



The Heritage Junction Dispatch

A Publication of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

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Calendar

Due to ongoing construction, Heritage Junction is closed until further notice.

Friday, April 1

Deadline for the June - July Dispatch

Check www.scvhistory.org for other upcoming events when Heritage Junction reopens.

President's Message

by Alan Pollack



Has Ace Cain gotten a bad historical rap? The historical record is frequently fraught with ambiguities. The story of Ace Cain is no exception. Born Horace Truman Cain in Madill, Oklahoma, on August 23, 1903, he is portrayed as a "colorful and controversial character" and yet a leading citizen of Canyon Country, with multiple honors for his contributions to the community. Was he a good man with a dark side, or was his "colorful" side misrepresented by those who knew of him?

ACE CAIN, SOLDIER

Before coming to Canyon Country, Cain had made a name for himself as an actor and

Hollywood nightclub owner. He had grown up on a farm in Wichita Falls, Texas. He later served in the U.S. Army for three years just after World War I with his brother Jim, visiting such places as China, the Philippines, and Hawaii. According to Jim's son Everett Truman Cain, in an interview with b-westerns.com in October 2002, the two brothers made a small fortune in gambling during their army days. Ace excelled in dice games, while brother Jim was an expert poker player. At age 24, Cain became a heavy-weight boxer. His promoter changed his name from Horace to Ace. He won nineteen fights before calling it quits after breaking bones in his hands too many times.

ACE CAIN, BOOTLEGGER

With the money gained from his poker exploits, Ace returned to a Prohibition Era

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America in the early 1930s. He met and married Beatrice Willys. His first business in Hollywood was not acting but bootlegging. Due to his affable personality, he made friends with the police, often cooperating when they needed to make a raid. According to his nephew Everett: "He would have his boys leave an old car with a few cases of cheap booze in it, so the cops could report that they had raided Ace Cain's."

ACE CAIN, ACTOR

The door opened to the movie industry when he met some B-Western movie actors and directors during his bootlegging days. His forte as an actor was to portray badmen in various B-Westerns in the 1930s. Weighing in at 6'5" and 240 pounds, Ace had the perfect body build for a western badman. He even did his own stunts and fights. During the mid-1930s, Cain played the villain in fourteen Poverty Row (B-movie) westerns produced by lower-tier small studios. His credits included a henchman in "Shotgun Pass" (1931), a cowhand in "Sundown Trail" (1934), Speed Hawkins in "Six Gun Justice" (1935), a camp cook in "The Cyclone Ranger" (filmed at Iverson Ranch, Chatsworth, Agoura, and Red Rock Canyon State Park) (1935), a lookout in "Toll of the Desert" (filmed at Vasquez Rocks and Iverson Ranch, Chatsworth) (1935), henchman Pete in "The Texas Rambler" (1935), henchman Kentuck in "The Vanishing Riders" (1935), henchman Sam Hall in "Rio Rattler" (1935), Dead Pan Wilson in "Danger Trails" (filmed at Alabama Hills, Lone Pine) (1935), a bartender in "Gun Play" (1935), henchman Saunders-Rontell in "The Law of the 45's" (1935), Ace Lewis in "The Irish Gringo" (1935), Inspector Bull in "The Shadow of Silk Lennox" (1935), a defense lawyer in "Too Much Beef" (1936), a henchman in "Wild Horse Round-Up" (filmed at Iverson Ranch, Chatsworth) (1936), and 1st tramp in "Flying Fists" (1937). Of note, Cain became one of the first members of the Screen Actors Guild in 1934.

ACE CAIN, NIGHTCLUB OWNER

As Prohibition wound down and the larger movie studios squeezed out the smaller ones, Cain retired from the movie business. He opened a nightclub in Hollywood called "Ace Cain's Café," which operated from 1935 to 1944. It was his first legal endeavor, located across from 20th Century Fox studios on Western Avenue near Sunset Boulevard.

According to Everett T. Cain, "it was complete with live floor shows featuring scantily clad chorus girls, singing waiters, jugglers, acrobats, animal acts, and the works." While brother Jim operated a liquor store next door, Ace Cain's Café became one of the top Hollywood nightclubs during World War II.

