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The Literary San Gabriels

By John W. Robinson

As Franklin Walker points out in his superb *Literary History of Southern California* (1950), one can gain considerable insight into a region's background and development by examining its literary heritage. In the case of the San Gabriel Mountains, this literary heritage is rather sparse and, with a couple of exceptions, not well known. These mountains rising north of the Los Angeles basin can claim no master laureate similar to Carmel's Robinson Jeffers, the Sierra Nevada's John Muir, or the desert's Mary Austin. Yet, a good number of writers have made the San Gabriels the locale for a paragraph, a page, or a chapter of their literary efforts.

More often than not, the manner in which the mountains are portrayed reflects the prevailing attitudes of the era. To the Spanish padres the San Gabriels were largely *tierra incognita* – unknown, uninviting, and untrod. Father Juan Crespí, diarist for the 1769 Portolá party, referred to "a high and dark range" north of the site late chosen for Mission San Gabriel. Another diarist, Pedro Fages, described "high barren hills, very difficult for

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Please address all exchanges and
material submitted for publication to:

Phil Brigandi, Publications Editor
1175 E. First Street, Tustin, CA 92780
ockid@netzero.com

The Branding Iron is always seeking articles of 2,500 words or less dealing with every phase of the history of the Old West and California. Contributions from both members and friends are welcome.

Editor's Corner . . .

For this issue of *The Branding Iron*, longtime Corral member John W. Robinson – the "guru of Southern California hiking," according to his publisher – favors us with a delightful essay on "The Literary San Gabriels." Hopefully it will encourage you to pick up a book, or tie on your boots and hit the trail. While I have spent little time in that range, as a lover of the Southern California brush country, the descriptions of the chaparral he quotes are warm and nostalgic for me.

Another longtime member, Donald Duke, takes us back to the days when ostrich farms were a popular Southern California tourist attraction. I am told it was especially interesting to feed the big birds oranges, and watch the bulge slide down their long, long neck.

—Phil Brigandi
ockid@netzero.com

Literary San Gabriels

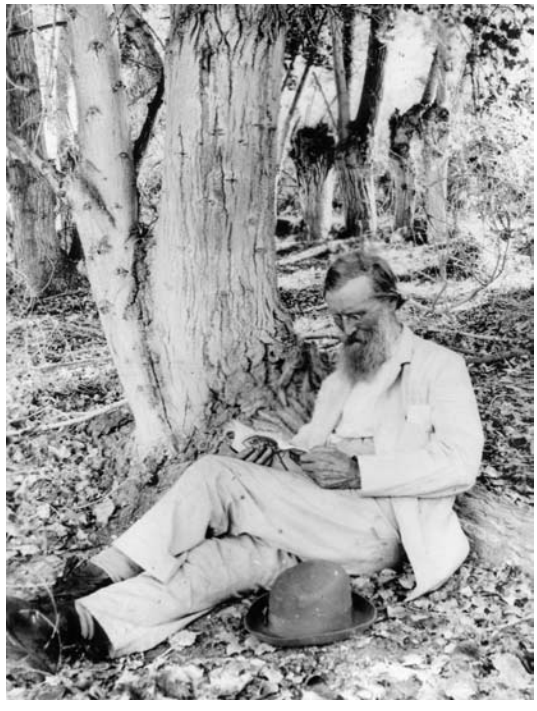
(*continued from page 1*)

beasts of burden" while crossing San Fernando Pass at the western end of the range in 1772. Succeeding Franciscan mission padres and California rancheros generally ignored the mountains, other than to retrieve livestock that occasionally wandered in the canyons. Mission records, voluminous on lowland activities, scarcely mention the "high and dark" range on the northern skyline.

Anglo writers gave the mountains much more attention, particularly after the discovery of gold in San Gabriel Canyon in 1854. Los Angeles newspapers ran columns of news about the San Gabriel mines, very little of it of literary merit. However, the perception of the mountains was changing. With prospectors combing the hills, no longer were the San Gabriels unknown and foreboding. Some began to see beauty in the mountains, as exemplified by this piece that appeared in the *Los Angeles Star* of November 23, 1861:

> *The range of mountains on our northeast boundary is at all seasons an object of admiration. Rearing its peaks three or four thousand feet high, they are subject to most fitful changes…. Sometimes enveloped in clouds, dark and threatening, the base is clothed in sunshine; and again the more lofty peaks lift themselves above the clouds which envelope their base, and stand out in bold relief, as if suspended between earth and sky. Now that winter season has set in, the mountains are clothed in their seasonal garb, and their tops are seen glittering in the bright sun, objects of beauty and admiration.*

The first literary figure to visit and write about the San Gabriels was naturalist John Muir. The young and footloose Scotchman, a resident of Yosemite since 1868, came south in 1877 to visit a friend from his University of Wisconsin days, Dr. O.H. Congar. From the Congar home in Pasadena, Muir gazed up at the olive-green rampart of the San Gabriel Mountains, directly to the north. He took leave of his host and, in his words, "made a fine shaggy little five days' excursion" into these hills so close at hand. He ventured alone, as was his custom in his early mountaineering years, toting only three loaves of Mrs. Congar's bread and a half pound of tea.



John Muir in Southern California, 1905.
(Courtesy the Palm Springs Historical Society)

Muir's excursion into the chaparral-clad mountains was a real challenge to him. Never before had he struggled through such a foreboding thicket of interlaced brush. A few weeks after his return he penned a vivid description of his adventure for the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* (September 11, 1877): "In the mountains of San Gabriel, overlooking the lowland vines and fruit groves, Mother Nature is most ruggedly, thornily savage. Not even in the Sierra have I ever made the acquaintance of mountains more rigidly inaccessible." But all was not toil and hardship. Muir rejoiced in the hidden beauty of the canyons he found deep within the chaparral-coated hills: "But in the very heart of this thorny wilderness, down in the dells, you may find gardens filled with the fairest flowers, that any child would love, and unapproachable linns lined with lilies and ferns, where the ouzel builds its mossy huts and sings in chorus with the white falling wa-

ter." Muir was most impressed with the falls of Eaton Canyon, which he described as "a charming little thing, with a low, sweet voice, singing like a bird, as it pours from a notch in a short ledge, some thirty-five or forty feet into a round mirror-pool." He called it the "Yosemite of the San Gabriel."

Muir enlarged and refined his description of his San Gabriels jaunt in the chapter "The Bee Pastures" in *The Mountains of California*, his best known book, published in 1894.

The last three decades of the 19th century witnessed remarkable growth in Southern California. Los Angeles quadrupled in population, and dozens of new communities dotted the surrounding landscape, as thousands were attracted to "The Land of Sunshine." A great deal of credit for this spectacular growth went to the resident boosters of California's golden Southland who sang the praises of this sun-drenched country in songs, poems, magazine articles, and books. Most of this literature of boosterism was written in the florid, overblown prose so popular during the Victorian era.

