LOS ANGELES CORRAL
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The Branding Iron
J. GOODMAN

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14 OLVERA STREET

By Glenna Dunning

It is a home that has witnessed many important events in the history of the Pueblo de Los Angeles. Over the years it has reflected the ambitions of rancheros and politicians, has provided a standard of gracious living for members of early Los Angeles society, and has sheltered poor immigrants and prostitutes. It was one of the first structures built in Spanish-era Los Angeles and is now one of the last remaining buildings from that time; once a mansion, it had become a "miserable, forgotten place" when rescued from imminent demolition by the efforts of one remarkable woman.

This important and historical site is the Ávila Adobe, recognized by some as just another old building on Olvera Street, but it reaches back to the early days of Los Angeles when the Pueblo was re-establishing

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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 . . .

Olvera Street turns out to have more of a "sporty" past than most of the tourists probably realize, as we learn in Glenna Dunning's article on the Ávila Adobe. Hopefully enough years have passed that a bordello can now simply be considered "local color."

By way of contrast, February 2010 marks the 100th anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America. Art Cobery adds a little local Scouting lore in this issue with the story of Camp Bill Lane, in Big Tujunga Canyon. Art has a personal connection to the story, since he camped there as a boy in the 1940s.

From Gary Turner, our Corral's unofficial "poet laureate," comes an icy tale of the frozen north.

Plenty of book reviews in this issue – and we're always happy to have more.

—Phil Brigandi
ockid@netzero.com

14 Olvera Street . . .

(*Continued from page 1*)

itself in a new location. The original 1781 site was abandoned in 1815 when torrential rains damaged several buildings, including the church. A location on higher ground was selected for the pueblo, and a new plaza was laid out. Following European traditions, the *nueva iglesia* (new church) was to be constructed on one side of the public square, and homes, businesses, and civic structures (guardhouses and jails) were to be built along the other three sides. As the years went by, prominent families like the Ávilas, Carrillos, Sepúlvedas, and Lugos, who lived on vast, outlying ranchos, built town homes near the Plaza where they stayed when they came to Los Angeles to take care of business, visit family and friends, or participate in various celebrations. Gradually the Plaza area developed into the original residential district and social center of the Pueblo.

One of these rancheros was Francisco Ávila (or Ábila), a native of Sinaloa, Mexico. In 1794 he made the journey to Los Angeles where he joined his father, Cornelio Ávila, who had settled in Los Angeles shortly after it was founded. The younger Ávila became a prominent citizen and land owner and, from 1810 to 1811, served as *alcalde* (mayor).

He selected a site for his new home just north of the Plaza and, in 1818, began constructing a spacious adobe dwelling with two long wings built at right angles, thus forming an L-shape. There were eighteen spacious rooms, many of which opened onto porches running the length of the structure and, on the east side of the house, a long *corridor* opened onto the patio where the Ávilas maintained a garden and a small vineyard located in the rear courtyard. The rooms had dirt flooring but this was common, even in large adobes like Ávila's; when tightly packed and swept daily, the smooth and clean floors achieved the consistency and appearance of concrete slabs. Though we might regard an adobe with dirt floors as humble, Ávila's home was considered a mansion in its time: it was elegant and well-furnished with French doors, costly furniture, damask draperies, and other

Encarnación Sepúlveda de Ávila (ca 1807-1855), daughter of Francisco Sepúlveda, and wife of Francisco Ávila. Doña Encarnación maintained the elegance of her home until her death.

(All photos courtesy the Security Pacific Collection/ Los Angeles Public Library)

domestic luxuries which had been shipped from New England around South America to California where they were traded for tallow and cow hides (or California dollars). When completed in 1818, the Ávila home was one of the first buildings in Los Angeles' new site, older than the nearby Church of Our Lady Queen of the Angels (or simply, the Plaza Church) which was finished four years later.

In 1822 Francisco Ávila's first wife, Maria del Rosaria, died. Left with three small children he soon married fifteen-year old Encarnación Sepúlveda, daughter of Francisco Sepúlveda, wealthy owner of Rancho San Vincente y Santa Monica. Despite her youth, Doña Encarnación quickly adapted to the role of a gracious hostess and the Ávila home became the scene of many social gatherings

and "fandangos" where lavish hospitality was always extended to family, friends, and strangers.

