



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 35, Issue 6

November-December 2009

Calendar

Saturday, November 14

General Meeting, 2:00 PM
Saugus Station

Monday, November 23

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Tuesday, December 1

Deadline for the January-February
Dispatch

Saturday, December 5

Christmas Open House 8:00 AM
to 12:00 noon, Saugus Station; see
page 8.

Board of Directors Meeting
1:00 PM Saugus Station

"Flickers at the Junction" cancelled

Check 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 was one of the last great train robberies in the West. In the early evening hours of November 10, 1929, Southern Pacific Railroad's Train No. 59, the West Coast Limited, left Central Station in Los Angeles and headed towards the Santa

Clarita Valley. On its way to Sacramento and Portland, the ill fated 12-car passenger train passed through Saugus and rounded the bend near the present day intersection of Soledad and Bouquet Canyon Roads. What started as a routine train ride was about to make history.

BUFFALO TOM VERNON

Lurking in the shadows next to the railroad tracks as the train approached Baker's Rodeo Arena (now the Saugus Speedway) was an ex-

rodeo rider who called himself Buffalo Tom Vernon. Buffalo Tom later claimed to have led a rough life, supposedly starting life as Tom Averill, the son of a Wyoming cattle-rustling couple James Averill and Ellen Watson, better known as "Cattle Kate". The parental legacy of James and Cattle Kate is historically suspect, but they are known to have been lynched for cattle rustling in Carbon County, Wyoming, in 1889. Tom (then 6 years old) claimed to have been present at the lynching and left for dead. According to Tom, he was rescued and brought up by a Dakota Indian chief named Iron Tail and eventually ended up riding in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, where he picked up the nickname "Buffalo Tom". He also appeared in the circus of Pawnee Bill, but starting in 1905, Buffalo Tom graduated to criminal activity with such crimes as grand larceny, and horse and cattle stealing. He spent time at San Quentin Prison twice, Ohio State Penitentiary, and lastly at Folsom Prison, where he was sent for cattle stealing

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AUTUMN MOVIES!

FLICKERS AT THE JUNCTION-

"WINGS";

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 7:30 PM

AT SAUGUS STATION

President's Message

Continued from page 1

in 1923. Shortly after leaving Folsom, Buffalo Tom drifted into the Santa Clarita Valley and sought employment with the Southern Pacific Railroad. He later stated he had been out of work, needing money, and promised a job by the railroad company but "had been disappointed".

DERAILING AND ROBBING THE TRAIN

Being ever resourceful, Tom decided to rob a Southern Pacific train. The Los Angeles Times of November 12, 1929, described what happened next. Railway investigators believed that Tom had carefully planned and timed the speed of the train for several days. Around 6:00 PM on November 10, he stole a clawbar and wrench used to remove railway spikes and bolts from a railroad tool house in Saugus. He worked his way up to the Southern Pacific tracks just to the west of the Baker Arena. As Tom stood watch, the Owl passenger train passed by without incident. He immediately began to remove the fish plates which connected the rails, and then removed spikes from the rails for about 60 feet. Tom seemed to know what he was doing. He was careful to leave the signal wires intact, for if broken, they would have warned an engineer of a train ahead.

At 7:30 PM, the West Coast Limited rounded the bend at Saugus at about 25 miles per hour. The relatively slow speed of the train was credited with saving many lives in the incident that followed. Not more than 5 minutes after Vernon completed his work on the rails, the Limited reached the weakened tracks and derailed while Buffalo Tom stood by watching. Locomotive 5042, the baggage car, and a smoker overturned and hurtled into a ditch next to the tracks. Engineer R.C. Ball was pinned beneath the engine and was badly scalded from escaping steam. He was taken to White Memorial Hospital. Miraculously, Ball was the only person injured on the train.

