all ages. It is located at 250 Central Avenue in Fillmore and runs from 9:00 to 5:00 each day. For more information about the event, see [www.scrvrhs.com](http://www.scrvrhs.com). Fillmore and Western Railway (FWRY), one of the sponsors, will sell tickets for one hour train rides on vintage trains at 10:00 and 11:30 AM, and 1:30 and 2:30 PM each day, and for a Family Murder Mystery Dinner Train, "For a Few Dollars Less", on Saturday night (reservations are required for the dinner train, 805 524-2546). The Rancho Camulos Museum and National Historic Landmark will also be participating in the festival, because trains played an important part in Rancho Camulos' history.

What is the history of the railroads in our area? Beginning in the 1850's, the railroads were America's economic lifeline. The Pacific Railroad Surveys of 1853-1855 explored possible routes for a transcontinental railroad, which was finally completed from Omaha to Sacramento in 1869. Seven years later, in 1876, the rail line down Soledad Canyon was completed at Lang Station, linking Los Angeles with the transcontinental railroad at Sacramento. The Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society website, [SCVHS.org](http://SCVHS.org), has extensive railroad-related information, including the driving of the Golden Spike at Lang, the construction of the Newhall railroad tunnel (still used today), and the founding of Newhall and Saugus.

On September 7, 1887, eleven years later, the Saugus train station opened when the Southern Pacific Branch line from Saugus to Ventura was completed. Thomas Bard was the leading advocate for the branch line and convinced other leaders of the community such as the del Valles, of its' importance to the growth of the growing oil and

agriculture interests. When the tracks arrived at Camulos, several railroad-related buildings were put up. Two are still in use but not open to the public. Although the depot was torn down, you can still see pictures and the depot sign when you visit the Rancho Camulos Museum. The railroad entrepreneurs promoted Rancho Camulos as the Home of Ramona and thousands flocked to visit the home of the heroine of Helen Hunt Jackson's novel "Ramona", which called attention to the mistreatment of Native Americans, but also caused the first tourism boom to California. In 1910, D.W. Griffith's movie crew with Mary Pickford came by train to shoot the first "Ramona" silent film. They stayed at the Round Rock Hotel in Piru, which is still standing and currently used as a rehabilitation facility.

Piru and Fillmore boomed with the arrival of the railroad. Local lore has it that the conductors changed the pronunciation of Piru to PIE- ROO, to promote a local coffee shop (and perhaps get a slice of their exceptional pies.) Fillmore today has the railroad museum, history museum, restored depot, turntable, and the Fillmore and Western Railway with its vintage train rides. Santa Paula

was already a thriving community before the trains came, but it prospered even more. There is no doubt the completion of the branch line forever changed the history of what is now marketed as the Heritage Valley.

The branch became a busy main line on December 31, 1900, when Southern Pacific's Coast Line was completed

between Ventura and San Francisco. However, it became a branch again four years later, when the Southern Pacific's line from Montalvo to Burbank through the Santa Susana Tunnel was completed. Passenger service continued on the branch line into the mid-30's, with two trains a day into Los Angeles. Citrus freight service continued for another 20 years. Heavy rains in 1979 washed out portions of the track east of Piru and in 1984 that section to Saugus was abandoned. Today, the remaining track is owned by Ventura County, but the trains live on in the movie shoots, on the FWRY tourist trains, and in our history.



## Hart Mansion and the Cowboy Festival

by Rachel Barnes



By now, most are probably aware the 22nd Annual Cowboy Festival is moving from its longtime home of Melody Ranch to the wilds of Old Town Newhall and William S. Hart Park this coming April 15 – 19.

It was a contentious decision, but it is also an exciting one. For what better place to host this larger-than-life celebration of all things cowboy than in the former town of, and at the former home of, the premier cowboy movie star? (Besides on a working studio lot famous for its role in the making of classic Westerns, of course.)

But we at the Hart are excited to join in the festivities this year, and the Museum is planning a “herd” of activities for visitors. In addition to offering self-guided tours of Bill Hart’s hilltop mansion on the Saturday and Sunday of Cowboy Festival weekend from 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM, there will be a chance for kids to make their own serape (Friday afternoon between 12:00 PM and 4:00 PM), their own sombrero, and their own horse pal (both on Saturday and Sunday between 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM).