Francisco Ávila died ten years later but, even though Encarnación was a widow with two young daughters (Luisa, who later married Manuel Garfias, nephew of Mexico's President Porfirio Diaz, and Francisca, who married German pioneer Theodore Rimpau), she continued to extend hospitality and her home remained an important social center of the Pueblo, the political center of Alta California.

In 1835 Governor Pio Pico moved the capital from Monterey to Los Angeles and later, during the Mexican War, it naturally attracted the attention of the United States government. In January 1847 Commodore Robert Stockton's American forces advanced toward Los Angeles with the goal of capturing the capital. Having received a warning, Doña Encarnación and her daughters fled to the home of family friend, winemaker Louis Vignes who lived east of the Plaza but, before she left, she instructed a servant to lock all doors and windows, and to keep the invaders out of her home. On January 10, the Americans marched into the Pueblo and captured it without opposition. A boisterous brass band led the troops to the Plaza and the young caretaker, lured by the stirring music, rushed to watch the spectacle, leaving the front door of the home wide-open. Some of Stockton's officers (among whom, some believe, was Kit Carson) were patrolling the streets and stopped at the apparently uninhabited adobe. Noticing the large and comfortable rooms, they promptly appropriated the place for their commanding officer who used it as his home and headquarters for ten days. Having proclaimed himself "Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Territory of California," Stockton issued numerous letters and proclamations from his "Head-Quarters, Ciudad de Los Angeles" where he flew the Stars and Stripes from a pole, giving the Ávila Adobe the distinction of being the first building in Los Angeles to fly the American flag. Additionally, because Stockton was the "Governor of the Territory of California," and used the adobe as his office, it occasionally has been referred to as the "First Capitol Building" of American California.

On January 13, 1847, generals John Frémont and Andres Pico signed the Treaty of Cahuenga which ended hostilities in California. Stockton soon headed north to Monterey to assume his role as Military Governor and relinquished the adobe to Doña Encarnacion who returned home in the company of a married daughter, Luisa Garfias, and two American officers, Lieutenants Davidson and Stoneman, who were billeted at the adobe. The officers were safeguarding the Army's payroll which they stored in a trunk in their room but, within weeks, they reported that their room had been broken into and that $640 ("the public funds upwards of $400, the private $240") had been stolen. Upon investigation, two Americans, Private John Smith and Peter Biggs, a slave owned by Captain A. J. Smith of the 1st Dragoons, were charged with the crime. In September 1847, a military commission tried Smith and found him guilty of stealing the money; Biggs, not tried by the commission because he was not a soldier, was flogged for his participation in the crime. The Army soon moved its officers (and payroll) to more secure quarters leaving Doña Encarnación to live in peace until she died in 1855. Her daughter and son-in-law, Francisca and Theodore Rimpau, remained in the home until 1868 when they moved to Anaheim.

Los Angeles had been experiencing changes in demographics since the 1850s and was becoming a predominately Anglo city. Residential and business districts were developing to the south and west, and families were moving away from the old Plaza area. Changes were occurring near the Ávila Adobe as well: the old "transito," which led from the Plaza to the adobe, had ended at a gate connecting the east-west wing of the adobe to its neighbor, the Casa Seguro (a bar and gambling casino built in 1844). This cul-de-sac was transformed into a through street around 1860 when an earthquake damaged the adobe wing so extensively that it was torn down, opening up the thoroughfare. To reflect its status, the new street was named "Vine Street" (sometimes "Wine Street"), al-

luding to nearby wine cellars and vineyards; in 1877 it was renamed "Olvera Street" in honor of Águstin Olvera, Los Angeles County's first judge who lived in an adobe on the corner of old Vine Street and Marchessault, on the north side of the Plaza.

The Ávila home went through changes as well. The Rimpau family still owned it and, sentimental about the aging structure where so much family history had occurred, they decided not to sell it but rather to lease it. By 1888, as indicated by a Sanborn Fire Insurance map, it was called the "Hotel d'Italia Unita" at 14-16-18 Olvera Street though it is doubtful that it ever served as a conventional hotel; in reality, it operated as a boarding house for families though, for a brief period, part of the building functioned as a restaurant and bar. By 1906 (again, as identified by Sanborn maps) the Ávila Adobe was identified as "Rest'r't & Female Boarding" but this innocuous label did not hide the open secret that the historic home, once the "First Capital Building of California," had become a bordello.