In 1945, Cain moved his operations to 1369 N. Western Avenue and opened the club "Ace Cain's". The club purportedly went topless around 1946 and was rebranded "The New Ace Cain's." In 1950, operating as "Ace Cain's After Hours" supper club, the club's dance and entertainment license was revoked by police after an investigation found that the club had no liquor license and "did not conform to the best public interest."

In a newspaper interview for the Newhall Signal in 1964, Cain reminisced: "I remember turning people away from my club many times because of lack of room. We had terrific shows, and the World War II years were good to us. However, the nightclub business became so hectic, working 16 to 18 hours per day, so in 1944 I sold the club but kept the property. During the years following, the club became rundown, so I took it back in 1951, closed it up, and sold the property in 1953 for the post office."

ACE CAIN MOVES TO THE SCV

This is where the historical ambiguities begin. After his nightclub days were over, Cain opened a liquor store/motel combo called "Uncle Ace Liquor Store" and "Uncle Ace Motel." They were located on Western Avenue near Santa Monica Boulevard. In 1953, he sold this business, moved out of Hollywood forever, and trekked out to the Santa Clarita Valley, where he spent the rest of his life. After moving to Canyon Country, he opened and operated the Rocky Springs Country Club on Sand Canyon Road.

As described by Everett T. Cain, "His club achieved a dubious reputation during his remaining years, because of the 'very friendly' women – ex-models, ex-show girls, etc. – that frequented his establishment." The land for the Country Club was purchased around early 1953 and was initially touted as a resort for trout fishing. Anticipating that his new neighbors would not be amenable to a country club in their midst, Cain built a three-bedroom home that was actually meant to be used later as the new Country

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Club (unbeknownst to his neighbors). Cain applied for a liquor permit in the summer of 1953. The Sulphur Springs District Improvement Association opposed it based on the liquor license creating a "police problem." The trout ponds were installed and remained open to the public for three years before being converted to a private club. The Rocky Springs Country Club officially opened in 1955. Cain built a swimming pool, and families were offered \$10 annual memberships to use the swimming pool, picnic, and playgrounds.

ACE CAIN'S PURPORTED "HOUSE OF ILL REPUTE"

The resort opened at the corner of Sultus Street and Sand Canyon Road. It featured a bar along with the picnic grounds and swimming pool. Early in the resort's presence in Sand Canyon, a rumor started that Cain was hosting a house of ill repute on the top floor. This reputation has carried on to this day, but there is no clear proof that he ever did this. In fact, Mary Warmuth Sathre, who grew up in the area, denies that any prostitution took place at the resort. She recalls that local residents enjoyed his bar and pool. "He was one of the nicest people you would ever know." In his Santa Clarita Signal column of September 3, 1992, Newhall attorney Dan Hon opined, "When Ace Cain built the castle now venerated by our lancelots of yesteryear, he thumbed his nose at the then-old-time residents. Rumor had it that he was bringing ladies of the night with him. Nothing could have been further from the truth. His wife wouldn't let him do it. Yet ol' Ace had a sense of humor. When he heard that his neighbors were accusing him of being the pimp of Sand Canyon, he bought a couple dozen old Army cots and piled them outside the pool house he had just built. Furor surrounded him, but he survived. His worst sin was selling beer to the neighbors and playing in the local poker game that he ran in one of the nation's first mini-marts."

ACE CAIN, COMMUNITY LEADER

And Cain turned out to be a model citizen and community leader. He served as President of the Board of Directors of the Mint Canyon Community Building Association. The building was completed in 1957. As the building was being constructed, he supported the project as President

of the Mint Canyon Lions Club. He worked to improve Mint Canyon's postal facilities when he was installed as President of the Mint Canyon Chamber of Commerce in 1958. He hosted Boy Scout events at his ranch in 1964. He was named as Honorary Mayor of Canyon Country's Frontier Days in 1967. When the Mint Canyon Community Building was sold to the Elks Club in 1970, Cain presented a \$2000 check from the sale's proceeds to the Boys' Club of Newhall-Saugus, and a check for \$1971.81 to the William S. Hart Union High School District Scholarship Foundation. Cain stated the recent population growth had caused attendance to fall off at the community building. The burden of ongoing maintenance costs and loss of their tax exemption forced the need to sell the building. Other organizations that received funding from the sale proceeds included Boy Scouts of America, Little League, Babe Ruth Ball, and the Youth Employment Service.