Wait! Serape? Sombrero? Although the word “cowboy” often calls to mind an image of the tall, dark, and rugged Texan astride his trusty mount, with his straight-sided-and-rounded-corner-crown Stetson hat planted firmly on head, the iconic Texas cowboy is not the only one to play a role in the history of cowboy-ness. In fact, California’s own cowboy history predates the famous Texas tradition by some 100+ years and has its very own distinct culture and look.

That history starts in the early 1500’s, with the arrival of Spanish explorers along the Pacific coast of Mexico and Central America. They brought with them horses and cattle, and quickly established ranches on their new lands. The heat of the western sun prompted these early ranchers to wear a large brimmed hat with a pointed crown, and a chin strap to hold it in place. The brim on the hat was so large in fact, it cast a shadow around the head of the wearer, and so the hat was called *sombrero* from the Spanish word *sombra*, meaning “shadow.”

The early Spanish explorers also took note of the blanket garments the Aztecs wore, which they wove from cotton and agave cactus, and dyed with juices pulled from insects

and fruits. A simple and utilitarian dress for hard workers, it did not take long for the new Spanish settlers to adopt the style themselves. The Spanish and Indian cowboys took to the serape since it’s simple shape allowed a variety of uses: body covering, blanket for sitting or sleeping on the ground, blanket for the horse’s saddle, protection from the elements, and even an impromptu sack should the need arise.

As Spanish exploration and conquest gave way to the rise of a Mexican identity, both the sombrero and serape remained as iconic images. And over subsequent generations, they have both become more elaborate, with bright colors and patterns going into their designs. But they have also stayed on as requisite tools for the Mexican vaquero (cowboy), a tradition and role that evolved from the earlier Spanish and Indian cowboys.

In the late 1700’s, when Spain officially extended its reach into *Alta California*, the ranching industry, with the accompanying Spanish and Indian cowboys, was established on that land as well. Ships arriving in California from the east coast of the United States in the 1820’s and 1830’s prompted a surge in the California cattle industry, and the Mexican vaquero began his heyday (and called “Mexican” since California was still Mexican territory at the time). He would become the symbol of Old West California as the Gold Rush of 1849 brought in hordes of new settlers, all of whom demanded meat and leather, and even inspired those Texas cowboys (who saw their rise in the 1860’s after the American Civil War) with his roping, livestock handling, and saddle cinching techniques. In other words, the Mexican vaquero – the cowboy of California – really was the foundation of the American cowboy.

Which is why we are celebrating him, and his accomplishments, at the Hart Museum during Cowboy Festival weekend. For not only does cowboy movie star Bill Hart owe a debt of gratitude to the vaquero for inspiring those Texas cowboys that he would emulate in his films, but Hart’s own property was once part of el Rancho San Francisco, the 44,000+ acre cattle ranch owned by that proud Mexican vaquero, don Antonio del Valle.

So come and join us for some vaquero fun this Cowboy Festival weekend! More information can be found on the museum’s website at [www.hartmuseum.org](http://www.hartmuseum.org).

## March 28 Symposium on St Francis Dam Disaster

The SCVHS and Cal State Northridge's Anthropology Department co-host a symposium on the St Francis dam disaster. The keynote speaker will be Dr. J. David Rogers of the Missouri University of Science and Technology: He figured out how the dam failed.

The two-part symposium will start with an open round-table discussion on "Current research issues on the St. Francis Dam Disaster", to be held by a distinguished panel of St. Francis Dam experts including Dr. J. David Rogers at the Saugus Train Station at Heritage Junction between 10:30 AM and 12:30 PM on Saturday, March 28, to be followed by a series of talks to be held at the Old Town Newhall Library later on the same day, starting at 2:00 PM. The Saugus Train station is located at 24101 Newhall Avenue, Newhall, inside William S. Hart Park. The Old Town Newhall Library can be found at 24500 Main St. in Newhall. The general public is welcome, and admission will be free.