For several years the areas north and east of the Plaza had become notorious for prostitution and, although sporadic efforts to enforce morality had been made, both Alameda and Olvera streets had fallen on hard times. The *Los Angeles Herald*, reporting on vice in 1906, asserted that "the houses on Olivera [sic] street, including the infamous 'Adobe,' were allowed to … flaunt their vice." The *Herald* noted that only a year earlier Mrs. Clara Portun, who lived in the Ávila adobe, had been arrested on a charge of enticing two "unprotected young women, barely 16 years old" to the location where, presumably, they "rented rooms." Police Captain Walter Auble personally investigated the charge and announced to the *Herald* that "harboring young girls and profiting by their youthfulness and inexperience will not be tolerated in Los An-

The Ávila Adobe around 1920. When it was built in 1818, it was an L-shaped home with 18 rooms. An earthquake around 1860 damaged the east-west wing which was demolished, leaving this north-south wing of eight rooms.

geles….[and that] the police have captured a woman [Portun] who has been responsible for luring more young girls to destruction than any other woman in Los Angeles." The newspaper further proclaimed that "the infamous cribs on Olivera [sic] street are closed. When Alameda street, a stench to the nostrils of tourists, was closed to rife traffic, Olivera [sic] street … had been allowed to run [its business]. Ugly hags ogled passersby from their windows, or even went into the street to cajole men into their dens." Nevertheless, it was not until October 1915 that the city's Redlight Abatement law evicted objectionable tenants from "objectionable places" on Olvera Street.

Christine Sterling (1881-1963) in 1929. Passionate about Los Angeles' past, she was called the "Mother of Olvera Street" in honor of her efforts in preserving the Ávila Adobe and Olvera Street.

City officials urged that the Ávila adobe be razed but the Rimpau heirs refused to comply, though they did change management and give more care screening potential tenants. The structure once again was operated as a legitimate boarding house and was occupied by numerous Mexican families. The old adobe was deteriorating, however, and in 1911 Manuel Carrizosa, a building inspector for the City Housing Commission, reported that there were unsanitary conditions in the building caused primarily by the lack of proper plumbing and ventilation. It was thought that the installation of improvements "would alter the fundamental strength so that the entire building might crumble down" but the Rimpau family was able to make sufficient repairs to keep the structure from falling down, or being torn down.

Even so, the once splendid home had become a "miserable, forgotten place with roof sagging, walls disintegrating for lack of protection," its garden used as a public dump. It faced Olvera Street, "a mean and filthy alley," and "popular hangout for transients and the general criminal element." In fact, it barely deserved to be called a "street" as it was only one block long, was unpaved and, other than the old adobe, had no buildings fronting it. All other structures were the back ends of buildings that fronted on North Main or Los Angeles streets, "and refuse incidental to the operations carried on in them frequently littered Olvera street." The city once again pushed forward with plans to demolish the Ávila home (to make room for a gas station) and, in 1925, the Department of Health posted a condemnation sign on the front door declaring that the structure was "unfit for human habitation by reason of defective construction and unsanitary condition."

It was at this bleak time that help arrived in the person of Christine Sterling. A third-generation Californian, Sterling passionately embraced the romantic ideals of Spanish- and Mexican-era California but had been bitterly disappointed to discover that so little from Los Angeles' early days remained. One day,

in November 1928, Sterling was exploring the old Plaza when she wandered onto Olvera Street which, she later recalled, was nothing more than a "grimy, unpaved alleyway with sewage flowing down the center of the thoroughfare." Nevertheless, when she saw the dilapidated adobe she knew that she had uncovered a "diamond in the rough" which she would restore and turn into "a city shrine, a museum, a rehabilitated living picture of the life and customs of our most stirring times." Asserting that "it is a great pity that visitors to the most interesting historic building in the city should find it located among such ugly and dirty surroundings" she expanded her vision to include Olvera Street and declared to the *Los Angeles Times* (December 18, 1928) that "if the city will permit me, I intend to take over the entire little street on which the historic adobe stands and convert it into a beautiful, sanitary Mexican market."