The San Gabriel Mountains received their share of attention among the scores of books and articles boosting Southern California during these decades. One of the early boosters to proclaim the glories of the region was Major Ben C. Truman, Rhode Island-born school teacher, Civil War correspondent, and publisher. Truman came to Los Angeles in 1867 and immediately fell in love with the area. During the ensuing years, as a Los Angeles resident, he edited several newspapers, served as publicist for the Southern Pacific railroad, and authored several books. In *Semi-Tropical California* (1874), a booster book about Los Angeles County, Truman vividly portrayed the San Gabriels as "the ruggedest of mountains, majestically lifting their hoary heads to the sky's azure dome, or enveloping themselves in wanton clouds of the most bewitching colors and exquisite penciling." He went on to describe the gold and silver prospects in the mountains.

Ben Truman's purple prose was echoed by other late-19th century writers. Theodore S. Van Dyke, member of a prominent New Jersey family and brother of desert author John Van Dyke, came to Southern California in 1875 to regain his health. He spent much of his time in the healthful outdoors, hunting and fishing. In *Flirtation Camp* (1881), a frivolous Victorian novel in which two young people – Laura and Bellville – prance through the Southern California mountains on a romantic chase, Van Dyke vividly describes a trip up Lytle Creek to Glenn Ranch amid clouds and wind. His young lovers continue their coy adventure, climbing over hill and ridge, pausing here and there to fish and hunt.

Van Dyke's best-known work is *Southern California: Its Valleys, Hills and Streams; Its Gardens, Farms and Climate* (1886). In the preface he writes, "In an age when the study of Nature has become the most popular of all subjects, no apology seems needed for a book treating of a land where the leading features of animate and inanimate nature are quite unknown to the great majority" of Southern Californians. "The Sierra Madre," as Van Dyke calls them, "rise with a sudden sweep much higher above the valley than most of the great mountains of our country rise above the land at their feet, lifting one at once into a different climate and to a country where primeval wilderness still reigns supreme. Few parts of the United States are less known and less traveled than these great hills; yet they look down upon the very garden of all California."

Van Dyke's portrayal of wild and untrodden mountains changed rather dramatically within a few years. The Mount Lowe Railroad, the Mount Wilson Observatory, and numerous mountain resort camps that sprang up in the 1890s brought people by the hundreds into the San Gabriels. The boosters of these tourist attractions proclaimed the Sierra Madre, "The Alps of America," equal to the great mountain ranges of the world.

Florid, grandiose prose reached ridiculous heights. Kate Sanborn, in *A Truthful Woman in Southern California* (1894), described a Pasadena lecture on the glories of the Sierra Madre that almost caused her to swoon:

> *I listened to a lecture lately where a man was struggling to do this, and it was positively painful. The flowery verbiage, the accumula-*

George Wharton James leads a party of tourists through the San Gabriel Mountains, circa 1895.
(Courtesy the California Historical Society)

tion of adjectives, the poetical quotations were overpowering. I seemed actually sinking into luscious mellifluousness. I shook it off my fingers, as if it were maple syrup. Then, as he climbed higher and higher, never getting away from the richest verdure and the sweetest flowers, scenes for an artist to paint with rapture, and a poet to sing in ecstasy, I found myself pushing up my forehead to improvise a mansard roof for my brain to swell in sympathy. And when he reached the summit and the panorama burst upon his enraptured vision, it was too much for my strained emotions, and I quietly slipped out.

Trumpeting the delights of Thaddeus Lowe's mountain railroad was George Wharton James, an English-born, former Methodist minister who spent the last three decades of his life traveling around western America and writing prolifically about his adventures. Hired by Lowe to publicize his unique railway, James set up residence on Echo Mountain and commenced turning out pamphlets, press releases and magazine articles singing the praises of the project. Tourists, flocking to his clarion call, rode the airy incline cable car up to Echo Mountain House, and on to Ye Alpine Tavern on the forest slope of Mt. Lowe. James used typical Victorian prose to extol the mountain atmosphere: "Mind and eye absorb the surrounding scene; the nostrils inhale the indescribable mingled fragrance, and the heart is insensibly lifted in adoration for this marvelous creation of the Almighty Lord."

In *California, Romantic and Beautiful* (1914), James describes a camping trip to Mount Wilson and the glories of mountain life: "There is no sweetener of human life more reliable and sure than the mountains. Flee to them. Help comes to body, mind and soul. The trees wave you a hearty welcome and afford shade and shelter. The brook sings its joyful message of the beauty of life and work, and at night soothes you with the assurance that 'something attempted, something done' has earned a night's repose."

Reading George Wharton James today can be a tedious and sometimes painful experience. Yet, in the words of Franklin Walker, "There is something about James that makes one like him even though much of his work is shoddy and his manner is constantly that of a salesman." His *Wonders of the Colorado Desert* (1906) is considered a classic by no less an authority than Lawrence Clark Powell. Despite his literary excesses, James found adventure, mystery and beauty in nature and expressed these traits with a sublimity surpassed only by the best Western writers.

Writers of the 1890s into the 1920s utilized the name "Sierra Madre" almost to the exclusion of "San Gabriels." There was something majestically warm and maternal in "Mother Range," and no one expressed this more fervently than Charles Fletcher Lummis, the brilliant, cantankerous, slightly eccentric editor of *Land of Sunshine*, one of Southern California's first literary journals. Lummis had tramped across the continent in 1885 to become city editor of the Los Angeles Times. He suffered a stroke after only a few years on the job and went to New Mexico to recover, where he became fascinated with the Indian and Spanish cultures and authored the best-known of his many books, *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (1893). Returning to Los Angeles, he took over *Land of Sunshine* and made it into an instant success. Lummis fell in love with the Sierra Madre and ran numerous articles proclaiming its attractions. In "The Mother Mountains" (*Land of Sunshine*, August 1895) he extolled:

> *There is a wonderful significance in the name Sierra Madre; a poetry which the self-satisfied race would be none the worse for capacity to feel; an aptness upon which science at a latter century's end cannot improve. It means more than the shaping of an infinite brood of foothills; more than a synonym for 'the tallest range.' It is not Mother of Mountains, but Mother Mountain whose offspring is Southern California.*

Lummis spent his later years at El Alisal, the home he built with stream boulders amid the sycamores of the Arroyo Seco, not far from the Mother Mountains he cherished.

Lummis' *Land of Sunshine* (renamed *Out West* in 1902) was graced by a good number of essays and stories by a budding young writer from the Owens Valley. Mary Hunter Austin held a metaphysical, almost mystical view of nature and its effect on humankind. In her autobiography *Earth Horizon* (1932) she revealed how, early in life, she determined that, "I would write imaginatively, not only of people, but of the scene, the totality which is called Nature, and that I would give myself intransigently to the quality of experience called Folk, and to the frame of behavior known as Mystical." This philosophy she evoked in her first and best-known book, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), a moving tribute to the landscape and lore of the desert country east of the Sierra Nevada.