Cain enjoyed acting in comedy skits in an annual minstrel show for fundraising events. In April 1960, he played the part of Matt Grillon in a takeoff on the TV show "Gunsmoke" in a benefit show for Sulphur Springs school. The directors of the show were Cliffie and Dorothy Stone.

A heavy winter storm flooded Cain's country club in 1969, forcing him eventually to lease the resort to the VFW in 1971, after their previous Post was destroyed in a wildfire. Due to the major earthquake on February 9, 1971, the veteran's group filled in the severely-damaged swimming pool and created a 90 by 100-foot dance floor, occasionally used for outdoor weddings.

CAIN AND STONE FAMILY FEUD

Ace Cain and country music legend Cliffie Stone were neighbors in Sand Canyon. They mostly got along well but were on opposite sides of an issue that developed in December 1972. In a hearing on a county-federal proposal to create a 28-mile network of levees and concrete channels along the Santa Clara River and its tributaries, Cain spoke out as one of the few who supported the \$60 million proposal. On the opposite side of the argument was a 22-year-old College of the Canyons biology student who stood up and stated, "A concrete ditch is not the answer. It will kill the oak trees." She also objected to the

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concrete's negative effect on horseback riding in the area. The young woman turned out to be Stone's daughter in law Anne Stone, who was there to speak on behalf of the Stone family. The origin of the dispute was the severe winter rainstorms of 1969, which dislodged hundreds of picnic tables from Cain's property. Cain claimed that the Stone property was already protected by a 700-foot-long flood protection fence which caused them to oppose the concrete channel. He further stated, "I'm tickled to death with the flood control fencing, but I'd still rather have the finished project." In the end, Stone's side prevailed, and the project was not started.

A few months after his dispute with the Stones, Ace Cain passed away on May 18, 1973. He was buried at Eternal Valley Memorial Park in Newhall on May 23. After Cain's death, the VFW purchased his property. They were forced to sell the property in 1993 by the City of Santa Clarita, after a dispute with the Sand Canyon Homeowner's Association regarding excessive noise, overnight camping, and lack of an operating permit. The building was converted to a private residence.

So, was Ace Cain treated fairly by our local historians? The reader may decide.

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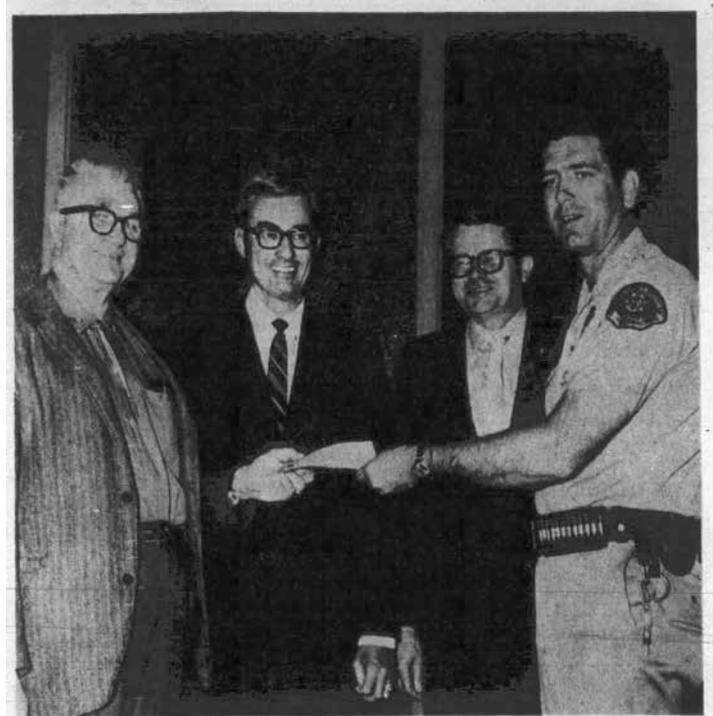
Santa Clarita Signal, Don't let nouveau riche kill VFW spirit, September 3, 1992

Ace Cain Photos



DEDICATE MINT CANYON COMMUNITY CENTER

Admiring newly dedicated \$50,000 community building for Mint Canyon are, from left, Ace Cain, president of Mint Canyon Community Association Inc.; Mrs. Lee Mox, who donated building site as memorial to her late husband, Gustav Mox; Mrs. Lela Merrill, Mint Canyon Woman's Club president, and Mrs. Dorothy Schaefer, civic worker.—Valley Times photo.