Sterling secured a lease on the adobe from the Rimpau family and began her restoration campaign by contacting city officials, wealthy friends, local newspapers (especially the *Los Angeles Times*), and by tracking down anyone who might be able to donate time, material and, especially, money. She devoted considerable time and effort persuading local citizens to help restore the Ávila adobe and Olvera Street, promising that "the city of Los Angeles [would be] offered a clean, picturesque, Latin-American street in exchange for a filthy, disease-breeding alley." By early 1929 over $25,000 had been raised for restoration work and, in November, with the backing of the City Council, the street was closed to vehicular traffic and work was started on grading and paving the street with tiles and bricks harvested from demolished Victorian buildings. Repairs quickly progressed on the Ávila home and it was soon restored and furnished with antiques (and antique reproductions) so that it reflected society in 1840s Los Angeles. On Easter Sunday, April 19, 1930, the "*Mercado*" on Olvera Street opened to great fanfare, and the Ávila Adobe opened its doors to hundreds of visitors who toured the home. Popularity of the attraction was immediate and Christine Sterling, who resided in the adobe she had rescued, offered tours to special groups until her death in 1963. The State of California acquired the adobe from the Rimpau descendants in 1953 and, registered as California Historical Landmark 145, it became the heart of the forty-four acre El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park. Once again, Doña Encarnación's home had become a gracious and welcoming destination for visitors.

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The Lost Boy Scout Camp

By Art Cobery

Boy Scouts now in their fifties, sixties, and seventies still cherish memories of outings at old Camp Bill Lane in Big Tujunga Canyon above Sunland.

The entrance was located on the west side of Big Tujunga Canyon Road, where Mount Gleason Avenue meets with that thoroughfare. A short drive through an olive grove brought you into an ancient riverbed where a number of primitive campsites nestled in woodsy haunts. Each site could accommodate a Scout patrol of ten or twelve boys along with their food, pup tents, and sleeping bags. Cooking took place on large, rusty sheepherder stoves stoked with a plentiful supply of nearby wood. Close by was a small river that flowed down a boulder-strewn wash. Scrub oaks, sycamores, and willows afforded protection from the mid-day sun. The bay trees and other fragrant plant-life emitted those special wilderness aromas.

When I first camped there as a Tenderfoot Scout in the summer of 1942, part of the afternoon program consisted of a refreshing swim in the large concrete pool, which was fed by an offshoot of the main stream. A filtering system replaced this natural flow around 1949. Other civilized amenities included a commodious lodge with two fireplaces and kitchen facilities. A small store provided the boys with fresh milk, soda pop, and candy bars at scheduled hours. A nature museum was erected to exhibit Harvey Cheesman's collection of canyon artifacts, stuffed animals, and mounted birds. It was formally dedicated in honor of this amateur naturalist and Scout Executive when he retired in 1944. Everyone looked forward to the burro rides which traversed the mountain trails beyond the river.

The fabled "Medicine Flats" was situated under the eucalyptus trees across the river. It was here that men and boys, chosen on the basis of service to troop and community, were inducted into the Order of the Arrow, Scouting's "Brotherhood of Cheerful Service." New members were initiated with secret rituals. On occasion, the famed Iron Eyes Cody and his son participated in these events, teaching about the ceremonies and traditions of the American Indian.

Bill Lane, after whom the camp is named, was a well-to-do oil investor who lived in a spacious estate off Hill Drive in Eagle Rock. He also invested in several acres of olive trees near where the camp would one day be located. Evidently, a small number of Scouts had camped in this unimproved area since the late '30s.

The camp itself was not established until 1940, after Scout Executive Harvey Cheesman persuaded Bill Lane, his friend and fellow-Scouting enthusiast, to donate acreage for this worthy goal. Lane purchased part of the old Johnson Ranch in 1940, and approximately 83 acres were eventually deeded to the Verdugo Hills Council, headquartered in Glendale. The council leased an additional 152 acres from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

The camp's formal dedication was held in 1941. Over 800 Scouts attended, as well as a number of Scouting and Los Angeles County officials.

John Glass, president of the Verdugo Hills Council in the 1960s, said, "Camp Bill Lane was the largest camp in the nation owned by the Boy Scouts of America so close to an urban area." The camp was a year-round facility, used by thousands of Southland youngsters for almost three decades.

Unfortunately, this popular Scouting refuge was built on the flood plain, making it vulnerable to seasonal run-offs. Even average rainfall years did not exempt the camp from minor washouts, and erosion was always a problem.

In 1968, there seemed to be genuine reason

for optimism. The City of Los Angeles built a controversial road through the camp's eastern edge, connecting Big Tujunga Canyon Road more directly with Foothill Boulevard and the future 210 freeway. While the work was in progress, Scout leaders persuaded the city to use the surplus soil from their excavations to raise and extend the camping area. The city also reinforced the banks of the adjacent river channel with huge rocks and boulders. This "rip-rap" was designed to ward off serious deluges of what some referred to as "a hundred-year flood."