The dam's collapse was the second largest disaster to ever occur in the recorded history of California. Its aftermath was steeped in controversy, some of which remains to this day. The St. Francis Dam ruptured unexpectedly (some would say otherwise) just before midnight on March 12, 1928, sending a huge wall of water down San Francisquito Canyon and the Santa Clara River to the Pacific Ocean at Montalvo. In its wake, the flood left at least 431 deaths, along with massive destruction of homes, farms, railroads, livestock and agriculture. It forever left its mark on dam safety in the United States and worldwide, and endangered the proposed construction of the Boulder Dam on the Colorado River.

The Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society and the Anthropology Department of California State University Northridge are pleased to announce their first ever joint symposium on this disaster.

Keynote speaker Dr. J. David Rogers will be speaking at the library on "St. Francis Dam: What Mulholland did that led to the tragic disaster". There will also be short talks on the proposed St. Francis Dam National Memorial legislation, and CSUN's "Forgotten Casualties Project".

Dr. Rogers, a world renowned expert on the St. Francis Dam disaster, holds the Karl F. Hasselmann Chair in Geological Engineering, in the Department of Geosciences and Geological and Petroleum Engineering at the Missouri University of Science and Technology, in Rolla, Missouri. Among many other research accomplishments, his 1992 article on the Reassessment of the St. Francis Dam Failure published by the Association of Engineering Geologists was recognized for the Rock Mechanics Award of the U.S. National Committee on Rock Mechanics and the E. B. Burwell, Jr. Award of the Geological Society of America. In 1994 his design of a reinforced rock cliff face on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco was recognized with the Distinguished Project Award of the Northern California Chapter of the American Public Works Association. After publishing "A Man, a Dam and a Disaster" in 1995, his contributions to the emerging field of geoforensics were recognized by the 1996 R. H. Jahns Distinguished Lectureship in Engineering Geology Award, jointly sponsored by the Association of Engineering Geologists and Geological Society of America. In 1998 he was named to the Society of Sigma Xi College of Distinguished Lecturers for the term 1999-2001.

The Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society and the Anthropology Department of Cal State Northridge are pleased to present this joint symposium on the St. Francis Dam disaster! For more information on this and other upcoming programs from the SCVHS, please call Alan Pollack at 661 254-1275. Website: [www.scvhs.org](http://www.scvhs.org).

## President's Message

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control. The flames threatened the railroad station at the San Fernando Tunnel and the farms of the San Fernando Valley below it. The sky over the mountains was said to be reddened for miles. The Los Angeles times stated, "Newhall was saved by 150 smoke-grimed, sweating men, who fought with dampened sacks and back-fired after some of them had seen Lang go in ashes." Overall, 200 square miles of mountains were scorched on the first day of the fire.

### HEROES OF THE DISASTER

Newhall's Edward D. Kichline saved a sick woman and her babies who were camped in a canyon just north of the town. Kichline crawled on hands and knees 100 yards through burning brush to reach the woman, Mrs. Biscailuz. He found a small wagon and horse into which he threw the women and children and had them ride out of the area. Kichline continued on foot and found himself surrounded by flames. With his lungs filled with smoke and eyes blinded, he finally had to throw himself on the ground on his stomach with a wet gunny sack over his head. After the fire swept over him, he crawled on the ground through the flames for another 100 yards before he reached safety.

Fred Dellarno raced the flames in Pico Canyon to save a group of horses. He did this while riding an old blind horse who had trouble out-pacing the fire. Dellarno finally had to abandon the horse and run to a safe place. He later returned expecting to find his dead horse, but instead found the old animal grazing in a sheltered area which the fire had passed by.

J. E. Over and George R. Harrison were among a group of five men trying to save lumber at Humphrey's Station, when they saw the flames heading towards Placerita Canyon where some of their families were camping. The men abandoned the lumber and raced towards the canyon, where they arrived just in the nick of time to save the women. The lumber, about 6000 board feet of it, did not survive.

### VICTORY OVER THE FIRE...WELL ALMOST

After three days of battling the flames in the San Fernando mountains, the fire fighters declared victory over the conflagration on October 7. The towns of Newhall, San Fernando, and Chatsworth had been saved. Many ranchers were left homeless, and cattle and game had been burned to death. San Fernando was virtually depopulated of men, who were dressed in their Sunday finest as they raced towards the mountains to save the town. Just when they thought everything was under control, the flames whipped up again in the mountains north of San Fernando. It took a hard day's work of 100 citizens of San Fernando to again quash the resilient fires. It was finally over. . .until the next time.

