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LOS ANGELES CORRAL

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The Los Angeles City Archives: L.A.'s Little Known Repository of Historical Municipal Government Records

by Robert Freeman

As a unique resource for information on the history of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles City Archives are one of Southern California's best kept secrets. Many local historians know little or nothing about Los Angeles' fine municipal archives, a literal treasure trove of primary source materials on the City's past. Established in 1980 as a part of the City Clerk's records management program, the Los Angeles City Archives have assumed the task of identifying, collecting, arranging, describing, preserving and making available for research use municipal records of historical value.

In its six years of operation the Archives have assembled an impressive group of historical records which chronicle the fascinating activity of a wide variety of City departments and agencies. Records of the City Council, Mayor's Office, Engineering Bureau, Planning Commission, Fire Department, Police Department, Transportation Department, Election Division, Tax and Permit Division, Controller's Office and Recreation and Parks Department to name a few are now available for research use at a centralized location. They have been preserved,

arranged and indexed in a manner historians, journalists and private citizens alike will find useful, illuminating and exciting.

Historians will be delighted to know that over 6,000 cubic feet of archival City records are given professional care by the staff of the City Clerk's Office, Records Management Division. The City Records Center and Archives, a unified storage facility for operational and historical records, is located in the C. Erwin Piper Technical Center at 555 Ramirez Street in downtown Los Angeles. Near Olvera Street and Union Station, the Archives are situated in an area steeped in local history. The land on which the Piper Technical Center sits was once the vineyard of City pioneer Jean Luis Vignes.

The City's historical records are stored in a 4,500 square foot air-conditioned archival vault where an average temperature of 65 degrees Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of 40-50 percent are maintained year-round. Documents are securely housed in acid-free file folders and storage boxes to promote long terms preservation. Trained archivists and records managers administer and implement a carefully conceived

(continued on Page Three)

The Branding Iron

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THE BRANDING IRON solicits articles of 2,500 words or less, dealing with every phase of the Old West. Contributions from members and friends welcomed.

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Los Angeles Corral



THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

APRIL 1987 MEETING

Corresponding Member Richard Dillon came down from Sausalito to address the Corral on "Humbugs and Heroes — Characters Who Came Through Sutter's Fort." Dillon defined a humbug as someone who pretends to be a person he isn't, and his research interests lie in biography and the regional history made by by pioneers. One important focus of California history was Sutter's Fort, a crossroad for the many travelers of all kinds who came to California. Sutter's New Helvetia provided the nucleus for Anglo settlement in Hispanic California; all roads led to Sutter's Fort.

Sutter's acquaintances included the explorer John C. Fremont, described by Dillon as having a complex and flawed personality, self-centered in the extreme and obsessed with success. Fremont treated Sutter badly despite Sutter's extension of hospitality when the Fremont expedition of 1844 most needed it. According to Dillon, Fremont qualifies as a humbug, but James Marshall was another story. Marshall came across as a simple man with valuable craftsman skills Sutter found useful. Marshall's discovery of gold at Coloma was one of history's greatest accidents. Sam Brannan, at the time a storekeeper at Sutter's Fort, proclaimed the discovery in the street of San Francisco. Brannan gained fame for his promotion of real estate, his stint as a filibuster in Hawaii, and speculation in various projects — but he died broke, like Fremont, Marshall, and Sutter.

By contrast, the prudent and stable John Bidwell, another Sutter employee became

(continued on Page Ten)

historical records program for the City of Los Angeles. The Archives serves as a government information service agency for City Officials and employees, scholars and private citizens interested in municipal history.

The Archives boasts a diverse group of records, some of which document the City's early history. Historians of the City's Mexican era (1821-1846), transition period to American sovereignty (1846-1850) and early American period (1850-1876) will find several key record series which illuminate Los Angeles' hispanic heritage, role in the Mexican-American War and gradual anglicization under United States rule. I have worked closely with these remarkable records both as an historian doing research and as an archivist facilitating the research of others. They offer an invaluable perspective on the role of our municipal government in shaping the character of early Los Angeles. We are fortunate indeed that these records have survived the ravages of time intact and that they have lived to tell their tale.

Perhaps the most fascinating series of historical records in the City's Archives is a miscellany of documents known simply as the "Los Angeles City Archives" volumes of "Untitled Records." The first seven volumes of this series cover the years 1827-1871 and consist of a variety of documents including minutes to the meetings of the Ayuntamiento (the Mexican era council); petitions and correspondence to the Ayuntamiento and copies of their responses; deeds of land; census records from 1836 and 1844; and legal records such as ordinances, resolutions and criminal cases.

The cast of characters in these volumes includes such prominent early angelenos as Prudent Beaudry, Henry Hancock, Pio and Andres Pico, Abel Stearns, John Temple and Benjamin D. Wilson as well as founding families such as the Alvarados, Avilas, Bandinis, Dominguez, Figueroas, Machados, Sepulvedas and Verdugos. Their dealings with the Ayuntamiento through correspondence and petitions offer a fascinating glimpse into the social and political make-up of early Los Angeles. Many of these pioneers took an active role in government as office holders.

The seven earliest "Los Angeles City Archives" volumes consist of documents which are written predominantly in the cryptic, provincial

Spanish of Alta California circa 1840. Reading through the original document is a tedious exercise for even the most fluent student of Spanish as they contain many abbreviations and inconsistencies. Fortunately, translations of the seven volumes were prepared in the 1890s by the City at the urging of the Southern California Historical Society. These faithful translations are in excellent condition and are available to scholars who prefer to read the fascinating accounts in English.