Following the success of *The Land of Little Rain*, Mary Austin traveled widely through California, the Southwest, and as far as England, singing the praises of the semi-arid lands in numerous books and stories. In 1913, while residing briefly in London, she was asked to provide the text for a book containing Sutton Palmer's watercolor paintings of California scenes. This she did beautifully in *California: Land of the Sun* (1914), a volume described by Lawrence Clark Powell as "a lyrical hymn to California, its contours and configurations of seacoast, valleys, and mountains." The chapter of the book entitled "Mothering Mountains" describes the Sierra Madre and contains some of the best prose so far written about the range:

> *The heads of the Sierra Madre are rounded, the contours of great dignity. Its charms, and it has many, of forested slope, leaping waters, and lilied meadows, do not offer themselves to the casual glance…. Entering the cañons of the San Gabriel, one is struck with the endearing quality of their charm. In a country which disdains every sort of prettiness, and dares even to use monotony as an element of beauty, as California does, it is surprising to find little dells all laced with fern and saxifrage, and wind-swung, frail, flowery bells. Little streams come dashing down the runways with an elfin movement, with here and*

there a miniature fall "singing like a bird," as Muir described it, between moss-encrusted banks.

Like Charles Lummis, Mary Austin was intrigued with the universal, mystical connotation of "Mother Mountains." "Was there ever a name at once so absolute, so understanding as Sierra Madre, Mother Mountain?... Never again for me will the Sierra Madre by a mere geographical term, a feature of the landscape…. Shall not the Mother of the land do what she will with it?"

California: Land of the Sun was published in Britain at the onset of World War I. It was unavailable to most Southern California readers until 1927, when it was at last published in the United States under the title *The Lands of the Sun*, without Sutton Palmer's magnificent watercolors. The original illustrated edition is a scarce collector's item today.

Abbot Kinney – tobacco heir, land developer, creator of Venice, California, conservationist, chairman of California's first Board of Forestry – was a businessman and engineer rather than a literary figure. Yet he produced a treatise which, though essentially technical, is also full of lively perception and vigorous prose about the Southern California mountains. Kinney's *Forest and Water* (1900) is an urgent plea for the preservation of the mountain watershed, wise forest protection, fire prevention, reforestation and reclamation. He called for the creation of an efficient forest protection force and gave details on the personal qualifications of prospective rangers, including the following bad news for bachelors: "Marriage is one essential of a life in harmony with natural law. Every man in the forestry force should be married by thirty. This is not only in consonance with the highest statesmanship to preserve the population in its reproductive power, but also for the highest responsibility and vital strength of the forest force."

Kinney's treatise led to the development of an efficient and professional ranger service not only in the San Gabriel Forest Reserve (renamed the Angeles National Forest in 1908), but in forest reserves throughout California.

Kinney was well acquainted with the San Gabriels. His home from the 1880s until his death in 1920 was his beloved Kinneloa Ranch in the foothills between Altadena and Sierra Madre. In *Forest and Water* he pleads, "We hold in Southern California something in climate as near perfection as humanity can hope for on earth. Not only do we offer cities of refuge from the relentless frost king of winter, but we also offer the unique condition of delightful refuges from the fiery breath of the desert…. For beauty alone and beauty considered only as a commercial asset, we must put an end to the folly of forest fires."

Charles Frederick Holder was probably the most avid sportsman-writer in Southern California history. Whether deep sea fishing off Catalina, angling for trout in San Gabriel Canyon, or big game hunting high in the mountains, Holder was actively involved in his chosen avocation. He was founder of the Valley Hunt Club in Pasadena and the Tuna Club in Avalon. Scores of his sporting articles appeared in such nationally-renowned periodicals as *McClure's Magazine*, *The Century*, and *Scientific American*. His dozen books included *The Log of a Sea Angler*, *The Channel Islands of California*, and *Life in the Open: Sport With Rod, Gun, Horse and Hound in Southern California* (1906).

It was this latter book, probably Holder's best, that contains within its covers much about the San Gabriels: fishing the canyon streams, hunting with hounds in the foothills, stalking big horn sheep, deer, and mountain lion in the back country. Holder knew the mountains well. A native of Massachusetts, he came to California in 1885 and found a home in Pasadena. He lived for a time on "Las Casitas," a sloping foothill bench just outside the mouth of Arroyo Seco Canyon. His *Life in the Open* is written in vigorous, lively prose; its chapters abound with enthusiasm, the thrill of the hunt, triumph.

Holder also saw great beauty in the mountains. In a horseback jaunt up the Arroyo Seco into the heart of the range he writes, "There is something in the smiling face of the mountains that takes strong hold of the fancy and imagination. There is an impulse to stop and bare the head before the works of the Infinite Designer of all these mountains,

hills and valleys."

Listen to how he describes a storm in the back country:

> *The rainstorms of the mountains fill the streams with melody and the forest thrills with ten thousand vibrant notes. The roar and cadence of the greater falls, the ripple over rocky beds, the wild sweep and surge of rain against granite cliffs, and the wail of the wind as it rises and give rein to its fancy, sweeping over the ridges, rushing down into the canons, through the chaparral … are all features in the splendid setting of the forest stage.*

Today's preservationists and nature lovers tend to look with a frowning eye on Holder because of his passion for hunting animals – particularly the endangered big horn sheep. Nevertheless, Holder, a disciple of the sporting life, wrote with lively passion about the San Gabriels of yesteryear.

Francis Fultz, ca 1920
(Louise Werner photo, courtesy the author)

More to the liking of conservationists was Francis M. Fultz, a Midwestern school superintendent who moved to Los Angeles, ostensibly to retire, in 1916. Instead of leading a sedate life in retirement, Fultz, in his 60s, joined the new Southern California chapter of the Sierra Club and developed a new passion – exploring the local mountains and studying their plant life. The academic botany he learned in the Midwest now became an avocation. He was fascinated with chaparral – what he called the "elfin forest" – and sent about to learn all he could about this uniquely Southern California type of brushy, thorny ground cover. Out of this study came a series of articles for the *Los Angeles Times Illustrated Magazine*. These articles became the basis for a delightful book, *The Elfin Forest* (1923).

"Striking and impressive as the mountains of Southern California are in their physical features, yet the most wonderful and marvelous thing about them is the forest of elfin trees which clothes them as with a garment," writes Fultz. "To stand on some high vantage point, where I can gaze out over the limitless sea of chaparral is to me a delight; to follow it with my eye, as it runs over ridges and dips down into canyons, then up another ridge and on again, is an inspiration; to see it extend on and on, until it disappears in the horizon or drops behind some distant range and realize the part it plays in the Creator's plan of Conservation, is an exultation."