Fifteen minutes later, the surviving passengers in the rear of the train were confronted by Buffalo Tom and his pistol. Five persons were herded into one car and held at gunpoint, but were not robbed. Southern Pacific employee W.S. Higgins was credited with saving another car from the robbery when he noticed Buffalo Tom running alongside the train. He screamed out "Hide your money and valuables. This is a train robbery." The porter in the car locked the doors at both ends and prevented Tom from entering. Tom was reported by the passengers to appear nervous and ill at ease. At first

he acted like a railroad employee, instructing passengers to go to the last two coaches and reassuring them that a relief train was on the way from Saugus. After a number of people complied, Tom went into bandit mode, pulled a bandana over his face, and in a mild, soft voice blurted out "Folks, get your money quick. No time! No time! You folks all stay where you are, my mate is up at the other end and I left my horse up on the road. I am a rancher here; never mind the jewelry, I want currency." The Los Angeles Times the next day thought that there were at least two bandits involved, but later

concluded in a November 12 headline: "Wreck Now Believed to Have Been Plotted and Executed by One Demented Man for 'Thrill'". Only twelve passengers reported loss of money that night. Tom walked away with about \$300. One passenger was actually somewhat amused by the whole incident. Irwin Bennett of Manchester, England stated to a reporter: "It was really quite an experience. I had begun to think all these tales of your 'Wild West' were fiction, but now I can see they are based on fact."



Buffalo Tom

TRACKING DOWN BUFFALO TOM

Buffalo Tom was not a very smart criminal. Passengers described the bandit as wearing a grey coat. The coat, with Tom's name marked on it, was found in the hills behind the train wreck by a deputy sheriff, along with other items tying him to the scene of the crime. Near the coat were found the business card and purse of two of the robbery victims. Tom apparently headed into Saugus where he hitched a ride into Hollywood, stating to driver and Burbank carpenter Tom Firth that he was going to visit a woman friend having surgery at the Hollywood Hospital. Tom also left a paper trail of letters written to various women friends while he was on the run. Investigators used the letters to trace his movements and eventually capture him.

Tom next showed up near Cheyenne, Wyoming, in late November, 1929 where a Union Pacific train was derailed and robbed. Vernon would later deny involvement in this Wyoming robbery, but police strongly believed it to be his work as well. As stated previously, investigators used letters written by Vernon to trace his movements. They found that he had visited the woman friend at Hollywood Hospital on the night of the Saugus train wreck. He reached Cheyenne on November 14, but left on November 25, one day after the train robbery there. He next went to Denver, where he stayed until November 29. He headed for Pawnee, Oklahoma,

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President's Message

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but before leaving Denver, foolishly left his Pawnee address with a chamber maid in the Manx Hotel. This last letter led to his capture and arrest in Pawnee on December 1. The next night Sheriff Jones of Pawnee County announced the confession of Buffalo Tom to the train wreck and robbery in Saugus. He denied the Cheyenne robbery and stated that he would allow extradition to California, but not to Wyoming. It is thought that Vernon felt he would be treated more leniently in California. He knew that in Wyoming his crime would be punishable by the death penalty as the sole legal option, and he also knew that no train robber in Wyoming had ever escaped punishment. Both Wyoming and California wanted to extradite Vernon and bring him to justice, so Los Angeles district attorney Fitts raced to Oklahoma preparing for a struggle with Wyoming officials. Vernon's confession allowed Fitts to win the legal battle and transport the bandit back to Los Angeles.



OFF TO PRISON

On December 11, Buffalo Tom first appeared before a judge in Los Angeles, where he was charged with one count of train wrecking and three counts of robbery. District Attorney Fitts announced his intention to seek the death penalty. One week later, despite Fitts' best efforts to send him to the gallows, 45 year old Buffalo Tom Vernon was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole by Superior Court Judge Aggeler. He was sent back to Folsom Prison to serve out his sentence. In spite of the life sentence, Buffalo Tom did eventually leave prison. But the ultimate ending to the saga of the Great Saugus Train Robbery remains steeped in controversy. Local historian Jerry Reynolds reported Vernon released from prison in 1964 and dying shortly thereafter of a "social disease". However, Carolena Rezendes of Sacramento wrote a letter to the Historical Society in 2004 disputing Reynolds story. She stated: "I know for a fact that he was not in prison in 1957-1958 because he was living with my family in Sacramento, California, in 1957 and 1958. As to how he died, it was TB (tuberculosis). Our family buried him."

