



# The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 40, Issue 3

May-June 2014

## Calendar

### Sunday, May 11

Swap Meet,  
8:00 AM to 1:00 PM,  
Heritage Junction; see page 8

### Monday, May 26

Board of Directors Meeting  
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Deadline for the July-August  
*Dispatch*

### Sunday, June 8, and every second Sunday

Swap Meet,  
8:00 AM to 1:00 PM,  
Heritage Junction; see page 8

### Monday, June 23

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 661 254-1275

## President's Message

by Alan Pollack



Now we can tell the end of the story. In the January-February issue of the *Dispatch* we told the sad story of the murder of Mrs. Hattie Melrose Farmer on November 14, 1890,

in Mint Canyon. The suspect was presumed to be an Indian who fled into the Mojave desert ahead of posses organized by law enforcement and by Acton locals like Richard E. Nickel (recent census evidence shows that the "Father of Acton" was not named Rudolph E. Nickel as we had previously thought), and Hattie's brother Norman Melrose (of Acton gunfight fame). But we had to leave you with a cliffhanger as to whether the murderer was ever caught. As part the search for the true name of Acton's R.E. Nickel, I happened to

stumble upon an article in the Los Angeles Sunday Herald of January 25, 1903. The article was written shortly after Norman Melrose gunned down William Broome in the streets of Acton, and answers the mystery as to what happened with Hattie Farmer's assailant, as well as giving more accurate details of the story of Mrs. Farmer's murder.

### The Murder of Hattie Farmer

So now we go back to November 14, 1890, to tell the full and true story of the murder of Hattie Farmer. Turns out there was only one witness to the murder, Hattie's 7-year-old son, who was not even in the house as previously reported, but was watching from some distance away on horseback. The son stated that a dark-skinned man on horseback, whom he presumed to be an Indian, called his mother to the door of their cabin at 9:30 AM on that fateful day. After offering the man a cup of water, Hattie turned back toward

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*Bouquet Canyon Road bridge across the Santa Clara River, 1964.  
View looking north from where Chi Chi's is today. The only thing around was a Tapia Brothers fruit stand to the right of the photographer. The rest is all dirt where Best Buy, Lowe's, and Vons, etc are today.*

## President's Message

*Continued from page 1*

her door, and was promptly shot by the stranger, who was still on his horse, and she fell down dead at her doorstep. In spite of previous reports to the contrary, the shooter never dismounted his horse nor made any attempt to enter the house. A later autopsy revealed that Mrs. Farmer had been shot with a rifle ball, which passed through her arm and into her breast. Out of fear for his life, the son stayed hidden in the brush for quite a while, then carefully approached the house and climbed inside through a broken board to see if a baby in the house had been killed. There were no other children reported to be in the house.

### The Search for the Killer

After finding his mother dead, the boy walked down the canyon, where he met G.W. Clark, who accompanied him back to the house. The two then went to Acton and reported the murder to postmaster R.E. Nickel. Although Nickel immediately contacted U.S. Marshal George E. Gard and Los Angeles County Sheriff Martin Aguirre, they did not act on the news until the next day. It had previously been reported that Nickel had not reported the murder until the next day, but this was not the case. Gard and Aguirre led a posse back to the house; the posse consisted of Deputy United States Marshal Jenkins and Deputy Sheriffs Hammel, Brady, and Abila, and Constable Mayes of Lancaster. Nickel and Norman Melrose led some other neighbors from Acton in search of the murderer, but found no trace of him that day.



*Hattie Farmer and Family*

In previous news articles from 1890, a man named John Clark had reported being ambushed near Lang Station later in the day of the Farmer incident, presumably by the murderer or murderers, and shot in the wrist. Turns out he was lying. After investigations of his allegations by Deputy Sheriff Wray and Sheriff Aguirre, it was concluded that there were no signs of an ambush at the location claimed by Mr. Clark.

### The Cliffhanger Revealed!

And now to reveal the answer to the cliffhanger! Was the Indian ever caught? Well firstly, there was no evidence ever obtained that the man was indeed an Indian. He was reported to be so only based on the testimony of Mrs. Farmer's son that he had seen a dark skinned man dressed in white man's clothing. And the killer of Mrs. Farmer was never found or identified. After weeks of tracking the suspect, covering hundreds of miles, and exhausting all clues, Gard and Aguirre simply gave up the hunt.

Meanwhile, the victim's brother, Norman Melrose, worked feverishly to find his sister's killer. He, of course, did not succeed. Sometime later, rumors began to spread that perhaps Melrose himself had been the murderer. These rumors were apparently revived as Melrose sat in jail after the shooting of William Broome in Acton. This was never proven to be the case.