Fultz proceeds to describe each species of the Elfin Forest, writing with clarity and accuracy to please the layman as well as the professional botanist. Indeed, the strength of *The Elfin Forest* is that it combines scientific knowledge with easy-flowing, enthusiastic prose – something seldom seen in technological monographs. The book is as valuable today as when Fultz wrote it 85 years ago.

If any book on the San Gabriels and other Southern California mountains ranges might be termed a literary classic, it would have to be Charles Francis Saunders' *The Southern Sierras of California* (1923). What makes a book a classic? When it possesses the quality of excellence that causes it to transcend time and be read beyond the author's own generation, says Lawrence Clark Powell. *The South-*

ern Sierras is such a book. Within its pages, Saunders does for the Southern California mountains what John Muir does for the Sierra Nevada. He, like Muir, is able to evoke the spell of wilderness and make the mountains come alive in timeless, vibrant prose. Literature and landscape blend in perfect harmony.

Saunders is at his best when describing the mountain flora, for he was an accomplished botanist. He seemed particularly intrigued with the chaparral. Here is how he describes it in a tramp through the upper Big Tujunga Canyon:

> *Once the mind is cleared of its conventional views as the woodlands, this Tom Thumb forest appeals to the eye as very lovely, leafy the year through, rounded and dimpling as it compliantly conforms like a garment to the moulding of the mountain to which it clings, yet with a decided will of its own as you will find if you step from the trail and attempt to pass through its midst…. For all its littleness it is infinitely harder to travel through than the great forests of the Sierra Nevada, where the trees stand apart at liberal distances, while these puny arboreal folk of the chaparral, linking arms, could halt an army.*

Saunders did not confine his rambles to the trails; he was equally adept at climbing peaks. Take, for example, his scramble to the summit of Strawberry Peak:

> *So I started up once more, clutching carefully at every projecting hold and keeping steadfastly an upward look, until finally, after fifteen minutes' tedious creeping, I scrambled out on the top, and lo! The kingdoms of the earth. Twenty-five miles eastward, "Old Baldy," genial giant of the Sierra Madre, blocked the view, but over one shoulder San Gorgonio peeped, revealing an arc of his smooth back outlined with a fringe of snow. Still farther on, San Jacinto's summit, lifted above a sea of vapor, floated like an island of air. To the north, beyond the range, a yellow smudge marked the desert's whereabouts; and nearer, almost at my feet, the great gray basin of the Big Tujunga lay in clearcut relief. Oceanward, the sierra sank gradually till its feet were sunk in a thin white fog that hid the greater plain of San Gabriel, and beyond that, in the light of the evening sun, the sea gleamed like a shining platter, bearing twin-peaked Catalina in its golden midst.*

Who was this writer who used the English language like an artist's brush? Charles Francis Saunders was born in Warminster, Pennsylvania in 1859 and educated in Quaker schools in Philadelphia. Until he was well into his 30s, he led an uneventful life as a clerk for a Philadelphia trading firm. It appeared he was destined for obscurity until, on his way home from work one night, he chanced to drop in on a public lecture on botany. The talk revealed to Saunders a charming world of natural beauty of which he had previously been unaware. His life now had renewed purpose. Several years of intense study and field wanderings made him one of the premier lay botanists in the East. Weekends and holidays he spent walking through the hills and mountains from Vermont to North Carolina, studying the flora. In 1897 he began his literary career by writing a series of articles on flowers and plants for a Philadelphia newspaper.

1902 was a watershed year in Saunders' life. At the age of 43 he married for the first time and paid his initial visit to California. His union with Elisabeth Hallowell was felicitous but tragically short-lived. She was an accomplished artist and shared her husband's interest in nature. Whenever her fragile health would allow, she accompanied him on his outings, toting paintbrush and colors to illustrate landscapes, flowers and trees. Four of Saunders' early books are enhanced with Elisabeth's drawings; more would have been but for her untimely passing in 1910.

Saunders' journey west was an eye-opener. He and Elisabeth were completely captivated by the fascinating flora of Southern California – the abundant wildflowers, the thorny but fragrant chaparral, the unique desert plants. In 1906 they moved permanently to Southern California, ostensibly for Elisabeth's fragile health; another reason was their total enthrallment with the region. They bought a home in Pasadena, and wasted no

time in exploring and enjoying the flora-rich valleys, mountains and deserts of their new surroundings.

Saunders' facile pen produced a half-dozen books during the ensuing decade, covering his three major new-found interests – the flora, the Spanish missions, and the Indians. Several of these, most notably *The California Padres and Their Missions* (1915), in which he collaborated with J. Smeaton Chase, were best sellers.

During these years, Saunders often rested from his literary chores by slinging a knapsack over his back and, with one or more friends, hiking into the nearby mountains. Out of these outdoor adventures came *The Southern Sierras of California*, the best of his eighteen books.

In the book, Saunders recounts his rambles through the verdant heart of the Sierra Madre, up such lofty summits as Old Baldy and San Gorgonio, across the desert-influenced Santa Rosas to the San Diego back country, and into the gentle hills behind Santa Barbara. With him usually was "The Professor," a fictitious character who sometimes represented a friend, sometimes a hiking acquaintance, sometimes himself.

Many of Saunders' descriptions are timeless. Here is how he describes his crossing of the Devil's Backbone enroute to Old Baldy:

> *It was like walking some bridge of the gods, so uplifted above the earth was it, so sweet and buoyant the air that drew across it, so remote seemed the world. And it was a bridge that led us into quite a new land, treeless save for an occasional flattened tamarack or lowly clump of chinquapin, and rising easily by barren, gravelly undulations flecked with lingering snow-banks here and there, until we came out upon a wide, wind-swept expanse of shale and broken rock – a desert on a mountain peak.*

Today's hiker can attest that the Devil's Backbone route to Baldy's summit is just as Saunders described it nearly a century ago.

Other accounts are of mountain landmarks long vanished, casualties to modern highways that allow easy access. Colby's Ranch, once a hiker's hostelry deep in the heart of

Charles Francis Saunders, ca 1906
(Courtesy the Henry E. Huntington Library)

Colby, was described as "the little Canaan of the Sierra Madre – a land of milk and honey, of cherries and figs, of apples and pears and berries, of rhubarb pies and peaches and cream." Buckhorn Flat, now a busy public campground off the Angeles Crest Highway but in Saunders' time deep in the wilderness, was "a thicket from whose heart the music of running water rose, an entrancing spot where silver firs, yellow pines, and incense cedars four or five feet in diameter made a contemplative twilight." Here, one Sunday morning long ago, Saunders and his friends held a Quaker meeting:

> *We all four sat together for an hour or so in worshipful silence beneath the great firs, hoping to experience the reality of the Lord's assurance…. In such primeval temple, without priestly meditation, the ripple of the brook and the song of birds for anthem and the perfume of the lilies for incense, we made spiritual sacrifice to the universal Lord of life.*

Among the large collection of Saunders' papers in the Henry E. Huntington Libraray are many little notebooks he kept on his rambles. In them are bare notations, listing flora

and fauna and giving directions, distances and travel times. A comparison of these skimpy field jottings with the finished book bears striking testimony to Saunders' creative power. Simple listings of names, places and numbers are, to paraphrase Lawrence Clark Powell, expanded by knowledge, illumined by imagination, and transformed into literature.

