



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

Volume 40, Issue 5

September - October 2014

Calendar

Sunday, September 14

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

Monday, September 22

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Wednesday, October 1

Deadline for the November-
December *Dispatch*

Sunday, October 12, and every second Sunday

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

Saturday, October 18

Talk on Rancho Camulos
2:00 PM Old Town Newhall Library

Monday, October 27

Board of Directors Meeting
6:30 PM Saugus Station

Check www.scvhhistory.org for
other upcoming events.

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

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



The Hatfields and McCoys had nothing on William Jenkins and William Chormicle! Starting in 1890, a violent range war between factions of these two men ripped apart the lives of many inhabitants of Castaic.

A futile dispute over land claims would last almost a quarter of a century, resulting in the murders of over twenty people.

William W. Jenkins

William Wirt Jenkins, a pioneer of the Santa Clarita Valley, led a colorful life straight out of the pages of the Wild West. Jenkins grew up in Ohio and arrived in the California gold fields with his family in 1851. There on the American River, Jenkins became skillful

with a pistol to hold off claim jumpers. Two years later, Jenkins drifted to the rough and tumble pueblo of Los Angeles, then one of the most violent towns in America. It was a place seething with racial hatred and mistrust between the native Californios and the Anglo immigrants, many of whom had come out West to the California Gold Rush. Shortly thereafter, his prowess with a pistol having gained the attention of Mayor Ignacio Del Valle, Jenkins was recruited into the Los Angeles Rangers, a volunteer vigilante police force that was commissioned with cleaning up the mean streets of Los Angeles. Fellow Rangers included Major Horace Bell, who later recounted his escapades as author of "Reminiscences of a Ranger", the first book to be published in Los Angeles, and Cyrus Lyon, who with brother Sanford, emigrated to Los Angeles from Macias, Maine, and eventually settled in the Santa Clarita Valley to run the stagecoach stop Lyons Station. This ragtag

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Photo by Gordon Glattenberg

Magic Mountain's Colossus rollercoaster closed on August 16 after a 36-year run. The double track design allowed two trains to run simultaneously.

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group of gunfighters embarked on a shoot first, ask questions later campaign, which effectively tamed the pueblo's criminal element within two years.

By 1856, at the age of 21, Jenkins had become a deputy constable for the pueblo. His first brush with notoriety began when he was sent to repossess a guitar belonging to a Californio man, Antonio Ruiz. In the process of the repossession, Ruiz somehow ended up dead at the end of one of Jenkins' gun barrels. Jenkins claimed that Ruiz had tried to escape and shot him in the back. Jenkins was tossed in jail and charged with murder. This was not good enough for a mob of some 200 Californios who attempted to break Jenkins out of jail for a lynching. It was the first race riot in Los Angeles history. They did not succeed and Jenkins ultimately went free when a jury of white people acquitted him after a deliberation of five minutes.

Jenkins and the Lazy Z Ranch

Jenkins eventually migrated up to the Rancho San Francisco, where the fledgling oil business was just taking off in adjacent Pico Canyon. Along with Sanford Lyon and Henry Clay Wiley, he sunk the first oil well in Pico Canyon in 1869, using the spring-pole method of drilling.

In 1872, Jenkins made the fateful decision to lay claim to a large section of land along Castaic Creek upon which he built the Lazy Z ranch 6 years later. He married Olive Rhodes of Illinois, and had two daughters. In the ensuing years, the Lazy Z became well known for breeding and training top flight race horses. All was well at the Lazy Z until William C. Chormicle showed up in 1890. Chormicle, a crusty 50 year old gentleman with a proclivity for guns similar to that of Jenkins', purchased 1600 acres of land in the Castaic area which had already been claimed by Jenkins for the Lazy Z Ranch. Chormicle had a large ranch in Santa Paula, where he spent most of his time, leaving his wife and several of his sons to run the operations in Castaic.