Ace Cain (left) of the Mint Canyon Community Building Association presents a check for \$2,000 to the Boys' Club of Newhall-Saugus. Receiving the donation are Boys' Club board members Kevin Lynch, Stan Dyer and Bob Rollins. The special gift was made available by the Building Association after it sold the Mint Canyon Community Building to the Elks Club last year.



Ace Cain in various acting roles..

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Time to Remember

by Maria Christopher

Over 400 lives were lost in the deadliest man-made disaster and worst civil engineering disaster of the 20th century, when the St. Francis Dam collapsed on March 12, 1928, in San Francisquito Canyon, a tributary of the Santa Clara River.

March is designated as St. Francis Dam Disaster Commemoration month in the Heritage Valley (The Highway 126 corridor through Ventura County to the city of Ventura). The Heritage Valley Tourism Bureau's (HVTB) Board of Directors initiated this annual commemoration month in 2018 to acknowledge that the history of this tragic event that united the lower Santa Clara River Valley should be preserved and shared with visitors. For 2018, the HVTB organized a committee that included stakeholders from throughout the flood path.

There was a lot of interest in the subject that year, because it was the 90th anniversary of the disaster, and because of the ongoing efforts spearheaded by Santa Clarita historians Allan Pollack and Diane Hellrigel to have the dam site designated as a National Historical Memorial and Monument.

In March, 2018, there were numerous events including lectures, tours, gatherings, candlelight memorials, and even the dedication of memorials in the Piru and Bardsdale cemeteries. In subsequent years, these efforts have continued. In 2019 the St. Francis Dam site was designated as a National Memorial and Monument, and the US Forest Service organized a collaborative group to work together to develop the site. The St. Francis Dam National Memorial Foundation is supporting that effort. In 2020 and 2021 events were restricted due to Covid, but the dam disaster continues to gather media coverage. Most recently, a PBS American Experience program was completed.



In 2022, the ongoing Covid constraints will again restrict commemoration activities. However, there are still opportunities to learn about this important event in our local history. You can drive up to the dam site and walk through the area still strewn with concrete fragments. Stop at Powerplants 1 and 2 and see the monument and displays that were erected years ago.

You can follow most of the 52-mile Floodpath down through present day Santa Clarita and out highway 126 through the Santa Clara River Valley. Stop at Rancho Camulos, whose historic buildings were spared, and learn more about that on a docent-led tour (Sundays at 1:00, 2:00, or 3:00 PM, or by appointment). A presentation by noted historian and author of "Floodpath," Jon Wilkman, is scheduled at the Rancho Camulos Museum on March 27. Continue through the Heritage Valley and visit the disaster memorials in the Piru and Bardsdale cemeteries. The Fillmore Historical Museum has a St. Francis Dam Disaster Exhibit (check for their current hours of operation). Further down Highway 126 in Santa Paula, visit the memorial called "The Warning," a homage to the motorcycle officers that saved so many residents that fateful night. There is also a permanent memorial at the Santa Paula Cemetery, and a special exhibit is added during the commemoration month of March.

Those who are not able to visit in person can peruse the vast collection of materials on Santaclaritahistory.com. Another valuable source of information is a 90-minute 2021 video presentation hosted by the Rancho Camulos Museum that features the research of Jon Wilkman (author of *Floodpath*) and Ann Stansell (author of the *Forgotten Casualties Project*). The video is available on a link from the Rancho Camulos Museum's Facebook page.

As we move toward the 100th anniversary of the March 12, 1928, collapse of the St. Francis Dam, let us continue to learn about the disaster and reflect on its impact on our local area. Take time to remember.

*Memorial plaque at the Bardsdale Cemetery.
Photo by John Nichols*

My New Company

by John Boston

If I knew what I know now, I wouldn't have taken so many walks alone in the local woods. Our quiet places have many wonderful things going for them. Fresh air. Nature. Scenery. Serenity. The ability to be alone, but not lonely.

But then, there's those dratted monsters. A high-pitched scream. An eerie feeling, especially during full-moon nights. Sometimes, it's been just a fresh mountain lion track at a stream's edge. As I approach middle age, I hope I can still battle 5-to-13 pumas simultaneously or, Daniel Boone-like, wrestle a bear with just my winning smile.