HAPPENINGS AT THE JUNCTION

Another fall in the SCV. As of this writing preparations are busily underway for the 3rd Annual Heritage Haunt. Thanks

to Ed Marg, Scott Sivley, and all the Haunt crew for their long hours of hard work and dedication to this project.

Also stay tuned for information on upcoming lecture programs at the Saugus Train Station. We have booked Carl

Goldman, co-owner of local radio station KHTS, to do a talk on the history of radio on Saturday, January 30. Also on tap for Saturday, April 3 will be a talk on the San Andreas Fault by author David Lynch ("Field Guide to the San Andreas Fault"). More details to come in the next issue of the Dispatch.

E.J. Stephen's popular "Flickers at the Junction" program concluded the year in October with Dracula and Plan 9 from Outer Space, and will return in 2010 with four shows through the year.

It's time again to elect our SCVHS Board for next year. Current members of the Board who are candidates for re-election are Jeff Boultinghouse, Kristyn Van Wy, E.J. Stephens, Nancy Cordova, and Alan Pollack; six board

positions will be available. Anyone interested in running for the Board or nominating someone for the Board, please contact Pat Saletore at 661 254-1275. Board of Directors Secretary Cathie Kincheloe will be completing a distinguished term on our Board at the end of this year. We would like to thank Cathie for her dedication and many contributions to the Historical Society during her tenure as Secretary. She will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure to work with her on the Board. Cathie plans to continue to play an active role in Society events, and I want to personally thank her for all the help and support she has given me over the last few years.

Looking for a fun and fulfilling opportunity to give of your time and talents to the community for the upcoming year? Please consider becoming an active volunteer for the Historical Society. There are many ways to help out at Heritage Junction, and in preserving the great history of our valley. Will you join us in this noble quest? To volunteer, please call 661 254-1275.

Thanks everyone for all your help in 2009. I look forward to seeing you all at the Train Station in the next year.

Alan Pollack

A few words on Volunteers

by Pat Saletore

In this photo you see four friends enjoying an afternoon tea. You also see four volunteers who are critical to our recent event, Heritage Haunt. We are there on the nights of the event, sure, but this event is a huge undertaking. Nothing gets done by itself. Theresa is there for the build, as well. Did you see the black curtains in the freight room? Cindy sewed them. Mary manages the saloon. Their “other halves” work really, really hard for months to make the Haunt happen, but these ladies are THEIR support system. Without these volunteers, there would be no event, no crowds of young people coming to our venue, just another month of not much going on.

The season of the Haunt is exciting. People are buzzing around doing this and that...trying to have everything ready. Jokes and camaraderie, the hum of excitement and busyness. As we have added new volunteers to work at the Society, things get done. Restoration is happening as money is available. The Saugus Station is getting organized and cleaned up. The cataloguing project is perking along. We make friends in the community. Word of our work and history gets out. And our organization improves itself.

I get feedback from articles in the Dispatch. That feedback is generally positive regarding what we have done. There is always someone suggesting that we do more. I wish we could.

What is holding us back? It's the same old story: we move ahead as we get money and volunteers. So, I know that if you are reading this, you care about the history of Santa Clarita. Being interested makes you an observer, but we need more. Our supporters need to get out of the audience and be participators! We need help—plain and simple. Saying that you like what we are doing is not getting it done.

You don't have to carry the weight of the world like Atlas to be of help. Not all of the work involves a paintbrush or a hammer. This Fall, we had the opportunity to make a little money by managing the parking at a couple of events at William S. Hart Park. We had to turn it down because we couldn't get a half dozen volunteers for three days. OK...we didn't make the little bit of money that would have brought in. But it is a symptom of a much bigger problem. We are a volunteer organization without enough volunteers! We are CHRONICALLY low on funds. We have projects that wait years because we don't have the money or workers to get them done. This becomes disheartening for those of us “regulars” who show up to work when we have a project or event. Volunteers burn out like that.