The Root of the Dispute

The root of the dispute actually lay in an ambiguity in the law, which resulted in overlapping land grants in the Castaic area being given to two railroad companies. According to a Los Angeles Times article on March 6, 1890, the Castaic lands were part of a body of over one million acres in Ventura and Los Angeles counties which were granted to both the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad and the Southern Pacific Railroad. The lands were originally granted to the Atlantic and Pacific by an act of Congress in 1866. In 1871, the same general area was granted to the Southern Pacific, but those lands previously granted to the Atlantic and Pacific were specifically excluded. The Atlantic and Pacific Railroad however was never completed. Thus in

July, 1886, the land granted to the defunct railroad was, by an act of Congress, forfeited and reverted to the United States government and restored to the public domain, which allowed homesteading of the land. In spite of the previous exclusions in 1871, the Southern Pacific company continued to claim the lands which had reverted to the government. The land dispute was brought to the Secretary of the Interior Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar II (in office March 6, 1885 – January 10, 1888), who decided in the Gordon case of 1887 that the Southern Pacific had no right to any of these lands. When Lamar was succeeded by William Freeman Vilas as Secretary of the Interior (in office January 16, 1888 – March 6, 1889), the Southern Pacific again tried to reclaim the lands, but were again rebuffed. Not willing to give up, the Southern Pacific then brought suit against a settler Wesley Coble to eject him from a tract of his land. In July, 1888, Judge Hutton of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County decided that the railway company had no right to these lands. The Southern Pacific apparently appealed, but systematically delayed and postponed the case to prevent the Supreme Court from reviewing the appeal. It was in this setting that Chormicle appeared on the scene in 1890. Jenkins had settled on land which ended up in the dispute between the government and the Southern Pacific. Chormicle claimed the same land based on a "permit" from the Southern Pacific Company.

The Murder of Cook and Walton

With Jenkins and Chormicle claiming the same land, the Castaic Range War officially began on February 28, 1890, when two men allied with Jenkins were shot dead by Chormicle and an accomplice as they were hauling lumber onto the disputed land to erect a cabin. Three days prior, 25 year old George Walton had hauled some lumber to a section of land on which he had filed a homestead. The same section was claimed by Chormicle. Walton had been in the area only three months, having previously lived in San Diego. According to an account by neighbor William H. George to the Los Angeles Times, and court testimony by Jose Olme, Walton passed by a shanty occupied by Chormicle, who took exception to Walton's actions and had the lumber moved and thrown over a fence below the shanty. Hard feelings developed between the two men, and Walton decided to move the lumber back to his homestead location to build the sides of his house with the assistance of Dolores Cook and his brother-in-law Jose Olme. The men got a wagon and a buggy, but before they had loaded the lumber, Chormicle and William A. Gardner arrived on the scene. Walton and Chormicle proceeded to have an altercation, during which Walton struck Chormicle in the face. The fight was broken up by Cook and Olme, and Chormicle returned to the home of Juan Leiva with Gardner.

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Walton and his men proceeded to load the wagon with lumber, and passing by Leiva's shanty, unloaded the lumber at the homestead site. They went back and loaded the wagon a second time and started off with Walton's wagon in the lead. Olme accompanied Walton on the wagon, with Cook driving the buggy. As the wagon passed Leiva's shanty, Chormicle and Gardner appeared at the windows and opened fire with rifles and pistols. Walton was killed instantly, and Cook died three hours later at Jenkin's house from gunshot wounds. Olme jumped from the wagon and ran to Cook's buggy while dodging bullets from Chormicle and Gardner. As he approached the horse of Cook's buggy, it started to run. Olme grabbed the harness and ran alongside the horse, which shielded him from further gunshots as he passed by Leiva's shanty and escaped to Jenkin's house unscathed.