The volumes were indexed according to subject by former Mayor Stephen C. Foster and former City Attorney Frank Howard in the early 1870s. This first effort at arranging and indexing the City's archives was a boon to municipal officials of the late nineteenth century and is a blessing for scholars in the twentieth. The indexes make scholarly research possible. Researchers can quickly determine the precise location of information they need to access. More importantly, the indexing work of Foster and Howard laid the foundation for future indexing services by the City Clerk's Office. An important precedent was set for making municipal government records available and accessible.

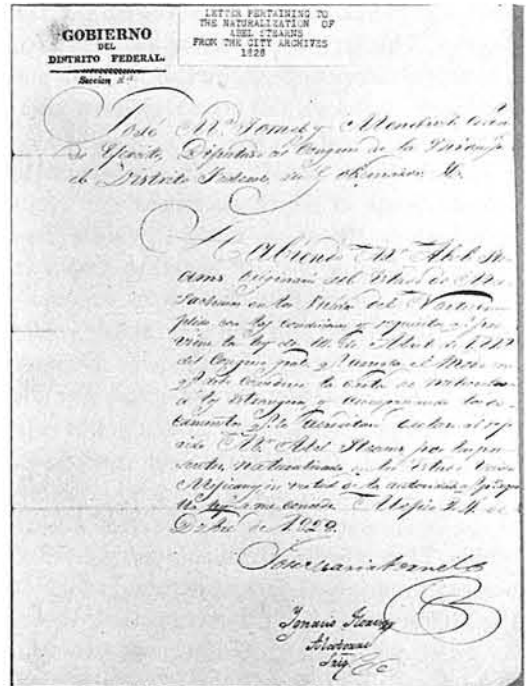
In addition to the Los Angeles City Archives volumes, scholars will want to note the availability of City property assessment registers, 1856-1867; tax records 1857-1866; business license records, 1856-1859; abstracts of titles to land, 1835-1895; deeds of land to and from the City, 1849-1895; and personal papers of Abel Stearns, 1828-1890 including his naturalization records.

The City Archives also contains several key records series which document Los Angeles' early American period. These include minutes to the City Council meetings; ordinances; resolutions; Council petitions and communications; annual reports of most City departments; minutes to City commissions such as Public Works, Public Utilities and Transportation, Planning, Recreation and Parks, Police and Fire; and reports of special Council committees.

That these early City records have survived into the later twentieth century is something of a minor miracle. The City had no formal Archives until 1980. During the years 1850 through 1979 records of historical value remained in the custody of the City Clerk's main office or in various departmental offices throughout the



Abel Stearns (1798-1871) - Former Alcalde of Los Angeles.



Letter pertaining to the naturalization of Abel Stearns from the City Archives, 1828.

City. Prior to 1850, City records remained in the hands of various government officials, often kept in their homes or offices. No centralized archival program existed for the first two hundred years of the City's history.

Unfortunately very few municipal records from the City's Spanish period (1781-1820) have survived. Although various territorial records from Alta California which relate to the settling of the pueblo of Los Angeles are extant, the Los Angeles City Archives do not possess them. For the most part, documents from this period are housed in the National Archives, the California State Archives, the Bancroft Library, the Huntington Library, the archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and in the hands of private collectors.

The legacy of California's "provincial archives," including the municipal records of Los Angeles, is the subject of a revealing essay written by Jacob N. Bowman in 1946. Entitled, "History of the Provincial Archives of California," the essay identifies the various record groups which constitute the Spanish and Mexican period archives of California. Reprinted by

the Historical Society of Southern California in 1982, it offers a detailed account of the handling of Los Angeles' pre-1850 records.

Those City records which have been preserved and maintained by Los Angeles over the years provide information on a wealth of research topics. The area which has always intrigued me most is the history of the effort to save the City's historical records. It is ironically fitting that the documents themselves chronicle the attempt by the City's founding fathers to secure the preservation of invaluable and irreplaceable records, records which have been and continue to be identified as the City's "archives."

The history of the Los Angeles city archives as a body of documentation, and as an institution charged with the care of these records, begins with the Mexican period. Not everything produced by the Mexican authorities in Los Angeles has survived the years of poor handling and storage conditions. Those record series mentioned above constitute the most treasured of our City's historical government documents.

In 1850 the City's Common Council identified the historical records from the Mexican

202	Name	Vol. Page	Subject	203
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 140	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 141	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 142	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 143	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 144	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 145	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 146	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 147	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 148	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 149	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 150	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 151	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 152	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 153	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 154	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 155	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 156	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 157	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 158	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 159	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 160	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 161	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 162	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 163	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 164	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 165	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 166	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 167	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 168	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 169	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 170	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 171	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 172	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 173	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 174	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 175	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 176	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 177	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 178	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 179	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 180	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 181	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 182	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 183	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 184	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 185	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 186	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 187	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 188	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 189	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 190	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 191	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 192	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 193	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 194	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 195	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 196	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 197	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 198	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 199	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	
	1848 - Marbury from [illegible]	107 200	Petition for land and proceedings [illegible]	

Index to Los Angeles City Archives. Volumes 107, 1827-1871 (in English, prepared in 1872).

period and provided for their protection. The Council was anxious to preserve the City's documentary heritage for practical and personal reasons. Records affecting title to land were highly valued. During the 1850s and 1860s, United States land grant hearings relied heavily on such documentation to verify claims made by Californio ranchers and land owners. Sadly, many of these land holders lost the battle to prove the validity of their titles; the vague nature and terms of Spanish and Mexican land grants did not fare well when pitted against the well-defined realities of the Anglo court system and English common law.