So what do I want? I wrote a Santa letter last year; it's a good place to start. You can see it online at www.scvhs.org.

We need people to work on the gardens. This does not mean that you have to do EVERYTHING in the gardens. Maybe you would like to take the roses by the Pardee House and make them beautiful. Maybe you could spend a little quality time with a weedwhacker, giving our buildings a “defensible space” in the event of a fire. That doesn't have to mean clearing acres of ground—just what you can do.

We need people to bring order out of the chaos. Sue W. could use some help keeping our station clean. More workers mean lighter work. It's a big building and there is a lot of OLD dirt. Sue Y. and I are working upstairs in the station to put a little order in our storage spaces. Hauling boxes of stuff up and down those stairs is not fun. And there is reason to hope that we might be able to put together a committee to put order into the library in the near future.

People with skills are always desirable. Carpenters, plumbers, electricians... you get the idea. I grovel for volunteers like that. Mike Jarel needs help with the train yard. We have a windmill that needs to get assembled. We have some narrow gauge cars and track that need to have an outside display put together. E.J. needs help with Flickers. We need people to help with events. We need docents, a grant writer, people who can raise money, paint, dig ditches, filing, vacuuming, windows... We need money. Your dues barely pay for the delivery of this newsletter!

Look: This organization has a big job. We don't just keep the scholarly memories of this community. We keep artifacts, photographs, books, papers,...all this stuff takes money and effort to maintain. Consider this too—think about the work and expense necessary to maintain an old house. Multiply that times 5 and add a train station, locomotive and the grounds they sit on! It's daunting, history fans.

Yeah, this isn't another cheerful story about how (against all adversity) we were able to accomplish something. It's just a little dire. But it is very real. Volunteering...being involved... does have compensation. Look again at the tea party photo. Yes, the four of us in the photo have done some dirty, unglamorous work to benefit the organization. And we come back for more. Our compensation is more than an internal awareness of how we helped the Historical Society. You see four friends, who didn't know each other before but now feel much richer because they did get involved.

Theresa, Mary and Cindy...thanks for volunteering, for going the extra mile and for an afternoon tea party that totally rocked!



Holidays at the Hart by Kristyn Van Wy



The holidays are just around the corner and the William S. Hart Museum is a great place to bring out-of-town guests. Your friends and family will enjoy the cool autumn weather as they stroll through the Park, and the

beauty of the Hart Museum as they gaze upon artwork by Charles Russell and Frederic Remington.

The Museum is closed for Thanksgiving and Christmas day but is otherwise open for its regular hours. Remember that the Museum will be decorated for the holidays throughout the month of December. You can also look forward to Cowboys and Carols on December 5th. If you have never enjoyed the ambiance of a concert in the living room of the Hart Museum, this is the perfect opportunity to do so! Check hartmuseum.org for updates and more information.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday - Friday
10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Saturday and Sunday
11:00 AM - 3:30 PM

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>.

A Year of Flickers by E.J. Stephens

The "Flickers at the Junction" film series concluded its third season on Saturday, October 3, with two films by Bela Lugosi. The "Good Bela/Bad Bela" twin-bill featured the horror classic "Dracula" from 1931, and 1959's anti-classic "Plan Nine From Outer Space." The show helped kick off the month of Halloween festivities at Heritage Junction. It was a fitting night to conclude a series that featured a lot of fun, as well as some sadness.

In July, everyone associated with "Flickers" mourned the passing of our good friend and legendary organist, Bob Mitchell. Bob had an eighty-year career as an entertainer, choir director, and accompanist, and was one of the last people to have accompanied silent films in the 1920's who was still playing for them in 2009. He appeared in 100 films during Hollywood's Golden Era, and was the very first organist at Dodger Stadium when it opened in 1962. He passed away on the Fourth of July at the age of 96 from congestive heart failure.