Leon Worden writes "Cook was a Fernandño Indian of Tataviam, Kitanemuk and Tongva descent, and Castaic was his ancestral territory. Upon his death, Cook left a widow and four children. Cook is the late Charlie Cooke's great-grandfather. Charlie Cooke (1935-2013) was chief of the Southern Chumash and a respected elder within the Fernandño-Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. (The 'e' was added to the surname by Charlie's grandparents.) Dolores Cook is also great-great-grandfather to the current (2014) chief, Ted Garcia, who received the title from Charlie in December, 2008".

According to W. H. George, Chormicle "has always stood well, and up to the other day he has taken but little interest in the quarrels". Gardner "lives with his father on their ranch nearby, and has always borne an excellent reputation. He is a single man and has never to my knowledge been in trouble before. Why he should have been drawn into this by Chormicle is a mystery to everybody. They were not particularly good friends before, and I can't understand it." Cook "was part Spanish, and stood well in the community. He had taken no part in the quarrel, and was simply assisting Walton to haul his lumber to his land."

As soon as they were finished shooting, Chormicle and Gardner raced out of the shanty to their horses and fled into the canyon. The news of the shooting spread quickly through the neighborhood, and within a short time the constables at Newhall were notified and began tracking the suspects. About one week later, Sheriff W.H. Riley of Ventura County received word of where the men were, and that they wanted to give themselves up. He met up with the fugitives in Piru Canyon and brought them to Ventura. The men stated that they had meant to give themselves up in Castaic, but saw a crowd of Jenkins' faction gathering, and fearing for their lives, took off across the mountain range to Ventura.

The Trial of Chormicle and Gardner

In late March of 1890, Chormicle and Gardner stood on trial for the murder of Walton and Cook. Their defense lawyers, J. L. Murphy, Esq. and Alex Campbell, Esq., claimed that the defendants were justified in the killing, alleging that Walton and Cook were the aggressors, and that Chormicle had to kill them in defense of his own property. The preliminary examination concluded on March 26 with the defendants being charged with the murder of Cook and Walton and held without bail.

The trial began two days later in department No. 1 of the Superior Court. The list of witnesses before the Court was over one hundred persons, practically the entire Castaic neighborhood. The prosecution's case left no doubt that Chormicle and Gardner did indeed fire the shots that killed Walton and Cook. It was left to the defense to prove justifiable homicide or self-defense. They put on several character witnesses attesting to the "very fine reputation" of both defendants. The Los Angeles Times on June 8, 1890, reported "Little by little the connection of W.W. Jenkins with the troubles in the valley has been made more apparent, and the defense now openly say that before the close they will show a conspiracy on the part of the men who lost their lives and Jenkins to kill W.C. Chormicle and W.A. Gardner." William B. Rose testified about a prior quarrel between Jenkins and Chormicle, during which Jenkins abusively accused Chormicle of driving his cattle off a section of land that both claimed. Jenkins was accompanied by Walton at the time, and both expressed their willingness to fight Chormicle for the land. Chormicle himself was placed on the witness stand and gave his side of the story of the killings. He claimed that he had come out of Leiva's house with his rifle and pistol to stop the men from hauling the lumber. He stated that he fired at them after they had drawn pistols on him. He further claimed that only he, not Gardner, had done the shooting, and that no one had shot from inside the house. Several witnesses, including John Powell of Newhall, testified that the deceased Cook had a bad reputation for "peace and quiet", was a loyal friend of Jenkins, and claimed to carry a pistol intended for Chormicle. Other witnesses for the prosecution, including W. J. Biscailuz, Pedro Lopez, and Geronimo Lopez attested to Cook's good reputation.

Testimony in the case concluded on June 14, 1890. Closing arguments took place the next day. Mr. Gordon for the prosecution claimed that the killing was murder in the first degree, and that both defendants were equally guilty. He stated that the evidence conclusively proved that both Chormicle and Gardner shot down Dolores Cook and George Walton from ambush behind the windows of the Leiva's cabin.