The Southern Sierras of California remains today the best book about the Southern California mountains and a worthy companion to Muir's *The Mountains of California*. If your library is to contain just a single volume on the local mountains, this should be the one.

Saunders penned two other books that touch on the old Sierra Madre. They are *With the Flowers and Trees in California* (1914) and *Under the Sky in California* (1919). Both are well worth reading today.

Hikers in the San Gabriels during the 1920s and '30s often came upon a short, wiry gentleman dressed in khaki, wearing a broad-brimmed hat and World War I-type leggings. After a few cheerful words of greeting, the elderly man would bound off up the trail, moving at a vigorous pace, and disappear from view as he scrambled up a nearby summit. The startled hikers had just met Will H. Thrall, the energetic editor of *Trails Magazine* and the author of the weekly "Today's Hike" in the *Los Angeles Times*.

To Thrall, the acme of enjoyment and inspiration was experienced in traveling a forest trail and camping out in the wilderness. He believed the essence of life was found in the beauty and simplicity of nature. Hand in hand with his love of the outdoors, Thrall believed in the benefits of strenuous physical activities associated with mountain hiking. "There is no exercise so beneficial, physically, mentally or morally, nothing which give so much of living for so little cost, as hiking our mountain and hill trails and sleeping under the stars," he wrote. In 1919 Thrall founded the San Antonio Club, an organization dedicated to the exploration and preservation of the San Gabriels. The Club organized bimonthly hiking trips in the mountains for almost three decades.

Will Thrall put his philosophy of outdoor living to work as editor of *Trails Magazine*, published under the auspices of the Los Angeles County Department of Recreation Camps and Playgrounds from 1934 to 1939. The quarterly magazine became a hit with hikers and campers from the start. Included in each issue were descriptions of mountain landmarks, road and trail descriptions, news of outing activities by various outdoor organizations, maps and illustrations, and a good deal of Thrall's mountaineering philosophy. Beginning with the Winter 1936 issue, *Trails Magazine* became a major source of mountain history with its "Cabin Landmarks of the Angeles" series. At Thrall's request, Lloyd Austin, proprietor of Switzer's Camp in the upper Arroyo Seco, wrote the story of the resort. Each subsequent issued contained one or more articles of historical interest, written either by early mountain pioneers still living or by Thrall himself, based on interviews and research. The material thus preserved will always be of priceless value to historians of the San Gabriel Mountains.*

As Thrall became better known as an authority on the local mountains, the *Los Angeles Times* invited him to contribute a weekly column on mountain trails. His popular feature "Today's Hike" ran every Sunday in the *Times* from October 21, 1934 through November 2, 1941. Thrall personally checked out the trails every week, often covering some 20 or 30 miles on foot to insure that directions given in "Today's Hike" were accurate.

When *Trails Magazine* folded, Thrall was 65 years old, retirement age for most men. But for a man of his vitality, retirement from an active life was a temperamental impossibility. Until he reached 80, he continued to take weekly hikes in the San Gabriels. Questioned about this strenuous activity on his 78th birthday, he replied "Hiking is the world's finest exercise. I'm not as fast as I once was, but I can still scale those peaks. I'll never stop hiking. It's life to me."

Will Thrall passed away at the golden age of 89 on February 20, 1963. As a fitting mem-

* Sierra Madre (Mother Range) was the popular name for the mountains until 1927, when the U.S. Board on Geographic Names ruled in favor of "San Gabriel Mountains."

orial to this man whose deep love of the mountains and gift of communication allowed him to convey this passion to others, the United States Board on Geographic Names, at the request of the Forest Service and hundreds of Thrall's friends, bestowed the name "Will Thrall Peak" on a 7,845-foot forested summit on the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains.

In more recent years, few have written more beautifully, or with more feeling, about the San Gabriel Mountains than Russ Leadabrand. Leadabrand's free, easy-flowing style was enjoyed by thousands of readers of the *Pasadena Star-News*, *Westways* magazine, and the Ward Ritchie Press guidebook series throughout most of the 1960s and '70s. A good portion of his writings covered the San Gabriels – their history, their natural appeal, their highways and byways.

Leadabrand, a native of California's great Central Valley, got his local start as a reporter with the *Star-News*, but it was his immensely popular "Let's Explore a Byway" series in *Westways*, running from 1961 until the late 1970s, that made his name a household word among Southern California travel buffs. Every month Leadabrand guided his readers along highway and byway through lowland, mountain, and desert. Among his trips were many into the San Gabriels – the Angeles Crest Highway, San Gabriel Canyon, Mount Baldy country, Wrightwood, Big Pines, and others.

Leadabrand's "Let's Explore a Byway" columns caught the eye of publisher Ward Ritchie. At Ritchie's request, Leadabrand authored a shelf of compact little guidebooks, the first of which was *Guidebook to the San Gabriel Mountains of California* (1963). In easy-going, disarming prose, Leadabrand's books impart a great deal of knowledge about the mountains. He tells of historical landmarks, resorts, roads, and campgrounds. "But," Leadabrand writes, "the best thing about the San Gabriel Mountains is the mountains themselves; rockribbed, burned over or green with young chaparral, sharp-etched against the blue winter sky or misty and phantom in the creeping, canyon-following arms of smog. The sights and sounds, the wash of the winds, the medicinal and restoring scents – these are the things that have lured the traveler into the range for hundreds of years. May it ever be thus."

CORRAL CHIPS

Sheriff Froy Tiscareño has announced several new appointed officers for 2009. **Millie Tiscareño** will take over from **Pat Adler-Ingram** as Membership Chairman. **Doug Brutsche** is our new Daguerreotype Wrangler, following in the footsteps of **Larry Boerio**. **Art Cobery** will now serve as Assistant Daguerreotype Wrangler (there being little call for an old time "Magic Lantern" these days). And **Sherry Cavallo** will join her husband, **Joe**, as Assistant Wrangler Boss.

Former Sheriff **Gary Turner** garnered second place in the recent Westerners International Western poetry competition for his poem, "Why Drink," heard at our 2007 Fandango.

Longtime member **Ernest Marquez** was featured in a recent *Los Angeles Times* story about his efforts to preserve the Marquez Family Cemetery above Santa Monica Canyon in Pacific Palisades. Scores of Marquez's ancestors and others were buried there between the 1840s and 1916.