Cultural continuity was another concern which led the Council to care for historical records of the Mexican period. During the first five years of American rule, Council meetings were recorded in both English and Spanish. Petitions to the Council were often received and answered in Spanish until the early 1870s. The

Council retained the services of an official interpreter until 1871. Many prominent members of the Los Angeles business community and City government were Californios with a strong interest in preserving their cultural heritage. Others were Anglos who had embraced the Roman Catholic faith, the Spanish language, and in many cases married into prominent Californio families for political and commercial advantage. The Mexican period documents were of great interest and important to these people; they recorded their efforts in business and politics during the pre-United States period.

During the Mexican period, government officials in Los Angeles assumed responsibility not only for the municipal records they created, but also for records of the government of Alta California. From 1845-1848 Los Angeles was one of the California cities which kept portions of the Governor's records as the United States forces invaded the province.

In general, the Mexican authorities were inconsistent in their handling of government records. They moved the archives to various locations in the effort of eluding the United States forces, yet were careless in handling the records once they had been moved. Bowman provides an interesting assessment of this tendency.

With the methods used by the Spanish and Mexican officials in caring for their documents, it is surprising that so many survived. The number of papers which were lost during the decades which they were in the hands or homes of officials and others persons, and which failed to come into the possession of the collectors in the 1850s and 1860s, is not known; an estimated guess might place them at about 15% of the archives as known to exist at the time.

In 1845, Pio Pico transferred part of the Governor's archives to Los Angeles. These records were originally kept in San Diego, then in Monterey. The move to Los Angeles coincides with the time period in which the capitol was moved to Monterey (1842) and the United States invasion began (1846). It is not known precisely where or in what building the documents were kept. Pico suggested they were kept in the office of the Secretary of State, Bowman claims they may have been in one of the pueblo administration buildings on the plaza. Joining the records of the Governor were those of the Department Assembly. These legislative records were kept by the Secretary of the Assembly at his home. In 1845 and 1846 the Assembly met in Los Angeles. Secretary Augustin Olvera allegedly placed them in the hands of Stockton in August of 1846, only to be lost in Monterey by 1849.

In 1846 the "pueblo archives" of Los Angeles consisted of the records of the Ayuntamiento and the Alcalde, including letters sent to the Mexican council, copies of their replies, maps, petitions for land and legal records. Bowman points out that they were often "kept by the officers in their homes and later in the juzgados (courthouse-jail) when they were erected. Other papers ended up in private hands.

United States officials began collecting government records in Los Angeles following the invasion of August, 1846. The archives were

then kept by the Governor's secretary, Jose Matia Moreno. Governor Pico provided for their "protection" while in Los Angeles, but between 1846 and 1848 the records of the Mexican government of Alta California, along with those of the pueblo of Los Angeles, met with an unfortunate fate. Pio Pico's testimony at a United States land grant case is revealing.

Under my direction and supervision they [the books, papers and documents of the office of the secretary] were packed into boxes, a portion were removed from the office to a designated place, the remainder of the boxes for the want of time and convenience were left remaining in the executive buildings; on my return to the country in 1848 I learned that not only the documents before mentioned, but many of those of the municipal government of Los Angeles had been scattered about, lost and destroyed, that they had even been used as paper for the making of gun cartridges, for the destruction of which documents I myself have suffered heavy pecuniary loss as documents in which I as a citizen of California was deeply interested, pecuniarily, and which were in the office, have never been recovered.

In an appearance before the United States Land Commission in Los Angeles (November 12, 1852), Abel Stearns testified that in 1846 the California and Los Angeles archives "were boxed up and deposited at the house of Don Luis Vignes in this City" When Commodore Stockton ordered these records to be turned over to the United States forces, some documents were seized. The records were taken to San Pedro, then to Monterey by the United States authorities. Stearns also spoke of efforts to hide the records from the Yankee invaders.

The archives of this pueblo were hid away when the Americans first approached in August of 1846 and they were afterwards in the hands of Flores while he was in command of the Californians in October, November and December of that year. They disappeared and nothing was known of them by the public until 1849, when they appeared in boxes in possession of the priest of this place who gave notice to the Alcalde that they had been left at his home, and the Alcalde, Jose Del Carmen

Lugo, took charge of them. I came in as Alcalde on the first of January, 1850. They were turned over to me without an index or my knowing of what they consisted. By order of the Ayuntamiento I was authorized to employ a person to make an index, and arrange them which was done. Many of the most useful documents were found to be missing, particularly the public documents relative to possessions and concessions of the town lands and other records, called the *Protocolo*, or Book of Records.

Bowman states that the province's general archives were turned over to Stockton and the land grant expedientes were collected by John C. Fremont. Fremont's testimony in an 1858 land grant case provides evidence of this action.

About August 14, 1846, I received an order from Commodore Stockton then at Los Angeles, directing me to take charge of the public archives, which were then in possession of Don Luis Vignes, an old resident of Los Angeles, in whose charge

they had been placed as I understood by Pico. I took possession until about the end of September when I placed them at what was then called Sutter's Fort on the American River.