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According to the Times, Mr. Murphy for the defense stated that "by right the two defendants should not be where they are, but W.W. Jenkins, Jose Olme and Thomas Riley are the real defendants who should be on trial. He argued that the testimony discloses a conspiracy on the part of Jenkins and his crowd to have the Chormicle land or kill them to secure it, and that it was the intention that Chormicle and Gardner should be the ones shot that fatal morning in February, instead of Cook and Walton."

The Verdicts

The case went to the jury on June 17. The courtroom was reported to be crowded with spectators, with quite a number of ladies in attendance. Chormicle sat with his family, while Gardner sat at his counsel's table. Their demeanor was described as being that of quiet confidence of their ultimate release. The morning started with Alex Campbell, Esq., speaking for the defense. His testimony was reported as "clear and logical, at times startlingly eloquent". When he finished his defense of Chormicle and Gardner, "the audience broke out into an uncontrollable burst of applause". Judge Cheney, unable to restrain the crowd from applauding had the courtroom cleared. Mr. McComas for the prosecution gave an equally compelling argument. As reported in the Times, "He deprecated the interjection of W.W. Jenkins into the case, saying no matter how big a scoundrel he might be, still he was not connected sufficiently with the case, by the evidence, to justify the prominence given him by the defense. He said Jenkins was not on trial, and that the defendants were not justified in the killing."

In essence, the court's instructions to the jury were that "if Dolores Cook, George Walton and Jose Olme went upon Chormicle's land, he being in possession, with the intent to commit a felony, by dispossessing him of the land by force, and with intent to kill him or do great bodily harm, they must acquit the defendants". The jury deliberated for twenty minutes before announcing a verdict. Dr. Nesbit of Pomona, foreman of the jury read the verdicts. Both Chormicle and Gardner were found not guilty of the murder of Dolores Cook. A second case for the murder of George Walton was dismissed the next day. The eighteen day trial had been one of the longest in County history to that time. There are members of the Cooke-Garcia family today who believe justice was denied.

The Range War

The trial was over, but the Jenkins-Chormicle feud was just beginning. For the next twenty five years, Jenkins, Chormicle and their henchmen picked up their guns over every issue in the Castaic area involving roads, mining, grazing, and water.

Over twenty people were said to have lost their lives in the ensuing feud and range war. The feud was thought to have ended in October, 1904, when Chormicle was awarded the land contested between him and Jenkins. A patent received from the United States Land Office awarded Chormicle 1600 acres of land previously claimed by Jenkins. The Los Angeles Times quoted attorney J. L. Murphy, "The case has cost far more than the land is worth, but it was a fight for principle with the settlers that could not be given up when once undertaken." But it didn't end there...

The violence continued in spite of the settlement. At one point, President Theodore Roosevelt felt compelled to send newly appointed U.S. Forest Ranger Robert Emmett Clark to Castaic in an attempt to intimidate the warring factions into stopping the fighting. This quieted things down until Clark left in 1913, after which the war resumed. Shortly after Clark left, Jenkins was shot in the chest at his ranch house by a Chormicle ally. He survived this attack.

The Duel With Billy Rose

Things came to a head on March 8, 1913, when Chormicle ally William Lewis "Billy" Rose shot Jenkins in a pistol duel in Castaic Canyon. As with the Chormicles, Jenkins had feuded with the Rose family for a number of years over land disputes. The families were described as being in "a state of armed neutrality" for a number of years, and that numerous threats to kill had been made. Rose accused Jenkins of offering large sums of money to have him killed. Jenkins said that Rose never had any right to the land he claimed based on a grazing permit. Rose was brought to court on a charge of assault with intent to commit murder. His attorney H. H. Appel argued that his client was justified in drawing on Jenkins "considering the reputation the latter bears in Castaic Canyon as a 'gun fighter'". After surviving his wounds, Jenkins appeared in court and testified "I tried to get out my own gun, but the pesky thing worked slow. I fired two shots and think I would have got Rose, but just then came another bullet which cut my arm." Jenkins further claimed that as he rode up the canyon, Rose suddenly appeared ahead of him and called on him to stop. Then came a zip of bullets. The entire affair lasted five minutes.