Ostrich Farming in Southern California

By Donald Duke

Beginning in the early 1880s, in the United States, ostrich plumes were an accessory to style. They were cascading from hats, ladies used them on the neck as a boa, also as fans for a fan dancer, they were used in military hats, and several other purposes. Within two years plumes soared in value, ounce for ounce, plumes were more precious than gold. From the 1880s until World War I, Southern California became a mecca for plume raising. Best known to historians was the Cawston Ostrich Farm.

While Cawston's was the largest and best known ostrich farm, there was the Los Angeles Ostrich Farm alongside East Lake (Lincoln Park), and ostrich farms in Ocean Park, Pasadena, San Diego, San Jacinto, and Santa Ana. Cawston's Ostrich Farm was the only farm that had a parkl as past of its operation. It was officially known as Cawston's Ostrich Farm & Zoological Garden and was first located on the Los Feliz Ranch (Griffith Park). It was located where the Mulholland Fountain is today. To reach the park, visitors took the Los Angeles County Railroad which ran out Sunset Boulevard and transferred to the Ostrich Farm Dummy Railroad which ran out Hyperion to what is now Griffith Park Boulevard to Los Feliz, then west with a zig-zag down the hill to the Ostrich Farm. The word dummy means that it was an enclosed steam locomotive in a box so as not to scare horses. Kids used to grease the zig zag rails and locomotives often had one hell of a time climbing the grade.

Cawston's Ostrich Farm & Zoological Park had an admission charge of 25¢ which included the picnic grounds, rides for the kids, and rides behind carts drawn by ostriches. If you were game, you could ride an ostrich. The ostrich was hooded so as not to reach back and snap at the rider. I am told it was like riding a stagecoach or camel. The park was first established by Dr. Arthur Sketchley,

Baby ostriches, just hatched.

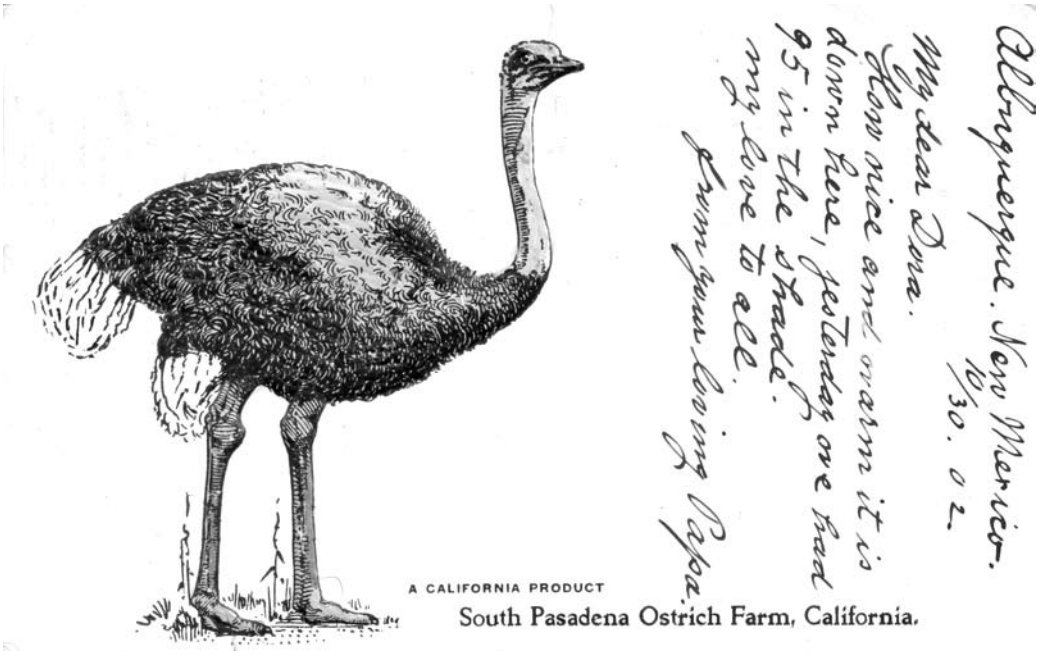
(Michael Patris Collection)

who brought the first ostriches to Southern California. More on Dr. Sketchley later on.

Just what is an ostrich? It is a strange looking member of the bird family that is unable to fly. It is also the largest living bird. Its original home was South Africa and western Asia. The ancients called them camel birds, because they looked more like a camel than a bird. Like a camel, the ostrich could travel days without water, and they wobbled like a camel. A full grown ostrich stands seven to eight feet high and weighs between 200 to 300 pounds. Its neck is about three feet long and the head has large eyes. To defend itself the ostrich has one hell of a kick, and has lots of power with its thick, powerful legs. It kicks like a kangaroo. It has two toes which are spread wide, which gives the bird great speed. Its weakness is its lack of sense. In fact it is dumb! An ancient belief is that the ostrich sticks its head in the sand when facing danger. A pure fable. It eats grass, leaves, seeds and fruit when it can find it. It lays eggs just like a bird or chicken, but the eggs are huge and weigh between three to four pounds each. The male sits on the eggs until they hatch in nearly 40 days.

Natives in South Africa plucked the feathers when they turn white and used them for decorative purposes. At what time they became popular in Europe is unknown. The French were the first to use the feathers or plumes for military hat decorations. The white plumes were dyed various colors depending on the rank of the soldier. The plucked plumes would grow back within a half year, and other feathers would turn white and were plucked. In the years that Cawston sold the plumes, he made millions and shipped most of them to New York and Europe. At one time Cawston had a retail store at 313 Broadway, in downtown Los Angeles.

In April 1886, Dr. Arthur Sketchley, an English native and pioneer of ostrich farming in the United States, decided Southern California had the same weather as South Africa and was fine for ostrich raising. He arrived with two railroad stock cars full of birds which had been shipped from Port Natal, South Africa to Galveston, Texas. His Ostrich Farm & Zoological Park at Los Feliz Rancho was near completion for the storage of birds, but not yet ready for the public.



(Michael Patris Collection)

Edward H. Cawston was a gentleman rancher living in Norwalk. One day he read in the *Los Angeles Times* that ostriches had arrived in Los Angeles and were in pens at Los Feliz Rancho. Cawston wondered what it was all about and made his way to Los Feliz Rancho. He figured this was a growing business and something he should invest in. Ostrich eggs were selling for seventy-five dollars each and he put a down payment for several eggs.

In the meantime, several ostriches died soon after arrival due to the hardship in transportation from South Africa to Los Angeles, and several were lost to coyotes roaming in what is now Griffith Park.

Establishing the park and the loss of birds was trying to Sketchley. He wanted out of the Ostrich Farm & Zoological Park and decided it was easier to be a broker and importer of birds. Cawston made his move and decided to buy the park.