The graves of Hattie Farmer and her mother Nancy Melrose now reside on Norman Melrose's former Mount Gleason Ranch, on a hill to the south of Acton.

In conclusion, I must leave you with yet another cliffhanger. Why did this unidentified man choose to shoot Mrs. Farmer in the first place? Anyone care to track that down? Good luck!

Alan Pollack.



*Photo by Cece Marie Smith*

## The Mundane, the Everyday, the Ordinary by Rachel Barnes



What do you see when you visit the William S. Hart Museum? Well, some amazing Western art, of course, by those famous guys Charles Russell and Frederic Remington. And yeah, an impressive collection of Native American artifacts, including some truly incredible beaded moccasins and ceremonial weapons.

We can't forget the expensive technology, like the state-of-the-art electric record player, electric refrigerator, and the movie projection room.

Then there are the awe-inspiring architectural elements, like the French food warmer and the hand-painted ceilings.

But you know what else? You can see a bottle of Red Hussar Pure Apple Cider Vinegar, which still has apple cider vinegar in it! Vinegar has always had a place in the culinary arts, but it has also been employed in multiple household tasks that required some form of acidic treatment.

Uses like cleaning, medicine, and garden care have all incorporated vinegar. In fact, apple cider vinegar has been a popular supplement for weight loss; add a little water and some honey, and you have a highly acidic (albeit diluted) concoction that studies have shown aids in the shedding of a few pounds.<sup>1</sup> Hart's staff probably used the apple cider vinegar in cooking, however, and you can still see the bottle on his gas stove in the Mansion's kitchen.

You can see a piece of rope tobacco, which was the most common form of tobacco in days gone by. In fact, rope tobacco suited 19th century miners and sailors perfectly, because the rope itself was compact and sturdy, and it could be chewed, smoked, or ground up and snuffed - placed inside the nostril - easily. Miners, who were not allowed to smoke in the depths of their mines, were especially fond of rope tobacco for the ability to cut off a piece and chew it. Hart probably cut off a "coin" or two from his rope tobacco and smoked it in a pipe: The direct and easy way to smoke rope tobacco. Not too much though, because there is still a twist of rope tobacco sitting on a side table in the Mansion's living room.

It is seldom discussed in polite company, but a pass by the guest bathroom upstairs reveals a roll of toilet paper, still sitting in its dispenser 68 years after Hart's death. The use

of paper as a cleansing tool was first developed in China as far back as 500 CE, but didn't develop as a commodity here in the United States until 1857, when a young entrepreneur named Joseph Gayetty founded the Gayetty Paper Company. Billed as *The Greatest Necessity of the Age*, Gayetty's medicated water-closet paper was available as late as the 1920's, although later inventors jumped on the band wagon, including the seven fellows that would eventually found the Quilted Northern Company - they were the ones who developed the toilet paper on a roll AND the splinter-free paper!

And nobody wants to think about getting sick, but it is a fact of life, and our own cowboy movie star suffered from the occasional cold or flu. We know this because his Smith Brothers Black Cough Drops still reside on his nightstand. The Smith Brothers were William and Andrew, the sons of a restaurateur who was given a recipe for a "cough candy" by a wandering traveler in 1847 (at least according to legend). The father, James, saw the potential in this cough candy - he did live in the wilds of Poughkeepsie, New York after all - and within a few years, the restaurant was producing as much cough candy as anything else!

Young William and Andrew assisted their father with his secret cough candy recipe, and when James passed away in 1866, the brothers took over. They were so successful that many imitators soon exploded on the scene, and the brothers decided to include photos of themselves on their packaging and advertising to distinguish their product from the "fakes." The Smith Brothers Company still uses the photos of William and Andrew on their packaging, and not only are they still in business to this day, but they are credited as the first to develop the cough drop here in the United States!

So, yeah. Art. Native American artifacts. Some cool technology. And some really cool mundane, everyday items with histories all their own! That's why if you haven't been by to visit yet, be sure to hike on up that hill to come see us. Look at what amazingly mundane history you can learn!