Ironically neither of the principals in the Castaic Range War were killed in the battles. Both died of natural causes. Jenkins perished quietly at age 81 on October 19, 1916, of a cerebral embolism. It was previously thought that Chormicle was shot to death in 1916, an act for which Jenkins was suspected. However, a recent review of Chormicle's death certificate shows that he actually died of chronic kidney disease on March 25, 1919. He is buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale. Neither Jenkins nor Chormicle died with their boots on.

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Trumping the Tradition by Rachel Barnes



There is something to be said for tradition. It is constant, it is reliable. It is a comfort to know that tradition will be steadfast in a world of a constant change.

However, the Hart Museum is now changing one of its traditions. As far back as most guests can probably remember, the Museum was open for guided tours during the school year Wednesdays through Fridays, 10:00am – 1:00pm.

It was reliable, but it was no longer serving the needs of our guests, especially during our school visits season when we are deluged with elementary school students from all across Los Angeles County. As much as we love our young visitors, and the unique experience with history they obtain when they come on a field trip, we know some of our guests don't want to take a school tour of the Mansion!

That is why we are changing our weekday hours only as of September 3. Starting on that Wednesday, weekday hours will now be:

12:00 PM – 3:00 PM, Wednesday through Friday

Tours start every 30 minutes

Last tour starts at 2:30pm

On weekends, the hours have not changed; they remain:

11:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Saturday and Sunday

Tours start every 30 minutes

Last tour starts at 3:30pm.

We will be setting aside separate hours for school tours only, which will better accommodate the students' classroom schedules. That means the school kids will come early and then go, and our non-school visitors will have tours all to themselves starting at noon on the three weekdays. If that doesn't scream "win-win," well, we're not sure what would.

See you up the hill soon!



Photo by Walt Thrall

Southern Pacific train #26, the Owl, crossing San Fernando Road in Newhall, May 1940. The Owl was an overnight train from Oakland to Los Angeles.

OUR VINICULTURE HISTORY

by Maria Christopher

The recent planting of wine grapes on the College of the Canyons Campus as a result of a donation from Remo Belli is just the latest chapter in the history of viniculture in our area. Winemaking was part of our early history, with the San Gabriel Mission acknowledged as the source of grapes for the other missions throughout the region. The San Fernando Mission, whose area of control included Rancho San Francisco (our own Santa Clara Valley), had a large winemaking operation, vestiges of which remain today.

We do not know if grapevines were cultivated at the estancia of Antonio del Valle which was located near where Magic Mountain is today. Antonio was the majordomo at the San Fernando Mission for many years and was responsible for the secularization of that mission. In return, he received the 48,000-acre Mexican land grant of Rancho San Francisco in 1839. When Antonio died just a few years later, his son Ygnacio inherited the approximately 1,800-acre westernmost portion of Rancho San Francisco, which he named Rancho Camulos after the Tataviam village, Kamulos, which was at that location.



Rancho Camulos is attributed to be the location for the first commercial production of wine and brandy in the area. Reportedly, Ygnacio obtained rootstock from the San Gabriel Mission and in the early 1860's began wine production in the newly completed basement of his adobe home at Camulos. The wine business prospered. During the 1860's, ninety acres of wine grapes were planted. By 1867, construction was completed on a large winery made with a base of river stone, huge wooden beams, and brick from Los Angeles. More modern equipment, including a distillery for brandy production, was acquired and delivered through the port of Santa Barbara.

It was the wine grape that brought the first real commercial success for the del Valle family. Between 1860 and 1900, some

of the finest wines and brandies in Southern California reputedly came from Camulos, which was then actually part of Santa Barbara County. In the 1870 federal industrial census, Camulos Ranch winery is reported as the largest of the four vintners in the San Buenaventura Township of Santa Barbara County, with a harvest of 45 tons of grapes resulting in 6,000 gallons of wine and 800 gallons of brandy. The products were sold throughout the area, and visitors to the many fiestas held at the rancho looked forward to enjoying Camulos's finest vintage.