Today, portions of the provincial archives of California are located in such repositories as the National Archives, the California State Archives, the Bancroft Library, the Huntington Library, the Los Angeles County Recorder's Office, and the Los Angeles City Archives. The municipal or "pueblo" archives of Los Angeles have survived for the most part to make up the first component of the Los Angeles City Archives. Beginning in 1849, the Common Council assumed responsibility for the care of the City's documentary heritage. We are fortunate that these records have lived to tell the tale.

Early records of the Common Council corroborate much of the testimony given by Abel Stearns in 1852. During the Council's meeting of June 30, 1849, president Juan Sepulveda read a letter sent by "the parrish priest." The priest claimed that, "in the vestry of this church there



Storage Vault of the Los Angeles City Archives, 1987. Robert Freeman, standing.

are two parcels, containing, presumably, court records." The priest went on to describe these parcels under his care as, "one a box and the other a trunk, both of them locked which in my opinion are full of books and archives belonging to this City. I hasten to inform you of this fact and ask you to advise me to whom to deliver the said parcels which I believe to be of great importance."

On July 7, 1849, Council member and "syndic" John Temple recommended that, "the Superior Government of this Territory be informed that the court and municipal records of this City were both discovered in the vestry of this City, which accounts for the conspicuous absence of many interesting documents." It is not clear how these records ended up in the hands of the parish priest. Furthermore, we have no record of what portion of the City's archives Temple was referring to as conspicuously absent. Today, the Los Angeles City Archives has possession of a portion of the pueblo's provincial archives; we can surmise that others met the fate alluded to by Pio Pico.

The City Archives is fortunate to have the original inventory of the pueblo archives mentioned by Abel Stearns. Stearns completed this inventory of municipal records in June of 1850 and submitted it to the Council as outgoing President of that body. The records he lists date from 1835 to 1850 and consist primarily of minutes of Ayuntamiento and Common Council proceedings, property records, registries of City licenses, financial ledgers, petitions to the Ayuntamiento, correspondence, and registries of marks and brands of cattle. Most of these materials can still be found in the City Archives today.

These records make up a portion of the record series "Los Angeles City Archives," or "Untitled Records." Other documents mentioned in the Stearns inventory are contained in the record series, "Deeds to and from the City of Los Angeles." The one notable exception is the registry of cattle brands and marks. Six volumes of these records were turned over to the Los Angeles County Recorder, Ygnacio Del Valle, by Common Council Secretary Vincente Del Campo in 1850. They may still be found in the Los Angeles County Hall of Records.

The late 1840s was a period of great change for the pueblo of Los Angeles. We are fortunate

that records which document the transition from the City's Mexican period to United States sovereignty have survived. These critically important records are now given the protection they have deserved for over one hundred and thirty years. These original Spanish language documents are available for research use, along with English translations and subject indexes. Their contribution to the writing of Los Angeles' history has yet to be fully recognized.



Corral Chips

Todd Berens and wife tour Canada and Alaska with truck and trailer, returning to the States in time to attend the annual meeting of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation in Portland, and the Oregon-California Trail Association meeting in Carson City. After which, Todd, along with a caravan of fifteen vehicles, spends five days traversing the Black Rock Desert over the old Lassen Trail.

At the Fourth Annual conference of the California Mission Studies Association held at Mission Santa Clara, two Los Angeles Corral members participated: *Norman Neuerburg* gave the paper "Indian Graffiti on Mission Walls," and *Ken Pauley* presented "Computerization of the California Mission Archives." At the banquet, held in the Williman Room in Benson Center on the campus of the University of Santa Clara, Norman was also the speaker on Saturday night and spoke on "Ancient Rome in Early California," a talk given earlier at both the Getty Museum and the San Fernando Mission.

Death Valley Tailings: Rarely Told Tales of Old Death Valley is the latest publication by *George Koenig*. The author, a long-time Death Valley

'49ers Director, has produced yet another intriguing contribution to the history of this fabled region. Desert buffs will want a copy for sure, \$7.95 for the regular trade edition and \$17.50 for a special cloth bound edition limited to 250 copies.

Hugh Tolford arranges a dinner and tour of the art and photo collections of O'Melveny & Myers for the Historical Society of Southern California. The meeting was presided over by *Tom Andrews*, Executive Director of HSSC. Tom keeps his ties with academia alive these days by teaching a course entitled "The California Dream: Myths and Realities" for the Master in Liberal Arts Program at the University of Southern California.

With the December 1986 issue of the *Southern California Quarterly*, the publication of the Historical Society of Southern California, *Doyce Nunis* completes 25 years as Editor. The 100 issues he has been responsible for since March 1962 give ample testimony to the high quality of editing that has been the hallmark of the *Quarterly*.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History is the setting for a champagne reception honoring artist *Ben Abril* and his "Images of a Golden Era," featuring paintings of historical California. On hand to quaff the bubbly and admire the art work are *Bob Clark, Iron Eyes Cody, Dick Cunningham, Andy Dagosta, Bill Escherich, Powell Greenland, Dutch Holland, Ernie Marquez, Jerry Selmer, Ray Wood, AM Ray Zeman, and CM Jean Bruce Poole.*

At the annual meeting of the Western History Association in Billings, Montana, CM *Michael Harrison* of Fair Oaks, California, is elected to the Council.

San Marino author and historian CM *Midge Sherwood* receives the combined Scholastic and Individual Award of Merit from the Conference of California Historical Societies.