Sadly, there's things you just can't punch in the nose. Werewolves. Ghosts. Bigfoots. Vampires. Pterodactyls.

In the late 19th century, the L.A. Times quoted town forefather Addi Lyon and his run-in with a giant flying dinosaur. So besides worrying about bears and serial killers in the shrubbery, now I must scan for pterodactyls who haven't gotten the memo that they're extinct.

Recently I launched my own company, johnbostonbooks.com. I'll be publishing a bevy of novels and books of national interest AND my SCV History Series, including the hot-off-the-presses *Ghosts, Ghouls, Myths and MONSTERS — The Most Haunted Town in America. (Volume I)*

Cripes. That town? It's us. GGMM is the first of a trilogy (why would it be the second?). In part, this thick and

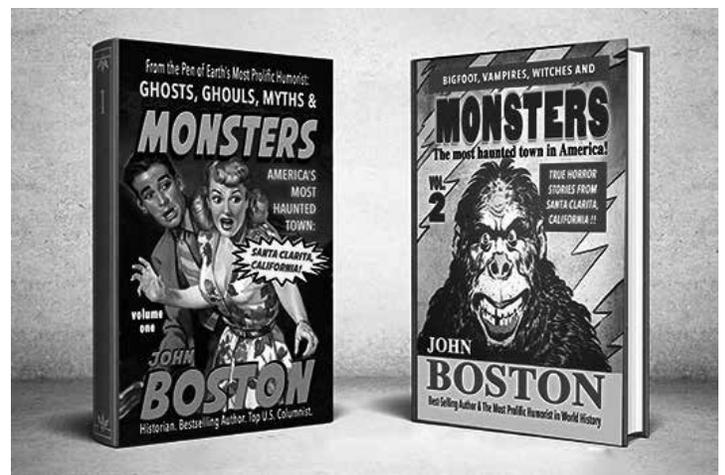
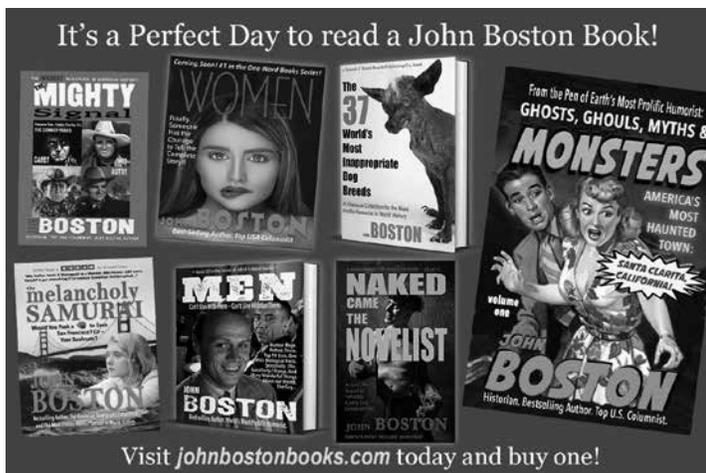
entertaining offering covers our only known serial killer, a young man who, when sentenced to death by a local jurist, was labeled a "human wolf who preyed upon humanity since the age of 6." I thought my kindergarten was tough.

As historian and teacher, I've collected hundreds of gee-whiz stories about dear Santa Clarita, such as our decades-long debate of just how big were our man-eating grizzly bears, and upon whom they dined. There's UFOs. Lots. One reported sighting was by our local Methodist minister (my girlfriend's dad), and you've got to figure his sermons must have been interesting. There's tons of ghosts tales, the Pterodactyls (the big flying lizards, not the nice Greek family) and, gulp — werewolves. I *hate* werewolves. They lessen my local outdoors experience.

If you like to laugh AND be scared, visit johnbostonbooks.com. Order a few copies. Read them with the doors locked. It's a really darn good book. So's *Volume II, Vampires, Bigfoot, Witches & MONSTERS*. It debuted in February.

Sorry about you people living in America's most haunted community. I didn't bring the monsters here. They're just naturally attracted. It must be our blood types...

Sign up for the SCV's & Earth's most prolific humorist and satirist's free newsletter at johnbostonbooks.com.





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*Heritage Junction, Version 2.0:
The Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas has created a replica of Las Vegas as it
appeared in 1905, when the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad
(now Union Pacific) arrived, starting the settlement of the town.*