Bob had played for "Flickers" since our very first show in 2007 and was instrumental in making the series a success. He played for an additional dozen shows until earlier this year, when he accompanied Mel Brooks' "Silent Movie". He was scheduled to play for Buster Keaton's "The General" in July, but passed away a week earlier. This show still went on - as he would have wanted - but was restructured as a memorial for Bob. Two tribute videos were shown during that evening, including one filmed exactly one year earlier, when Bob played "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" for 55,000 fans at Dodger Stadium. Bob was scheduled to play one additional time in December of this year, but with his passing, it was decided to end this year's series after the October 3 show. Bob was a true legend and gentleman, and we all miss him dearly.

During the 2009 season, we veered away from showing only silent films to present several classic talkies as well, including "The Wizard of Oz", "North By Northwest", "A Hard Day's Night", and "Stagecoach". For 2010, "Flickers" will be presented quarterly and the line-up will consist of classic talkies and silent films, with a new accompanist. Please check the website for the schedule when it is finalized.

This film series would not be possible without the support of the Board of Directors of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society or the many volunteers who helped out during the season. Two people deserve special recognition: Kim Stephens and Kristyn Van Wy. Without them, "Flickers" couldn't happen. Thanks to everyone who attended a show in 2009. We look forward to seeing you at the "Flickers" again in 2010.

Edison House Dedication by Jeff Boultinghouse

On Saturday, May 30, three local chapters of the Questers, an international organization dedicated to historic restoration, declared that the restoration of the historic Edison House was completed and the house was dedicated to the Historical Society. The project has taken several years under the leadership of the Canyon Questers, the Heritage Reflections Questers and the Oak of the Golden Dream Questers. The house has been lovingly restored to its 1920's condition, with antique furnishings, appliances, light fixtures and numerous other details, so that it appears the same as when Edison Company employees called it home.

Representatives of State and local government were on hand to express their appreciation to Oak of the Golden Dream Questers President Sue Yurosek, whose chapter was also celebrating their 40th anniversary. Certificates from State Senator George Runner and Assemblyman Cameron Smyth were presented and Santa Clarita City Council member Laurene Weste brought certificates from the City and from Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich. The restored Edison House was officially received by Society First Vice President Jeff Boultinghouse.

The Edison House was one of a group of cottages built by the Southern California Edison Company to house employees when the Newhall substation was opened in 1919. It was moved west of Saugus in 1925 when the new Saugus Substation was completed, where five additional homes were built of identical design. Assistant Edison Patrolman Raymond Starbard was living there on March 12, 1928, when Edison's Borel transmission line (to Lancaster) suddenly shorted out and blew up an oil switch, bringing all of the substation personnel to emergency duty. That short indicated that the Borel line had failed where it passed through San Francisquito Canyon. He quickly passed the word to Los Angeles and was credited as being among the first to spread the alarm of the St. Francis Dam disaster.

The restored Edison House at Heritage Junction is the last of its kind in the Santa Clarita Valley. Only a few more remain in use at Southern California Edison's Big Creek Hydroelectric Project in the Sierra northeast of Fresno.

Many Edison employees occupied the cottages. A typical family might live in a cottage for a year or so, until promotion or reassignment took them to another location. In the 1950's, the rent for a two-bedroom cottage was \$25 a month, a real bargain. The low rent made it possible for Edison employees to save enough money for homes of their own. When they moved to another camp, they went to the end of the waiting list for camp housing. The small cottages varied in size, but always had the same basic floor plan. Most of the families had children, which sometimes made for tight quarters. As the areas around the camps became more developed and more

housing became available, many of the cottages went vacant, often for years at a time.

As the Santa Clarita Valley grew and housing became more available, the camp at the Saugus Substation was no longer needed. The cottages were sold to Newhall Land and Farming Company on January 17, 1972. The Edison House was donated to the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society and moved to Heritage Junction on January 18, 1989. The remaining houses were burned down by the Los Angeles County Fire Department in a training exercise.