Before selling his interest in the Ostrich Farm, Sketchley designed and built a large incubator for the hatching of eggs. He did not want to risk the loss of a single egg being crushed by the male sitting on the eggs for 40 days. Each female could lay as many as ten eggs, but many were crushed; with the incubator, the Ostrich Farm became full of new chicks. Young birds were prone to colds and had to be watched at that tender age. Instead of eating grass and leaves, the ostriches were fed corn and alfalfa, and the young birds developed much quicker.

(Michael Patris Collection)

Under the management of Cawston, the Ostrich Farm & Zoological Park developed rapidly. A large pavilion was constructed, large enclosed pens for ostrich viewing, a cafeteria was built, and all kinds of tables and benches for picnickers. The zoological gardens were a sight to behold.

Large buildings were built for the processing of plumes. There were drying vats for the coloring of the plumes, a sorting and storage building, and a shipping room. An ostrich was considered full grown after a year, when they had developed white plumes. For plucking, an ostrich was run into a "V" shaped corral, hooded, and the white feathers plucked or cut off. A half to a pound of feathers could be plucked from a bird. The stub would fall out in a couple of months and a new feather or plume grew in its place.

Ostriches would mate once a year, and the male was mean and rough on the female. A male would service anywhere from ten to twenty females. The male would roar like a lion when he had finished servicing a female. Females were not able to make a noise or bark.

Within four years the Cawston Ostrich Farm had over 3,000 birds in its inventory. The Cawston showroom featured thousands of plumes for sale at various prices due to col-

(Michael Patris Collection)

or, length, width, etc. Feathers were dyed in many colors from fine French dyes. In 1902, the farm received as many as 60,000 orders for plumes from its large catalog. Plumes were now shipped worldwide.

South Pasadena gained a world class tourist attraction in 1896 – the Cawston Ostrich Farm. The farm had run out of space at Los Feliz Rancho (Griffith Park) and required more space. A huge parcel of land in then Lincoln Park (South Pasadena) was purchased. Before anything was built, Lincoln Park was merged into South Pasadena. After six months of construction, the new Cawston Ostrich Farm opened with a huge celebration on November 17, 1896. The property was bounded by Monterey Road, Pasadena Avenue, and it lay next to the Santa Fe Railway main line, although trains did not stop for passengers. On the opposite side was the main line of the South Pasadena Line of the Pacific Electric Railway with service to the park every 20 minutes.

Admission fee was still 25¢ and the tourist could stroll in a setting advertised as, "free from boisterous elements and strictly first class. Here one can see hundreds of ostriches, baby chicks, and ostrich eggs, as well as beautiful gardens." The farm continued to do a huge mail order business, and the Cawston Ostrich Farm received more mail than any other site in Southern California.

This was the first time that everything was complete before moving in. The administration building contained the general offices, the feather sales room, and the mail order department. A large incubator building was heat controlled so that the large eggs hatched in 40 days. The main factory building was where the plumes were brought in, sorted, and dyed. It also contained a repair room for used plumes. The store house was a concrete building where feathers were stored for sale under ideal conditions. Most of the property was given to the outdoor ostrich pens and the gardens. The gardens were a sylvan dell and spread beneath giant oak trees and varied palm trees. The semi-tropical park was complete with flower beds, green lawns, and a flowing fountain. Afternoon tea was taken in a Japanese tea garden.

In 1906 the Cawston Ostrich Farm was incorporated for $1,000,000. What the stock sold for is unknown, or how many shareholders there were. One has to assume that Edward H. Cawston was the primary shareholder?

The year 1911 was the 25th anniversary of the Cawston Ostrich Farm. Edward H. Cawston was approached by a group of Los Angeles citizens to sell the farm. He was 46 years of age, and was looking forward to returning to his birthplace in England to enjoy his fortune. A syndicate was made up of bankers that gathered together to buy the farm. On November 2, 1911, the farm was sold. In due course, Cawston returned to his boyhood home in Cabham, Surrey, England.

Just after the sale, a full page advertisement appeared in the South Pasadena Chamber of Commerce yearbook which said, "The original, the pioneer, the greatest and largest of

(Michael Patris Collection)

all its kind, the Cawston Ostrich Farm is one of the institutions in Southern California, and there is hardly a tourist who has not visited this institution." The text also made reference to the many awards that Cawston Ostrich Farm had won over the years.

As war clouds spread over Europe, the shipment of plumes dried up. However, in the United States they remained at the same level. Apparently women's styles had not changed.

Edward H. Cawston finally passed away in England on June 29, 1920. With the millions he made selling ostrich plumes he lived well. He had returned to South Pasadena twice to see how things were going before his death.

While the Cawston Ostrich Farm had prospered for a quarter century, it fell on hard times during the Depression. Business slowly began to taper off following World War I, but not to a level where there was a problem. In 1934 the farm was sold at an auction to pay off the debt and two years back taxes. The Cawston Ostrich Farm finally closed its doors in 1935. It took an additional two years to sell off some 50 ostriches, the remaining equipment, and the property.

Thus ended one of Southern California's prime tourist attractions.

"The Latest Out." Scene at the Ostrich Farm, South Pasadena, California

(Michael Patris Collection)

Monthly Roundup . . .

New Deputy Sheriff Michael Patris and guest speaker Michael Mathes (right).

January 2009

We began the new year with a lively talk by Dr. Michael Mathes on "The Francisco Vazquez de Coronado Expedition: A Medieval Vestige in the American West."

In the 1540s, Spain was busy exploring the New World. Vazquez de Coronado's journey, which took him as far north as Kansas, was the largest land expedition in history, with some 300 men and 1,000-1,300 Indian servants.

The Spaniards, Dr. Mathes explained, were Medieval in their outlook, organization, and even much of their equipment. They dreamed of gold and glory – perhaps the rich cities described by Cabeza de Vaca, or the legendary seven cities of gold. They could not believe that Mexico City was the only great city in the New World.

The men received no pay. "They got what they could steal," Dr. Mathes said. Many expected never to return. They would find wealth in a new land, or find death.

The expedition set off in April 1540, and after spending the winter in New Mexico, moved east into Texas. From there, Coronado and a small force moved north into Oklahoma and Kansas. He later rejoined his men, and they returned to Mexico in 1542.

As far as the men were concerned, Dr. Mathes said, the journey "was a total failure – nobody got rich." But the trip was historically and politically important, if only in disproving the legends of wealth to the north.

And many of the men did benefit in later years from their association with Coronado. There was a certain prestige, a courageousness in having gone on this great trek. This led to good jobs for many of them. "In the long run it paid off," Dr. Mathes explained.

During the questions and answers after his talk, Dr. Mathes also dispelled the legend that the first horses in the American West came from Coronado's herds. The Indians had no concept of horses as beasts of burden, he said; any animals that escaped would have been promptly caught, cooked, and eaten.