CM *Joe Northrup* serves as President of Los Pobladores 200, members of which are descendants of the 1781 founders of Los Angeles. Northrup is anxious to find other descendants who are eligible to join the organization. "We wish to search for and to preserve our lineage and to promote further pride in our Hispanic California Heritage," says Northrup. "After 206 years, there has to be some 10,000 descendants in Southern California from the original Los

Angeles pobladores. We invite unregistered descendants and interested amigos to join us."

Abe Hoffman addresses the Canoga Park Kiwanis on the occasion of their 60th anniversary, speaking of the early history of the San Fernando Valley. He follows this with a presentation to the Ebell Club on "Our Changing City."

Up San Francisco way, CM *Dick Dillon* sees his excellent biography of John Sutter, *Fool's Gold*, brought out in a new-format paperback by Western Tanager Press, and his article on the history of the Golden Gate Bridge appears in *American History Illustrated* to salute that span's 50th anniversary.

Martin Ridge edits *Frederick Jackson Turner: Wisconsin's Historian of the Frontier* for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Interested readers can pick up a copy for \$6.95 from the Society at 816 State Street, Madison, Wisconsin, 53706.

Ray Wood is elected President of the Friends of the Encino/Tarzana Library, installed as President of the nationwide Jedediah Smith Society, and is serving on the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles City Historical Society. After attending the Death Valley Congress of History and Prehistory, as well as the Congress of History of San Diego County, Ray presents a talk on "Ina Coolbrith" to the Downey Historical Society. Notable, too, is Ray's latest book, *The Saints of the California Landscape*, a fascinating and useful guide to places in our state named for various saints.

Ernie Hovard, a Pasadena native and retired Pasadena Police Sergeant, has returned from an archaeological survey on the remote island of San Miguel. He was invited by the Channel Islands National Park Service to assist the Park Ranger Archaeologist with a survey of the prehistoric Chumash Indian village sites along with old ship wreckages near the Point Bennett area. Ernie has collected and studied Indian and western lore for many years. He has participated in numerous archaeological expeditions on Santa Rosa Island with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and the Nevada State Museum whenever time has allowed from police work. He has been a student of Channel Island Archaeology for many years.

"Historical Architecture in Redlands: Gentility and Anger" is the topic for a talk by CM *Larry Burgess* at Pomona College as part of the

Fleming Fund Lecture-Seminars. And for the Baja California Symposium XXV Larry traces "Early Spanish and Mexican Connections with Redlands."

Don Pflueger appears before the San Dimas Corral of The Westerners to discuss the beginnings of several cities in eastern Los Angeles County which are celebrating their centennials this year.

Hugh Tolford ramrodded the Death Valley Conference on History and Prehistory. During the event, CM *Robert Hoshide* told of "Henry Washington: Death Valley Surveyor." The meeting ended with Hugh's masterful slide show "The Last Great Bonanza." Among the attendees we noted *Bill Newbro*, *Walt Wheelock*, *Ray Wood*, along with CM's *Dan Cronkhite*, *Dick Crowe* and *Palmer Long*.

Bellerophon books in Santa Barbara has published *Norman Neuburg's* handsome, erudite, and abundantly illustrated volume on *The Decoration of the California Missions*.

Bob Huntoon, former Active Member, and a Corresponding Member since moving to Redding in 1973, has spent the intervening years in establishing, with a partner, a small manufacturing concern, writing and publishing a book on *Industrial Procurement and Management* and, for the past seven years, selling real estate. Bob is still convinced that Redding is the finest place in California to live, and he sends his warmest greetings to his member friends of The Los Angeles Corral.

Finally, our scholarly, sociable, and singular Msgr. *Francis J. Weber* authors "Precedent for Ecumenism," which appears in the *Western States Jewish History Quarterly*, undoubtedly the first time a priest has published in this journal.

HISTORICAL ESSAY CONTEST

Westerners will be interested to learn of a new annual contest that offers cash prizes. *The Californians* magazine announces two prizes of \$250 each for manuscripts that fall into two general categories. The first of these is the Westward Ho! prize, offered to the best article concerning the overland and 'round the Horn pioneers who settled permanently in California between 1823 and 1869. The second is the

California History prize, given to the best article on any aspect of California and her people from prehistoric to early 20th century. Articles in both categories must be between 6,000 and 9,000 words.

Entries will be judged on originality, depth and significance of research, analysis and interpretation, thoroughness and objectivity, and standards of scholarship. The deadline for submissions will be January 15 of each year. Information on writers' guidelines may be obtained from Jean Sherrell, Editor, *The Californians*, 100 Valencia No. 301, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Monthly Roundup continued...

wealthy and successful — but Dillon finds him dull, henpecked, and a prohibitionist. Although Bidwell rose from poverty to riches, his life was undramatic, since he always expressed prudence and stolidity. Bidwell opposed graft and corruption but was anti-Catholic and anti-Chinese — a man of contradictions.



Deputy Sheriff Robert Clark and Speaker Richard Dillon.

Dillon's favorite pioneer was a Dutch bachelor named John L. Zwart, aka Schwartz, a Sutter employee who continued operation of Sutter's salmon fishery as early as 1844. An eccentric recluse, Zwart started an inn which became an important stopping place en route to Sutter's Fort. Zwart raised fresh vegetables and supplied the 49ers with needed food products, for a price. In one summer Zwart made \$25,000, not counting the salmon sales. His melons earned him \$30,000 in 1852.