What remains today at the Rancho Camulos Museum of that chapter in our viniculture history? The vineyards were destroyed during a major flood of the Santa Clara in the late 1890's. However, a replanting of mission grapes lines the restored arbor in the garden. In the adobe basement there are old wine barrels, and the license obtained for brandy distilling still adorns a beam. There is a wine press of that era on display on the veranda.

The winery which still stands was severely damaged in the 1994 Northridge quake and is not open to the public. It is one of 15 historical buildings included in the 40 acre Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark. In addition, the distillery, other brandy and winemaking equipment, old barrels and staves have been saved and secured, looking forward to a day when the winery can be restored to its old glory.

Today as you explore the local wineries such as Agua Dulce and Reyes and enjoy their vintage, as well as that of the growing number of local private producers, remember the days of brandy and winemaking at Rancho Camulos. Consider bringing a bottle of local wine and a picnic to Camulos for a tour, and recreate your own little piece of that part of our history at Rancho Camulos, where the history, myth, and romance of old California still linger. Visit us at www.ranchocamulos.org to learn more about your local history.

SCVHS Museum Gift Store

by Cathy Martin

The SCVHS museum gift store has just received our first shipment of fall-inspired gifts. We are trying something new this year: Many of you have requested items that are made in America, which can be hard to find these days. However, I persevered and found a company that makes hickory walking sticks. They come in assorted sizes, and one even has a compass on the top! It just might be a unique gift for one of those people who have everything.

We also just got back in stock our very popular desert-themed animal sculptures, along with an assortment of plush horses and those fun ceramic mugs and shot glasses.

Come by soon in for the best selection. Please remember that your purchases benefit the SCVHS restoration fund.

Please also keep in mind that the SCVHS Christmas Open House will be on Saturday, December 6, from 12:00 to 4:00 PM. There will be more information in the next issue of the *Dispatch*.

President's Message

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ST. FRANCIS DAM NATIONAL MEMORIAL

You may recall in the November-December, 2012 issue of the Dispatch, I wrote an article on the Johnstown Flood of 1889 and how it compared to the St. Francis Dam tragedy. At the end of the article I wrote: "In reading about the Johnstown Flood, one is struck by the many similarities to the story of the St. Francis Dam disaster. Both of the tragic events received tremendous newspaper coverage throughout the country. But there is one glaring difference. The site of the South Fork dam is now a National Memorial complete with a National Park Service visitor center manned by Rangers with museum, theater, and documentary film. At the St. Francis dam site there is...nothing but the ruins. While it is a national remembrance well deserved in Johnstown, perhaps the St. Francis deserves similar recognition. Can we in the Santa Clarita Valley make that happen?"

Well that pipe dream of 2012 is closer to becoming a reality. Thanks to the legislative expertise and dedication of Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel, a committee consisting of Dianne, myself, Leon Worden, Frank Rock, Darryl Manzer, Ann Stansell, James Snead, Linda Castro, Don Ray, Evan Decker, Lauren Parker, E. J. Stephens, and Kim Stephens, and the assistance of Santa Clarita Mayor Laurene Weste, we have successfully gotten a bill introduced in the House of Representatives to make the St. Francis Dam site a National Memorial. Dianne, Linda Castro, and I traveled to Washington, D.C. in June, 2014, and met with the staff of Representative Buck McKeon to pitch the National Memorial concept. The McKeon staff enthusiastically responded to our presentation, and I am happy and proud to announce that on July 31, 2014, the Honorable Representative Howard Buck McKeon introduced on the floor of the House of Representatives a bill, H.R. 5357: To authorize a national memorial to commemorate those killed by the collapse of the Saint Francis Dam on March 12, 1928, and for other purposes. We are most appreciative to Representative McKeon for his introduction of this historic legislation to properly memorialize the victims of the dam disaster after 86 years. The bill now goes to the House Natural Resources committee. We will continue to work hard to get the bill through committee, then to the floor of the House for a vote. We will also work on introducing the same bill in the Senate, and then hopefully get it to the President's desk for signature. As you all know, getting a bill through Congress these days can be challenging, so we will need your support to make this happen. In the coming days, you may be requested by us to write letters to our local Senators and Congressmen in support of this bill. Stay tuned for more details!