<sup>1</sup> *There have been several studies conducted over the years that have tested the weight loss efficacy of vinegar, including a double-blind experiment conducted in 2009 with obese Japanese participants. Results of the study showed that the participants who drank between 15 and 30 milliliters of vinegar did lose approximately 2 - 3 pounds.*

## The Hills Are Alive With the Sound of Music . . . by Maria Christopher

... **N**ot the Alps, but the hills of the Santa Clara River valley. Music has long been an integral part of our local history. Early drawings show Native Americans singing and dancing in the courtyard of the San Fernando Mission. The Indians would have brought these traditions with them from their villages, including the tiny Tataviam village of Kamulos which had become an outpost of the San Fernando Mission lands known as Rancho San Francisco. Kamulos, which in the native language reportedly meant “juniper berry”, “place of refuge”, or “gathering place,” sat at the confluence of the Santa Clara River and Piru Creek. The traditional drumming and chanting were an important part of their daily life and communal celebrations. That heritage is preserved in the drum circles and Pow Wows of today, including our very own Hart PowWow, which this year will be on September 26 and 27th.

In 1839, Rancho San Francisco became a 48,000-acre Mexican land grant to Antonio del Valle that included all of what is now Santa Clarita. What remains of Rancho San Francisco is Rancho Camulos. Camulos (like Kamulos, but spelled with a C) is an 1,800-acre working ranch established by Antonio's son, Ygnacio, and now the site of the Rancho Camulos Museum and National Historic Landmark. As vaqueros worked the land at Camulos, the musical traditions of the native peoples were soon joined by the musical traditions of Spain and Mexico.

Ygnacio started construction on the main adobe at Camulos in the early 1850's and added on to it after he moved his family there permanently from Olvera Plaza in 1861. Camulos continued to be a gathering place and a mecca for music. Early photographs such as those accompanying this article show residents, as well as visitors like Don Antonio Coronel, joining in the music filled fiestas and fandangos. These scenes were captured by Charles Lummis, an early preservationist, author, anthropologist, and photographer. Lummis reportedly began visiting the del Valle rancho in 1884 or 1885. He

made a significant contribution to Rancho Camulos' being acknowledged as one of the settings in H. H. Jackson's epic California novel “Ramona”, when he published a book of photographs titled “Home of Ramona”, in 1888. However, another major Lummis contribution was his wax cylinder project to preserve our musical heritage. Starting around 1904, Lummis captured hundreds of songs of the southwest on wax cylinders and eventually published some of the transcripts in “Spanish Songs of Old California”. The del Valle family from Rancho Camulos contributed twenty-two songs. Nena and Susanita del Valle, granddaughters of Ygnacio, shown at the Camulos fountain in the accompanying picture, taught Lummis traditional songs and dances. (Susanita also caught the eye of the dapper Mr. Lummis. However that is the subject of another story!) Those recordings can still be heard today on the Autry National Center website, [www.theautry.org](http://www.theautry.org)

But our Rancho Camulos musical traditions did not end when the del Valle's sold Camulos to the Rubel family in 1923. Camulos continued as a gathering place for large parties and musical performances, including USO dances during World War II. After Rancho Camulos became a National Historic Landmark in 2000, the newly formed non-profit museum returned to its del Valle roots, launching festivals such as Ramona Days featuring groups such as Los Californios, who had re-recorded parts of the Lummis collection, and also hosting the annual Californio Festival de Rancho Camulos, a Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival partnership event. This spring we launched an historic presentations and music series, Ramblings at the Rancho. The next event, on May 17, features John Bergstrom's group, Western State of Mind. Make that your opportunity to visit ... Where the history, myth, romance, **and music** of Old California still linger. Rancho Camulos is on State Highway 126, 10 miles west of I-5 and 2 miles east of Piru. For more info see: [www.ranchocamulos.org](http://www.ranchocamulos.org)



*Don Antonio Coronel dancing at Camulos with unidentified woman, date unknown*



*Susanita and Nena del Valle at the Camulos fountain, early 1900's*

## Quester News by Roberta Harris

**W**hat! No TV or cell phones! What did children do for fun? Quester docents try to answer these questions and many more as they lead tours of eager schoolchildren through the Kingsbury and Edison Houses, to learn about life in the Santa Clarita Valley between the 1870's and the 1930's.

Members of Oak of the Golden Dream recently toured the zoo at Hart park and learned about the history of the other buildings that make up the complex around that area. We ended up at the Ranch House, where our latest project will be assisting The Friends of Hart Park in replacing the window coverings. Bill Hart purchased this house in 1921, and later lived in it while the mansion on the hill was being built.

A special thanks to Norm Phillips, Rachel, and Margie, who provided a wealth of information on both the history and current issues of this area. Also, thanks to our member Becki Basham for organizing this tour.

### The Questers

An International non-profit organization founded in 1944 that supports preservation and restoration of artifacts, historic buildings and sites and promotes the study and research of antiques.