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

### Weekend Docents:

Sioux Coghlan	Anna Kroll
Evan Decker	Barbara Martinelli
Rick Ferrante	RuthAnne Murthy
Sara Floyd	Alan Pollack
Francesca Gastil	Jeff Prange
Harold Hicks	Gordon Uppman

Interested in becoming a docent? Visit our website at [www.scvhs.org](http://www.scvhs.org)

### Those who open and close for the docents:

Duane Harte	Barbara Martinelli
Darryl Manzer	RuthAnne Murthy
Cathy Martin	Alan Pollack

### Weekend Questers\*

Joanie Colette	Cynthia Harris
Ann Grayson	Bill Tozzi
Fritz Grayson	Nancy Tozzi

### Grounds:

Brian Cattell	Darryl Manzer
Sandra Cattell	Cathy Martin
Evan Decker	Gerry Sokolowitz
Al Ewing	Glen Terry
Marcial Herrera	LDS Young Adults

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



*Dr. J. David Rogers;  
see page 5*

## Site of Possible Future National Memorial was One of the Epic Disasters in American History

The Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society will present a tour of the St. Francis Dam site at **11:00 AM** on **Saturday, March 14, 2015**.

The failure of the St. Francis Dam on March 12, 1928, the second-worst disaster in the history of California and one of the worst disasters in American history, killed about 431 people. The break and subsequent flood leveled farms and homesteads, destroyed property and livestock and changed the way dam safety was addressed forevermore.

The tour will begin with a short presentation about the disaster. This talk will be held at the **Saugus Train Station** at Heritage Junction within William S. Hart Park, **24101 Newhall Avenue, in Newhall, California**.

At noon, ticketed passengers will board a motor coach at Heritage Junction for a trip up to the dam site in San Francisquito Canyon, followed by a hike to the dam's ruins.

St. Francis Dam expert Frank Rock, who has been featured on the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and local television, will conduct the lecture and tour. Tickets are **\$35 per person for all ages** and include snacks and bus transportation. Funds raised will benefit programs of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society.

Participants should wear long pants and comfortable hiking shoes. Water will be provided.

Tickets may be reserved by calling **661 254-1275** with credit card and contact information, or by mailing your ticket order to **P.O. Box 221925, Newhall, CA 91322-1925**. Mail orders must be received no later than **March 7**. Because this tour is a very popular fund-raiser, it is impossible to guarantee that seats will be available for purchase on the day of the tour. Order your tickets now!

## New Members

We welcome to membership in our historical society:

Craig Abernathy      Evan Decker  
 Jill Brown              Stephanie Malinow

## Police Chase in Heritage Junction Causes Fence Damage

A man damaged fences and his own car when he fled police in Heritage Junction in Newhall on the morning of January 27.

The suspect was seen driving erratically around 10:15 AM when maintenance workers asked him to slow down. Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's deputies were patrolling in the area and were asked by the workers to talk to the man. "To me he had that blank-stare look in his face like he was under the influence of something, and that's initially what had park staff flag us down," a deputy said.

Upon seeing the deputies, the suspect fled the scene, taking out part of a picket fence and grazing sprinklers in front of the Newhall Ranch House, as well as an informational sign, a garden area and a chain-link gate before exiting through the front entrance gate and heading southbound on Newhall Avenue.

Deputies initially thought the vehicle would crash into the historic Pardee House after launching off of the walkway in front of the Newhall Ranch House. They exited their patrol car in order to pursue the suspect on foot, should he attempt to run. Instead, the black Chevy Impala skirted the back side of the house and smashed through the chain-link gate.

"The most expensive part is probably going to be replacing the fence and gate in front and the damage to our picket fence," said Duane Harte, the SCVHS treasurer.

The driver of the car is described as a Hispanic male with a slim build, between 25 and 30 years old, with slick, medium-length black hair. The vehicle is described as a black 2013-2014 Chevrolet Impala 4-door sedan with paper plates and moderate front-end damage.

### 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>.

## John Wayne: The Almost Personal Friend of Mine

by John Boston

A few years ago, from out of the blue, I got a most unusual phone call. It was my pal, Todd. He was putting together a John Wayne film festival for the giant AMC Channel and wondered if I wanted to be interviewed about The Duke. My first temptation and, really, what should be everybody's, was to consider falling on my knees and bleating: "I'm not worthy!"