Sutter himself is well known, a pioneer who fled to America in 1839 and founded New Helvetia five years later. Having lost everything because of the gold rush, Sutter died in 1880 of a broken heart. But he had his dark side; he abandoned his wife and family, fled his debts, drank too much, lied, and chased around. Such defects aside, he befriended many people, including Hawaiian *Kanakas* who built grass shacks — the first permanent homes in the Sacramento Valley.

Dillon concluded his comments with a discussion on whether Sutter committed murder while in Santa Fe in 1836, an accusation made by Benjamin D. Wilson. Dillon argues for Sutter's innocence in the incident.

MAY 1987 MEETING

Corral Member Tom Andrews addressed the May meeting on the efforts of historical societies to preserve the past, focusing on the history and work of the Historical Society of Southern California. Now 104 years old, the HSSC has had periods of crisis and challenges to its survival. Despite its longevity, the HSSC has not had a truly permanent home, and it has been based at the Lummis Home only since 1965. Its strength, however, stems from its top-quality leaders and support. HSSC founders included such luminaries as J.P. Widney, Reginaldo Del Valle, and J.J. Warner. Its publication, *Southern California Quarterly*, is a leading local history journal with a reputation for scholarship and integrity.

In the past year the Historical Society of Southern California has embarked on an ambitious program of building its endowment, com-

pleting the Lummis Home garden, redefining its purposes and goals, and keeping afloat financially. The financial issue, Andrews noted, is one that plagues all historical societies. Other problems include the need for active leadership on its board of directors, creating programs to involve the community, committing itself to historic preservation, and continuing its publications.

Historical societies in the Los Angeles area need better communication, a pooling of resources, establishing closer relationships with local institutions, and involving young people and teachers. Andrews called for creation of a Congress of Southern California Historical Societies, less fragmentation and competition, and more cooperation for realization of larger goals. He concluded his presentation by challenging Corral members to provide input as to goals, service, and meeting of community needs. A general discussion in response to Andrews' challenges proved free-wheeling and lively.



Speaker Tom Andrews, Deputy Sheriff Robert Clark and Sheriff James Gulbranson.

JUNE 1987 MEETING — THE ANNUAL FANDANGO

On June 13 the Corral celebrated its annual Fandango Californio with a dinner and tour of the renowned Gamble House in Pasadena. Over 150 people attended the Saturday afternoon reception. Wrangler Boss Elmer Taylor had his crew out in force, serving libations and keeping the whistles wet, while Rick Brown and his staff from Frederick's Restaurant of Santa Maria set out the hors d'oeuvres and beautiful buffet dinner.

The Gamble House is an outstanding example of the turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts movement in America. Designed by Greene and Greene and constructed under their supervision in 1908 in nine months' time at a cost of \$50,000, it is an internationally recognized masterpiece. With great attention to detail, the architects harmonized a thematic concept of setting and Southern California lifestyle, including in their specifications furnishings, fittings, and fixtures. The house is a symphony in wood, and a delight to the eye.

Many thanks to the Gamble House staff for allowing us the privilege of enjoying the grounds and the tours.



Elwood "Dutch" Holland and Msgr. Francis Weber.



Mrs. William Escherich, Ella Powell, Hugh Tolford and Charlotte Snyder.



Dick Cunningham, Katie Ainsworth and Mrs. Ray Zeeman.



Atara Clark and Walt Wheelock.

A Southern Journalistic Comparison of the Crimean and Mexican Wars

by Horace Perry Jones

The Crimean War, which pitted Russia against the so-called "allies," Turkey, Britain, and France, erupted in 1853, only five years after the conclusion of the Mexican War. Since Southerners were of a fighting breed, accustomed from boyhood to ride and shoot, they quite naturally followed all the action of the Crimean War with keen interest. Additionally, because it was largely Southerners that participated in the Mexican War, they were quick to compare "their" war with the one going on in the Crimea — naturally to the advantage of American participation against Mexico. A North Carolina editor sarcastically wrote:

During the Mexican War, the English Press, which before every battle predicted our defeat, became very merry over the slowness of our operations. [But despite numerous drawbacks]. . . two small American armies, not as large, when combined, as the detachment which the allies sent to Kertsch [a port on the eastern tip of the Crimean peninsula], overrun [sic] Mexico and conquered a peace in a less time than the allies have been at war with Russia, without being able to conquer even the extremities of her empire.¹

Allied strategy in the Black Sea involved an amphibious landing on the northern neck of the Crimean peninsula, followed by a forced march south to the great Russian naval base of Sebastopol, which they promptly besieged. But although the allies believed Sebastopol would fall "within a week or ten days,"² that mighty fortress would ultimately stand firm for approximately a year.

The Jacksonville (Fla.) *News*, in an article entitled "Who are the Best Soldiers of the Day?," compared the American soldiers of the Mexican War with those of England and France currently involved in the Crimea, and concluded:

Alas for England! She has found that

the day for successful meddling with the affairs of the world has in a measure past — the Lion's fangs have grown blunt with frequent use. . . .

Alas, too, for France! She has a Napoleon upon the throne, but she waits in vain the glorious news from another Marengo, Austerlitz, or Jena. . . .