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

Weekend Docents:

Linda Casebolt	Debra Martin
Sioux Coghlan	Barbara Martinelli
Evan Decker	RuthAnne Murthy
Sarah Floyd	Sean O'Connell
Francesca Gastil	Alan Pollack
Harold Hicks	Gordon Uppman
Anna Kroll	Mia Villamayor

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

Those who open and close for the docents:

Linda Casebolt	Cathy Martin
Duane Harte	Alan Pollack
Barbara Martinelli	Roberto Torres

Weekend Questers*

Becky Basham	Roberta Harris
Linda Comela	Judy Holland
Nancy Cordova	Kate Waterson
Ann Grayson	Robin Wallace
Fritz Grayson	Judy Wood
Barbara Harris	

School Tour Docents:

Barbara Martinelli	Brent Roberts
RuthAnne Murthy	

Grounds:

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

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

A Quiet Day in August When All Things Changed

by John Boston

An anniversary passed without much fanfare recently. The day was August 8; the year, 1769. It is, inarguably, the most significant date in Santa Clarita history, more important than dams bursting, earthquakes quaking, or the construction of the first Valencia yuppie concentration - camp housing project.

For thousands of years before it, life had been the same. Ancient primitive people known by the generic name of Anasazi lived here, hunting big game: Bison with horns stretching to 12-feet, swift antelope, wild goat and deer. They dined on fish, fresh water clams (good band name) and leeches and acorns. These original citizens disappeared around 400 A.D. In their place came a Shoshone-based people from the Midwest plains. These warlike Shoshone settled into the SCV. It took awhile, but they melded into their own tribe and eventually became known as Tataviam.

Both Native American groups went generation after generation doing pretty much the same thing. They had no wheel. They leached acorns. They hunted using implements that were the same design being used 100,000 years earlier - maybe longer

Is - that - not - *staggering*?

We have a major computer revolution every six minutes, while these folks used spear and arrow bits that had not changed in thousands of generations.

On August 8, 1769, an expedition led by the Spaniard Gaspar de Portolá came through Elsmere Canyon from the San Fernando Valley. They marched down what would be Newhall Avenue today, underneath the Highway 14 underpass, past Carl's Jr., down the road into Newhall, following the Santa Clara River (near McDonald's at Valencia and Soledad/ Bouquet Canyon Road) to what may even then have been called, "Castaic."

The name comes from the Tataviam word, "kashtuk," meaning, "mine eyes." It's a spiritual term for what you can see. Some may already suspect that we actually see through the soul, and not the retina.

Portolá's expedition was led to an Indian wedding ceremony at Chaguiyabit, the Tataviam capitol of about 500 souls. (There is debate about the population of the valley then - it could be 500 or 2,500 or more; or, less). Spain was the conqueror of the world, builder of fortresses and cathedrals, and ships that sailed the oceans. The Tataviam lived in wickiups and walked about nude.

Anthropologists say there was virtually no intelligence difference between the two cultures. But, how differently they lived!

I just marvel at that time line. Depending who you talk to, the ancient ones lived here anywhere from 4,300 to 28,000 years ago - maybe as long as 50,000 years. For all those thousands of years there was *no* change. A scouting party of Europeans visited on a probably-hot August day, and 245 years later the pace of change is simply dizzying.