Our chapter is currently looking for new members. For more information about The Questers in California, check us out at: [www.calquest.org](http://www.calquest.org) or call:

Roberta Harris: 661 257-0890  
[roberta@myquesters.com](mailto:roberta@myquesters.com)

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

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

### Weekend Docents:

Wendy Beynon	Theresa Marg
Linda Casebolt	Debra Martin
Sioux Coghlan	Barbara Martinelli
Evan Decker	RuthAnne Murthy
Bob Feder	Alan Pollack
Sarah Floyd	Brent Roberts
Francesca Gastil	Gordon Uppman
Harold Hicks	Andrew Yokers
Anna Kroll	

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

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

Linda Casebolt	Cathy Martin
Duane Harte	Alan Pollack
Ed Marg, Jr.	Sue Yurosek
Barbara Martinelli	

### Weekend Questers\*

Linda Hinz	John Stephens
Becky Novy	Jenewyn Van Wie
Louise Schultz	Dee Ann Wood
Bobbie Stephens	

### School Tour Docents:

Bob Feder	Barbara Martinelli
Harold Hicks	RuthAnne Murthy
Debra Martin	Brent Roberts

### School Tour Questers\*

Helen Barlow	Linda Hinz
Ann Grayson	Judy Holland
Fritz Grayson	Dee Roche
Cynthia Harris	Louise Schultz
Roberta Harris	Jenewyn Van Wie

### Grounds:

Ed Marg, Sr	Glen Terry
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\* Don't know who the Questers are?  
See at left, and [www.questers1944.org](http://www.questers1944.org)

# The Winds of Santa Clarita

by John Boston

The Little Santa Clara has been windy since I can remember, and the reason thrown out by old-timers as to why is because Palmdale sucks.

I think there are other forces at work. There are those in the shuffle and grumble set who keep detailed meteorological records of heat waves, ice flows and numbers of days where toupees have lifted into the ionosphere, heading toward Elko. I just offer more a hunch than science. It seems like this has been the windiest few months since I was a boy.

We've made national headlines over the years for being under where low and high-pressure ridges collide. Some four decades back, we made the big time because, of all things, tumbleweeds.

The community of Valencia was just a toddler. Most of the Santa Clarita Valley was an open field. Thanks to the leaking burlap sacks of Russian immigrants crossing the vast American prairies a century and a half back, our unofficial valley flower was the tumbleweed. I try not to exaggerate when I say they collected by the gazillions.

The Lyons Plaza (now across from Old Orchard Park in Newhall) was fairly new and sat across, not from any planned suburban sprawl, but miles of potato and onion fields. With only a random utility pole, slow-moving bunny rabbit, or a culvert to stop them, the tumbleweeds would roll across Lyons Avenue, and the L-shaped little strip mall next to the boyishly young Rick Patterson's car wash and would act as a performance-art dustpan.

There the weeds, some of them 10-feet in diameter, would jam up, high as the roof. You could forget about getting a haircut or visiting the Laundromat on a windy day. The plains drifters would collect up to the roof, 30 yards thick. Today, it's yuppies who cause traffic jams. Back then, it was the tumbleweeds.

I can't imagine living at the top of Oat Mountain, especially in the rickety old wooden fire lookout tower. The hermit/fire watcher would be in a cabin essentially balanced on toothpicks, as 100-mph-PLUS gusts of wind tried to send him (or her) to Kansas.

I can't recall a year without a visit from the Santa Anas. They usually arrive in fall or winter, but they've been known to blow through almost any time. One myth is that they arrive bringing warm wind. Isn't necessarily the case. They blow

hot and cold and in between. They are the harbinger of great fires, and stories go back 5,000 years of their intensity.

Best guess as to where the name was born comes from Santa Ana Canyon, in Orange County. References go back to an 1886 newspaper article, but historians disagree. Some say the word is a corruption of the Indians' misinterpreting the word, "Satan." Some tribes called them the "Devil Winds" or "Devil's Breath."

Ruth Newhall, former Signal editor, noted the winds can trace their lineage to St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary and grandmother to Jesus.

In 1984, the winds knocked over a double-rig truck in Castaic. In 1964, they were sheepishly welcomed, because the men couldn't help but notice how they blew the skirts up of the local womenfolk.

We've also had twisters appear out of nowhere.

In May of 1927, a Nebraska-styled twister touched ground in Mint Canyon, completely lifting the Arthur Brown gas station off its foundation along with a neighboring kennel. All dogs and mechanics escaped serious injury.