But it was like a meteor, suddenly flaming in the sky and lighting the darkness of the heavens, that the Mexican War developed the U.S. of A. into their true position, as one of the first military powers of the earth.³

Another item in a North Carolina paper under the caption "COSSACKS LIKE YANKEES" proudly boasted that the London *Times* described the Russian Cossacks in the Crimea as resembling "Mounted Yankees, in their agility, intelligence, irregular costume, and individual self-reliance."⁴

As the Crimean War ground dismally forward, a Memphis paper revealed that even a British journal, the *Westminster Review*, belatedly acknowledged American prowess in the Mexican War:

One knows now what it is to be admired in the Mexican War — the facility with which an army of volunteers submitted to discipline; the perfection of their weapons, new inventions of America, handled with a skill previously unknown; the commissariat in a wild and vast country; of the flexibility to mechanical adaptations as to reporting, printing, and communication homeward.⁵

Staunch Russian resistance within the besieged city of Sebastopol delighted Southern editors because it gave them more grounds to criticize allied tactics when compared with those used by Americans against Mexico. One newspaper juxtaposed the American conquest of

Mexico City with the unsuccessful allied attempt to subdue Sebastopol thus:

A large city [Mexico City], the capitol of a nation whose approaches were guarded by rough mountain passes, and whose ramparts were lined with hundreds of pieces of artillery, and defended by some 40,000 men, fell before the consummate generalship, the indomitable spirit of the American soldier.

Contrast this campaign of a few months with the operations of the Allies, and then see the reason why the London *Times* is willing the Americans to show how to take Sebastopol.⁶

Two other Southern newspapers also jubilantly printed articles by the London *Times*, which conceded that, "if the Americans can show a way to take Sebastopol, England will be ready to learn and given them credit for the lesson."⁷ And, as an aside, Colonel John Bankhead Magruder, "who distinguished himself in the Mexican War," had decided to enlist in the Crimean campaign as a soldier of fortune, and ultimately fought for both France and Turkey.⁸

Although contrary to Southern hope, or even expectation, Sebastopol finally fell to the allies in September, 1855, which largely resulted in the end of the Crimean War. After rebuking Russia for surrendering the city, then explaining to the allies how America could have taken the fortress more quickly and easily, the Norfolk (Va.) *Daily Southern Argus* launched a final one-sided comparison between the two wars in which it summarized:

In a single campaign our army went on from glory to glory. In the midst of an enemy's country, fighting battles wherever they were offered, conquering citadels and storming heights, and capturing armies, until, encamped in the city of Montezuma, it had all Mexico at its feet. The country was conquered, and entirely at the mercy of its conquerors; yet we plundered no one, respected the rights of all, paid for the territory we acquired, and then peacefully withdrew our army. . . . Can Great Britain parallel this chapter in her whole history? Where did she ever conquer and then purchase and retire?⁹

NOTES

¹Wilmington (N.C.) *Daily Journal*, June 25, 1855.

²Peter Gibbs, *Crimean Blunder: The Story of War with Russia a Hundred Years Ago* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 123.

³Jacksonville (Fla.) *News*, May 26, 1855.

⁴Ashville (N.C.) *News*, December 7, 1854.

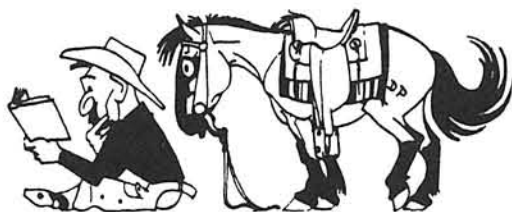
⁵Memphis (Tenn.) *Daily Appeal*, August 8, 1855.

⁶Jacksonville (Fla.) *News*, May 26, 1855.

⁷Hillsborough (N.C.) *Recorder*, May 16, 1855, and the Helena (Ark.) *Democratic Star*, May 24, 1855.

⁸Charleston (S.C.) *Weekly News*, March 30, 1854.

⁹Norfolk (Va.) *Daily Southern Argus*, November 20, 1855.



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL . . .

DAHLHART WINDBERG: Artist of Texas, by Jerry Allen Potter. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984. 143 pp. Black and white illustrations and color plates. Cloth, \$47.50.

At a time when many Artist-Art books are being published, it is good to find one that is not only a tribute to a fine contemporary artist, but which also details the means and methods by which this Texas artist has arrived at his pinnacle of fame.

Born on a farm in Goliad County, Texas, Dalhart did all the usual farm chores that is the lot of country-bred youngsters. His artistic talent surfaced early however and he spent any free time available drawing interesting pictures. He had little interest in school lessons so his teachers finally gave up and helped him as best they could to develop his art talents.

Monetary living problems developed and

so Dalhart obtained his first commercial Art job: painting HOUSES! He also fell in love — and then received his draft notice — and spent the next two years in the Army. Being a person with obvious art talent the Army made him a SIGN PAINTER. Whatever spare time he could finagle he spent viewing European art museums and galleries. Astounded at the beauty of the masters, he decided then and there to emulate their rich technique of oil painting into his own painting style.

Out of the service, his first desire was to marry his childhood sweetheart, then return to work as a sign painter while he avidly pursued the mystery of how the old classic masters achieved in their paintings that exquisite radiant richness. This tenacity of purpose obsessed him for a considerable period because since he could find no books on the subject, he began a long series of chemical experiments to find this elusive secret.