No value judgment, good or bad. The Tataviam worried about keeping away from grizzly bears or being able to outrun a forest fire. We've moved mountains. Changed rivers. We fly through the air, talk to people a half-planet away instantly and more smile-bringing, it's today here and tomorrow there.

Most Tataviam males could squat down and draw, in the dirt, a perfect relief map of California and Nevada. But I doubt that they had a concept that the world was round and spinning. They would have no need to make a long distance wireless phone call to Tokyo. In the time they took to walk across the valley, we can fly to London. Their take? Why?

Not good. Not bad. But look how tough they were. We have to have the just-right mattress. They slept on the ground, sometimes under oak leaves. I wonder: Did they have trouble falling asleep? Did they worry about children doing well in life? Did they wonder if a son who couldn't sharpen a flint well or tie a stone arrowhead onto a stick - would he have trouble making it in the world?

Things took time. We've obliterated it.

They would take a day to smoke the scent off their bodies in order to go on a hunt for two or three days. We get impatient clicking through 565 channels.

Some of us are still scared of the dark. I'll bet they were. We have mastered both day and night, cooling them, heating them, lighting them. We can effortlessly move things that weigh thousands of tons.

When Portolá came over the ridge, he led a party that stretched out about a quarter of a mile long. I'm betting the Tataviam knew of the white man. The SCV was the hub of major Indian trading routes stretching for hundreds of miles, and even across to Catalina. You'd think gossip would be a valuable free commodity. Maybe the Tataviam knew of these strange creatures for hundreds of years before their coming on August 8th.

But still. To see that long parade for the first time, of men in strange clothes and bullhide vests, colorful flags and strange weapons.

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Hart Park's Calendar of Events

by Eric Reifman

3rd Annual Hart Train Show - September 13-14, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM

The High Desert Modular Model Railroad Club (HDMMRC) will be displaying their HO-scale model railroad layout at Hart Hall. You'll see many passenger and freight trains passing through varied California scenery including deserts and countryside, industrial plants, and an old west town.

Native American Pow Wow & Craft Fair - September 27, 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM; September 28, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM

You will experience a significant slice of Native American culture at the 21st Annual Hart of the West Powwow. There will be dancers, drummers and the numerous displays of arts and crafts.

Bow Wows - October 12, 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM

This popular fair will feature an exciting lineup of entertainment and pet-related vendors, as well as low-cost adoptions from six Los Angeles County shelters. All pets are spayed or neutered, up to date on vaccinations, and licensed at the time of adoption. For more information, see: <http://www.bowwowsandmeows.org>.

John Boston

Continued from page 8

I'd bet that being traders, some of the Tatavians had a satisfied smirk, calculating on how they could make a great swap for the goodies the Spaniards possessed.

There was a major earthquake in the Santa Clarita that first day Gaspar de Portolá visited here. Indeed. The earth did move, and it has never been the same since. You can go back and list compelling dates that forever changed this valley: The railroad's being finished in 1876; paved roads at the turn of the century; electricity, telephones and natural gas made wholesale available in the 1920's. The planned community of Valencia's being dedicated 33 years ago this month.

It makes you wonder: What epic change will be recorded next? Tidal wave? Plague? Asteroid? Unasked-for migration of yet more Irish? Pleasant, stupefying and luxurious progress? You'd think something big is going to happen in the future.

But - what?

{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. Over at the scvbeacon.com, every week do look for his John Boston Report - <http://scvbeacon.com/category.php?catg=5>) and Time Ranger/SCV History column - <http://scvbeacon.com/weekly-column.php?id=1296> And, you can Tweet him at THEJohnBoston.}

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New Members

Here are newest members of the SCV Historical Society. Welcome aboard, and thank you for helping to preserve the history of the Santa Clarita Valley!

Greg Jordan - Life Membership

Richard Noonan - Life Membership

Candace Holsenbeck Janet Werren

Henry Troxell Evie Ybarra

Lucia Wells

Join the SCV Historical Society Today!

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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>.



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