February 2009

Stories and memories of Clifton's Cafeteria were served up by our own Glenna Dunning, of the Los Angeles Public Library. Clifford Clinton (1900-1969) combined the two halves of his name when he opened the first Clifton's in downtown Los Angeles in 1931. His Cafeteria of the Tropics was famous for its garish façade, and Clinton's offer to "Pay What You Wish."

Clinton, who had seen real hunger living in China with his missionary parents in the early 1900s, "felt that everybody deserved to have one square meal a day," Dunning explained. "He really was looking out for

people."

After briefly operating his Penny Cafeteria, where yes, all dishes cost just 1¢, Clinton then opened his Brookdale Cafeteria, decorated in wilderness style, complete with a limeade pool, and rocky sherbet mine. Now stripped of its rustic décor, the downtown L.A. restaurant survives to this day as Clifton's Cafeteria, run by Clinton's son and grandson.

Clifford Clinton was also a civic crusader, working on the recall of Los Angeles Mayor Frank Shaw in 1938. After World War II, he turned his attention to world hunger, promoting his MPF – multi-purpose food product.

A number of members shared their own memories of Clifton's after Dunning's presentation.

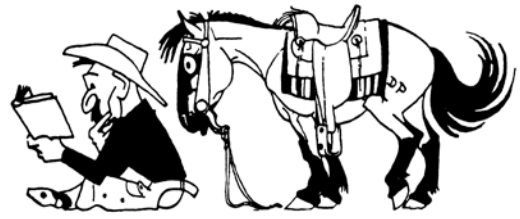
March 2009

The ranching history of Southern California's Channel Islands was highlighted at our March meeting by Ann Huston, Chief of Cultural Resource Management for the Channel Islands National Park.

At one time or another, all eight of the islands were used as ranch land, for both cattle and sheep. Ranching began during Mexican times, when several of the islands were granted as ranchos. The Vail family continued to run cattle on Santa Rosa Island until 1998. Santa Cruz Island also had an olive grove, vineyard, and its own winery in the days before Prohibition.

The Channel Islands National Park consists of all or part of the five northernmost islands – Anacapa, San Miguel, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Santa Rosa. The park also extends a mile out to sea from the islands, "half the park is under water," Houston explained. Along with its efforts to protect the natural resources of the islands, and work with other landowners, the National Park Service is also pledged to preserve their historical resources.

Huston illustrated her talk with photos of some of the historic buildings and locations on the islands.



Down the Western Book Trail . . .

Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front, by Todd DePastino. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008. 320 pp, Notes, Illustrations, Photos, Index. Cloth, $27.95. Order from *www.ww.norton.com*

This is a wonderfully refreshing story about a youngster of 19 who revealed with bold black brush strokes and sardonic captions a caustic humor in over 600 cartoons displaying what the GI's lived and felt. It has been lushly illustrated with pictures from World War II and his cartoons into the early 1990s.

His parents were hardscrabble Mountain Park, New Mexico apple farmers. He was born October 29, 1921 and his parents moved frequently seeking better job opportunities.

He had little formal schooling but borrowed $500 from his grandmother to attend a cartoon school in Chicago where he learned the elements of his craft.

He maximized the benefits from his skills with a good deal of cunning and artifice. At one point in 1944 he ran off 30,000 copies of his book *Mud, Mules and Mountains* on paper stolen from U.S. supply ships at Naples and sold them through Neapolitan dealers.

He got into frequent trouble with army brass including Mark Clark, who was pacified with an autographed cartoon, and General George Patton, who protested the picturing of grimy soldiers often showing disrespect for the officers. Patton threatened to have the newspaper *Stars and Stripes* banished from the Third Army unless Mauldin's drawings were removed.

He was summoned by Patton to a 45-minute meeting at a Ducal Palace in Luxemburg. *Time* magazine ran a report saying, "After 45-minutes with old blood and guts young

gags and grime emerged grinning, reporting last week, 'I came out with all my hide on. We parted good friends but I don't think we changed each other's opinions.' Mauldin GI's remain unwashed, unsquelched." Eisenhower intervened and kept the gag sketches coming.

Mauldin was married three times. He married his first wife at 18. She returned to become his caregiver after having been separated for 50 years. He was a correspondent for the *Chicago Sun Times* and served as a correspondent and front-line artist in 1991 with Operation Desert Storm.

In 1993 he began to go downhill and suffered from Alzheimers. He passed away in Newport Beach, California, on January 22, 2003 at the age of 81. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. He was very proud of his Purple Heart, award for mortar wounds in Italy.

All in all, he was an eccentric artist, but he was as human a being as they get.

– Norman S. Marshall

I Have Seen the Fire, A Novel Inspired by the Life of Sarah Royce, by Robert V. Hine. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008. 142 pp. Paper, $17.95. *www.unmpress.com.*

I Have Seen the Fire, a fictional treatment of Sarah Royce, will delight the reader who enjoys following the stories of adventurous souls. It tells of a gold-rushing family – father, mother, and two-year-old little girl – as they move across the continent from Iowa to California in 1849. Even after they are in the gold fields, Sarah's life remains unsettled. Unsuccessful at mining, Sarah's husband moves his family from the mining camp to Sacramento, and then to San Francisco. Finally, they settle in Grass Valley near the Sierra Nevada foothills. The family gradually grows, despite the fact that Sarah's husband, ever the "dreamer," is often absent pursuing business away from home. After two more girls are born, a boy is born late in 1855. Obviously a rare event in the family, it becomes even more momentous when the child's blue eyes hint of a foreign paternity.

A distinguished historian, retired from the University of California, Riverside, Robert Hine has based his novel on historical characters. Originally from England, Josiah Royce and Sarah Bayliss met in upstate New York, got married and soon moved to Iowa to improve their economic condition. Josiah Royce was restless, however, and after he heard of the gold strikes in California, he proposed to leave his wife and and young child in Iowa, be away for a few months, and come back rich from the California gold fields. But Sarah, a woman of strong faith in her God, would not be left behind. Their son, Josiah Royce, was destined to become the new state's premier philosopher and historian.

Robert Hine's prose is spare but focused. Readers experience the hardships of the overland trek, including the constant specter of death by exhaustion, dehydration, and cholera. The physical features of the landscape seem very real, just as real as the hardships endured by the travelers. Equally vivid is Hine's portrayal of the rigors of life in the mining camps and riotous San Francisco. Hine infuses many acts of valor, love, and tenderness into the novel.

Faith and perseverance may not be sufficient to conquer all obstacles, but this story shows us that they strengthened Sarah Royce's resolve for her trip across the continent and her life in California. Like her historical predecessor, Robert Hine's Sarah Royce exhibits a conviction and altruism that exemplifies the character that we have come to stereotype as the "pioneer woman."

– Froylán Tiscareño