Meanwhile, he was also painting signs full time, and starting a family, with the first born soon due. Teaching art classes in the evenings and weekend exhibiting in sidewalk art shows completed his schedule. While experimenting on the surface of one set of canvases he made an accidental mix of materials involved, and LO! It turned out to be the EXACT surface texture that he had been trying for years to obtain! Now his paintings started really selling. He won awards, wrote a book on painting, and published collector color prints of his work. At this date he is also into related art businesses including printing, custom fine frames and other bi-products.

After 46 pages of text and b/w pictures, the book very beautifully shows the best of Windberg's art, with fifty of his most famous paintings splendidly reproduced in full color.

It is indeed an excellent book for pleasure reading and for technical reference as Windberg and the author seem to hold nothing back. Someone once said that "Success is a ladder that cannot be climbed with your hands in your pockets" and for young and practicing artists this book should prove a living inspiration.

Art Beeman

THE ART AND LIFE OF W. HERBERT DUNTON, 1878-1936, by Julie Schimmel. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984. 268 pp. Illustrations (black and white, and color plates), bibliography, index. Cloth, \$24.95.

W. Herbert "Buck" Dunton is vividly portrayed as an easy-going, always-trying-to-improve-his-style man from the East who became a "Westerner — westerner in body and soul." Dunton, like many other painters, came to the West to paint several times before he finally moved to the West.

Dunton believed that, had he lived in the day of Meriwether Lewis, Audubon, or even as late as Catlin or Francis Parkman, "no life of mine would have been thrown away painting pictures." Fortunately for us, he lived when he did.

Julie Schimmel's book, *W. Herbert Dunton*, is one that not only buffs of Dunton, but any collectors of Western art and history will want to add to their collections.

The book has many color plates, as well as black and white, of Dunton's work as an illustrator and as a serious painter. Probably what true fans of his work will especially appreciate are the catalogues of illustrations, known works and exhibitions.

John H. Heflin

SOLOMON D. BUTCHER: *Photographing the American Dream*, by John E. Carter. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985. 142 pp. Illustrations. Cloth, \$28.95.

There's a puckish surprise buried in this book. At first, upon carefully reading the 18 pages of text by author John E. Carter, curator of photographs at the Nebraska State Historical Society, you discover that Carter has a high regard for the collection of pioneer Nebraska photographs by Solomon D. Butcher. Carter liked the photographs and he liked the photographer. But as the curtain goes up on this rather offbeat frontier drama you are warned early-on by Carter that Butcher "Was funny, eccentric, and just a little bit out of step with the world."

That's the nub of the thing. That tendency

to march to another drummer, however distant or far away, has made this horizontal 10-inch by 11-inch gallery of 105 black-and-white plates a thing apart from every other similar early photography book that university presses, academic publications or fine press houses have ever done.

Butcher's view of the world was decidedly original. Perhaps unique. Definitely, at times, unsettling. Butcher had emigrated to Custer County in Nebraska in 1880 along with his parents. He had been born in 1856, had completed high school and had learned the photographer's trade. In Custer County young Solomon was not overjoyed with the frontier life, of building soddies and living in them. He soon went back to Minneapolis to a medical school, didn't finish that, but found a bride and brought her back to that Custer County frontier.

Eventually he would find his niche. He would travel about the soddie frontier of Custer County of Nebraska taking pictures of families of homesteaders either in front of their unique sod houses or, if the place was too ugly, in front of groups of farm animals, at a small family cemetery, in a field, on a hillside.

In each instance the photos — glass plates, remember — show the photographed family posed, poised, frozen, surrounded by their most precious possessions. Maybe a piano, a giant piece of cabinet work, a crib, children in their Sunday best; but they pictured something elegant in their hard-scrabble lives. Few, if any, of the people he photographed smiled. It was not in vogue to smile in those days.

But Butcher was always seeing more than his camera. In one hunting view he had been witnessing flocks of birds flying over a lake. A hunter shooting at them. The developed glass plate showed nary a bird — only some blurs. So in the darkroom Butcher etched in some birds, lots of birds, a skyful of birds. This was great.

If the shapely hill he photographed was too barren, he drew in trees on top of the hill on the negative. Butcher shot a photograph of a farmer using a large bush to swat a horde of invading grasshoppers. The man was engulfed in grasshoppers. But when the

plate was developed, no grasshoppers. So Butcher etched in an abundance of grasshoppers. The resultant picture reeks of humbug, but how can one be offended? He had found his distant drummer.

In one totally incomprehensible plate something horrendous had happened to a spot on the roof of a frontier house. To hide the lab error Butcher etched in a ghostly tom turkey, a giant one. When the subjects got their print the man said, "I don't remember any turkeys..." He was totally dumbfounded. His wife, obviously as fey as they came, didn't bat an eye. She bought the Butcher fakery with more enthusiasm than Butcher. She not only said that the ghostly turkey had been there when they posed but that she and her husband had talked about it.

Butcher was a pioneer photographer practicing a pioneer art in an unformed frontier portion of middle America. The pictures tell most of the story. But you have to listen carefully for all of it. The sound of that distant drummer to which Solomon D. Butcher marched while he captured Custer County, Nebraska, as it was changing from raw sod homesteads to wooden frame houses and stores is discernible.

His fame has been recorded many times. He is "the photography man" of that piece of Nebraska history. He wasn't always at peace with his occupations and hardships and small victories and many defeats. But he had a lovely, crazy, artistic eye and sense of humor. This is a good piece of bookmanship, a must for antique frontier photo fans, and a rare slice of Americana.

Russ Leadabrand