The Edison House is now a permanent part of the historical building collection at Heritage Junction, along with the Saugus Station, the Kingsbury House, Ramona Chapel, Newhall Ranch House and the Pardee House.



The Restored Edison House



SCVHS Vice President Jeff Boultinghouse accepts the restoration on behalf of the Society



Some of the Questers involved in the restoration.

Two photos courtesy of Neil Harris

Cleaning the Saugus Station by Pat Saletore

Some of the work at Heritage Junction yields recognition. If you fix a railing, then it is fixed and we can see and use it for years. Some jobs are intrinsically cool. Working on our photo scanning and cataloguing means you get to see all the neat old photos. Putting on public events gets appreciation from the assembled participants.

Sue Wameling has volunteered to come in every Wednesday morning and do housekeeping at the Saugus Station. It doesn't sound very glamorous, but you really can't imagine the difference it makes. Between the reduction of dust from the road and Sue's weekly visits the past month, the Station is almost a different place! She isn't just doing light housekeeping either...she got on her hands and knees to make the kitchen floor look amazing. We are getting to clean in places that we couldn't get to before and the place has just taken on a new feel. Volunteers come in all kinds of different interest levels, but some things just warrant more appreciation than others. Cleaning bathrooms and scrubbing floors...PRICELESS.



Photo by Neil Harris

*Oak of the Golden Dream Questers President Sue Yurosek accepts a certificate from Santa Clarita City Council member Laurene Weste marking the 40th anniversary of the chapter.
(See page 6)*



Recent Docents

Thank you to the following members who served as docents during July and August:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Frank Adella | Barbara Martinelli |
| Jeff Boultinghouse | Barbara Milteer |
| Laurie Cartwright | RuthAnne Murthy |
| Sioux Coghlan | Alan Pollack |
| Sarah Floyd | Pat Saletore |
| Francesca Gastil | E.J. Stephens |
| Harold Hicks | Konrad Summers |
| Karen and Bill Limbaugh | Kristyn Van Wy |

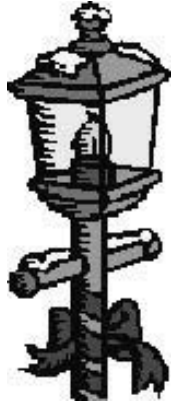
Thanks also to the docents who helped at the Pumpkin Festival and Haunt:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Frank Adella | Karen and Bill Limbaugh |
| Laurie Cartwright | Barbara Martinelli |
| Sioux Coghlan | Barbara Milteer |
| Sarah Floyd | Alan Pollack |
| Francesca Gastil | Kristyn Van Wy |
| Harold Hicks | |

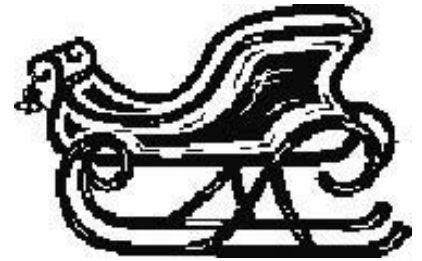
And Special THANKS to E.J. and Kimi Stephens for another year of Flickers!



Christmas Open House Saturday, December 12 from Noon to 5:00 PM



COME
AND SHARE THE
HOLIDAY SPIRIT WITH THE
SANTA CLARITA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY!
THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS
WILL ALL BE OPEN FOR YOU TO VISIT
SEE THE PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE THIS YEAR!
CELEBRATE THE SEASON!



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Headquarters: Saugus Train Station
24101 San Fernando Road, Newhall
Open to the public each Saturday and Sunday
1:00 to 4:00 PM
Kingsberry House open the first Sunday
of each month from 1:00 to 4:00 PM

Historical Society Board of Directors

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"Preserving the best of the past for the good of the future"

**Society Info: www.scvhs.org
Photo, Text Archives: www.scvhistory.com**