Todd explained that AMC would be putting on a weekend marathon. In between commercial breaks, they would be inserting some snippets of various people's thoughts on arguably America's most memorable actor. They were shooting up at Vasquez Rocks in a couple of days. Bonus, it paid money. Not Kevin Costner money, but showbiz money nonetheless.

I picked out my best cowboy shirt (handmade by local doctor Alienore Conrad, who, in her spare time, is seamstress to the stars). I like this shirt because it makes a statement. The fabric is these 1940's cowgirl/tarts: Racy with come hither expressions, yet you could still wear it to church.

Well, once.

This brings such a wide smile. Dad was 82 then and still meandering through this particular parenthesis. I took Pops and a pinochle deck. My expectations were low. I figured I'd meet Todd and a handyman tech guy holding a camcorder.

People. I had a *trailer*. And, the event was *catered*. There was a director, a sound guy, a cameraman, a plethora of assistants, and a make-up lady who dutifully dabbed my allegedly shiny nose with something that felt like a little sponge. Can't wander around Vasquez Rocks in an \$800 cowboy hat, ten-dollar jeans and a shiny nose.

I told a story I'd sometimes share at my SCV History campfire classes, back in the day. It involved Wayne and his co-star in "The Cowboys." They were about to film the scene where Bruce Dern's cowardly character was about to kill John Wayne Himself. Right before the camera rolled, the poster boy of all Republicans asked the grizzled Dern: "So how does it feel that you're about to become the most hated man in America?" Dern replied with his trademark smirk: "I may be the most hated man in America, but I'm going to be the most popular guy in Berkeley."

As the cameras rolled, Todd asked me questions. I had spent several hours cramming, going through old notes about Wayne's filming up here. He used to hang around Melody

Ranch with a handsome young Hollywood star from Glendale High, where Wayne also attended.

There was a producer named Robert N. Bradbury. His son went by the stage name of Bob Steele, the cowboy box office sensation. Bob's friend from Glendale was Marion Morrison — who later changed his name to John Wayne.

Wayne was the screen's first singing cowboy, although Wayne couldn't sing. His character, Singing Sandy, always belted out a little dirge before he plugged someone, usually on the main boulevard of Placerita Canyon's Melody Ranch.

I had so many stories that I didn't get around to telling. The Duke still holds the modern record for being a leading man — a staggering 142 movies.

It was here, at Vasquez Rocks, where The Duke made one of the worst movies of all time, his "Plan 9 From Outer Space."

Two Oscar winners, John Wayne and Susan Hayward, starred in the 1956 unintentionally comic epic, "The Conqueror." The Duke played Genghis Khan. Poorly.

John Wayne was the first choice to be Matt Dillon in a TV Western pilot called "Gunsmoke." Wayne turned down the part, but recommended a young, quiet friend: James Arness. "Gunsmoke" was filmed mostly out here in Santa Clarita and at Melody Ranch.

One of my favorite John Wayne stories didn't take place on a horse or in a saloon. He was in Las Vegas and trying to get some sleep. In the hotel suite below, Frank Sinatra was hosting a rather loud party. Now Wayne never liked Sinatra. In his jammies, The Duke stormed downstairs, knocked on the door and asked nicely if the revelers could keep it down to at least a Led Zeppelin concert level. One of Sinatra's bodyguards tried to bodily throw Wayne out and the Duke broke a chair over his head. The party quieted down.

Oddly enough, I found myself talking about what John Wayne meant. The question caught me off guard. I'm not sure America was ever really like this. But I think John Wayne is an America that deep down we strive to be.

To me, John Wayne represented clarity. You did the right thing, no matter what the cost. He usually portrayed characters who were strong, straightforward and honest. I miss that simplicity of This Is Who I Am & This Is What I Do.

*Continued on Page 9*



## John Boston

*Continued from page 8*

Set against the backdrop of the Western, I likewise miss the wide-open spaces of what used to be America. Suburbia has spread like a fungus in my short lifetime.