In July, of all months, another darn mini-twister touched down in the picturesque Sierra Pelona Valley. Heavy rain pelted the northern part of our community and the little tornado completely ripped a garage into pieces, splintering wood and scattering heavy machinery.

In May of 1987, Nick Lamprakes made the SCV trivia books by becoming the first ever local to be swept away by a cyclone. On a calm, clear and mild day, a freak twister appeared, shredding Nan Tyson's barn in Sand Canyon. Sitting in his pick-up with the window open when the freak wind hit, Lamprakes and his truck were nearly picked up and the rancher almost sucked out the window. He had to hold on to his steering wheel for dear life.

My favorite wind story is from June 12, 1955.

It wasn't anything sustained like our Santa Anas. A small cyclone set down in Newhall, ripping off the roof to Newhall Ice on 5th Street. Clarence Martin was working inside, when he heard the corrugated roof began to strain and buckle, he felt the air being sucked out of his lungs, then he remembered looking straight up - he was indoors, mind you - and seeing the sky. The roof had risen about 10 feet, collapsed down, then it rose again, to float and land

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## Hart Park News by Frank Hoffman

**H**art Park has had a very busy year already, with several holidays and many rentals and programs keeping everyone constantly moving. Many new Eagle Scout Projects have been completed, including everything from Shade Shelter Construction to Road and Trail refurbishment / repair after a solid couple of days of heavy down pouring rain. You all remember rain in Southern California, right!?

Anyway, the parks' wild animals have all been pairing up and we're seeing many new young animals around here, including young squirrels, lizards, bunnies and immature Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks. We have also seen and collected several rattlesnakes around the park already. The Hall recently co-sponsored a Rattlesnake Awareness Training class that taught 16 different dogs and their owners about what to do (and what not to do) when you encounter a rattlesnake. A follow-up to this yearly program will be held again on Sunday, June 1st, behind Hart Hall; for more information or to register for this very important training, please contact the Mountains Restoration Trust at (818) 591-1701 or write [www.mountainstrust.org](http://www.mountainstrust.org).



Please keep an eye out for the Santa Clarita Valley's very first Pacific Islander Festival, happening here in Hart Park's picnic grounds on May 10th, 2014, from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM. Live drums, dancers, and entertainment will be offered throughout the day, and islander food will definitely be available, along with several art and craft vendors, to offer everyone a different and very unique cultural experience.

For more information about upcoming park events or to reserve Hart Park for a special family gathering, please do not hesitate to call or write our park offices at (661) 259-1750 or 259-0855, or by writing Cheryl Hazama at [chazama@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:chazama@parks.lacounty.gov).

## John Boston

*Continued from page 6*

next to the railroad tracks across the street. The whole episode was witnessed by a Highway Patrolman, who watched from his prowl car as debris and the Newhall Ice roof lifted and flew across Railroad Avenue, landing on both the tracks and on the other side of them.

The wonderful small-town-suchness of this was, afterwards a cozy mob walked over to the manager's house, where he was eating lunch. When they informed him a tornado had taken off the roof, he calmly replied that AFTER he finished his lunch, he'd mosey over to inspect the damage. Locals noted that the original builders had used the old-fashioned square nails.

We had another mini-tornado set down here in the 1930's. Mind you, there were just variations of dirt out here back then. Of all the things to hit, the whirlwind landed smack dab on a large canvas tent set up near 13<sup>th</sup> Street for a Sunday evangelical revival meeting. I'm not qualified to conjecture whether it was the forces of good or evil that landed the tent a mile away in Placerita Creek. Needless to say, the show was canceled.

My good fortune is I've lived on property with a humble home surrounded by dozens of oaks. Outside, it's like walking on Granola with all the leaves, twigs and acorns. The patio furniture can usually be found somewhere up the Little Tujunga. The fire department has to keep buying new red flags for their alerts because the old ones are blowing away. Doors blow open and children under 40 pounds like my daughter have to play outside with rocks in their pockets. It's tough on the kid, it's tough on the pockets.

In more eclectic times, before we went suburban, community leaders would have rallied. A club would have formed, something with the lofty handle of the Semi-Hirsute Victims of the Breezes or maybe something as simple as the Greater SCV Big Bag of Wind Society.

I'd have to include myself, but I'm happy to recruit members.

*(John Boston has earned 119 major awards for writing, including being named, several times, America's best humor, and, best serious columnist. You can read his John Boston Report and Time Ranger history column every week in the [scvbeacon.com](http://www.scvbeacon.com). Read his Mr. Santa Clarita Valley column Sundays at <http://www.santaclarita.com/johnboston/>. And, Twitter @THEJohnBoston.)*



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