And probably beneath it all, which I didn't mention, is the fact that John Wayne got to punch bad guys in the nose or just simply shoot them. And if the budgets were bigger, blow them up. Sigh. What a better and clearer world that would be. Today, if you come out against evil, a rancid chorus of idiots minces and calls you a hater.

Well. If we can't actually live punching idiots in the nose, we can at least watch it.

You know the darn irony of that John Wayne Marathon so many weekends ago? I was way up in the Sierras while it played. Todd never did send me a reel and I never saw a second of my screen time, although I had a ton of calls waiting when I got back to civilization from people from all over the country who had seen me on TV.

I still can't stop smiling about that little flirtation with show business and giants. I was on AMC, talking about John Wayne. I had a trailer. And my own individual bottled water.

Who knows? Maybe some day someone will send me my SAG card.

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{John Boston has been named Best Serious and Best Humorous newspaper columnist in California, Los Angeles, and America, several times, to go with 100-plus major writing awards, including The Will Rogers Humanitarian Lifetime Achievement Award. Over at the [scvbeacon.com](http://scvbeacon.com), every week do look for his John Boston Report

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## Cowboy Festival at Heritage Junction by Cathy Martin

Howdy S.C.V. H. S. Members! Last Dispatch I told you we'd be partnering with the City of Santa Clarita for this April's Cowboy Festival, to be held on April 17-19. Well, the planning is over; for info and ticket purchases go to <http://cowboyfestival.org>. These events will be held at Heritage Junction:

**Friday April 17th:** Friday Night Flickers Double Feature.

The first movie is a William S. Hart short, starring our local film legend. The second is "Suddenly", starring Frank Sinatra and filmed entirely on location in Newhall and Saugus. Trivia question: Can you locate the sites in the movie? I'll give you a little hint - one of our buildings is the star! Well that's a big hint, but there's much more to this psychological thriller. The Films will be hosted by our local film buff E. J. Stevens, and Bill West. Adults \$10.00, kids 10 & under are \$5.00. You will also get a free bag of popcorn with your ticket stub. Starting at 5:30 PM, Wolf Creek will be serving craft beer and wine, and there will also be a food truck for dinner.

**Saturday April 18th:** Marie Wise-Hawkins will take the stage for our concert and dinner package. Marie is one of our all-time favorites, and she will be singing country music for us. The dinner will start at 6:30 PM, and Wolf Creek will be serving craft beer and wine to complement the dinner. Marie and her band will take stage around 7:30 PM.

**Sunday April 19th:** Tour of the historic sites around Santa Clarita Valley. The tour will start at 9:00 AM at Heritage Junction with a brief outline of the local sites you will see, then will board the air-conditioned buses. Ever wonder where the Oak of the Golden dream is located, or what is Mentryville? You will experience these first hand with our expert tour guides. Lunch and snacks will be provided, and the estimated return time is 3:30 PM. Wear comfortable walking shoes, a hat and sunscreen, and don't forget to bring your camera.

**Both Days:** Heritage Junction will be hosting 10 local musical talents, 5 each day on our freight loading dock. Buckaroo books will be in the Pardee House with Western authors and Q&A sessions throughout the event. Lots of western gear vendors will be in the Newhall Ranch House and the garden areas in the park. The Art Directors Guild will be in the Saugus Train Station Freight room. Our local Artists' Association will be on the porch of the Newhall Ranch House displaying their western art. Civil War re-enactments will happen 3 times a day at Quester's Court. The Edison and Kingsbury houses will be open for tours. For your dining needs, food trucks and craft beer/wine by Wolf Creek. This is all included in the price of admission to the Cowboy Festival.

This is our big fundraising event of the year, so please come and support us. Hope to see you there!



The Heritage Junction Dispatch  
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Telephone (661)254-1275  
Headquarters: Saugus Train Station  
24101 Newhall Avenue, Newhall 91321  
Open to the public each Saturday and Sunday  
1:00 to 4:00 PM  
Kingsbury House is open the first Sunday  
of each month from 1:00 to 4:00 PM

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**Society Info: [www.scvhs.org](http://www.scvhs.org)**  
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**Dated Material: Please Do Not Delay**



*Marie Wise-Hawkins will be our headline act at the Cowboy Festival.  
She was a recent finalist in the Country Showdown at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville;  
See page 9*