But no one envisioned the 1969 winter storms that would ravage the Big Tujunga channel, transforming it forever.

The first of two massive storms hit near the end of January. The Tujunga *Record Ledger* claimed that the flooding surpassed even the record year of 1938. In some places the wall of brown water was a thousand feet wide.

The rains continued, and on the night of February 25, 1969, eleven feet of water cascaded over the Tujunga Dam spillway, giving birth to a bank-to-bank flood, wiping out the camp, the Riverwood bridge, and the formidable Foothill bridge that connected Tujunga and Sunland with the eastern end of the San Fernando Valley. Water and sewer lines were disrupted, cars were washed away, and at least seven Sunland homes were destroyed.

On February 27 the *Record Ledger*'s headline exclaimed: "Worst Storm in History Hits Valley." The paper's weatherman, Neil David, declared that the recent downpours could only be compared with the record year of 1884. It didn't take quite a hundred years after all.

Bridges and homes were soon rebuilt, but there was nothing to rebuild where Camp Bill Lane once stood. Buildings, trees, plants, and topsoil were all gone, scoured clan by the relentless purge. Compounding the tragedy, those who lost their homes downstream attempted to sue the Boy Scouts and the City of Los Angeles, claiming that the river channel was diverted during the road construction in 1969. A city spokesman declared this to be

The entrance gate at Camp Bill Lane in the 1940s. (Courtesy Sheldon Baker and Bob Nellis)

One old entrance gate still stood in 1996. It was later blown down in a windstorm.
(Courtesy the author)

"absolutely false," and the case never came to court.

After months of fretful debate, the Department of Water and Power agreed to purchase the 83 acres of desolation that had once been a verdant retreat for thousands of boys.

This loss set off the search for another suitable site to serve as a close-in camp for Scouts. Fund raising was launched in the spring of 1969 with a two-day hike from old Camp Bill Lane to Hanson Dam. In June, 300 people attended a fund raiser at the Disney Studios where the Disney film "Follow Me Boys" was shown, which depicted the trials and fun of being a Boy Scout. Jack Pike, co-chairman of the event, told the audience that Camp Bill Lane was now "a bed of rocks." Now the council hoped to raise half a million dollars to build a new close-in camp that would offer "escape from the pressure and confinement of big city living."

Finally, a choice piece of property, Camp Verdugo Oaks, was located on Templin Road, off Interstate 5, about 40 miles from the city. In 1981, the council was able to procure a Forest Service lease, along with the buildings and improvements formerly owned by the Camp Fire Girls. This new Scout camp consists of five acres of gentle hillside shaded by majestic oak trees. Compared to the old camp, it is a modern facility boasting permanent tents and bunk houses. Substantial space is also reserved for those who prefer more rustic camping. Portable propane stoves, kitchen utensils, tents and recreational equipment may be rented from the camp ranger. Harvey Cheesman's old collection of animals and artifacts is still safely housed in the Nature Lodge. The old museum at Camp Bill Lane had been constructed on high ground, making it possible to rescue these treasures from the floods of '69.

Corral Chips

The Los Angeles Corral – at least those of you with poetic or limerickic skills – has received the 2008 Fred Olds Western Poetry Award from the Westerners International for our collection of *Cowboy Poetry and Limericks II*, as originally presented at our 2008 Fandango. Former Sheriff **Gary Turner** was responsible for assembling the keepsake publication. At our January meeting he was recognized as our newest Honorary Member.

Longtime members **Elmer Taylor** and **Bob Kern** have been transferred to Ranger Active status.

The ECV is at it again. **Abe Hoffman** sends along this snapshot, and a note from a certain nameless Clamper:

"**Abe Hoffman**, XNGH and **Glenn Thornhill**, VSNGH, both from Platrix Chapter No. 2, at the plaque dedication for the Southern Alliance four-chapter ECV Clamp trek at Cal-Nev-Ari, Nevada. Other Corral members in attendance were **Sid Blumner**, XSNGH from Billy Holcomb Chapter No. 1069, and **Mark Hall-Patton**, XNGH from Queho Posse Chapter No. 1919."

Ken Pauley's new book on *The 1910 Los Angeles International Air Meet* has been published by Arcadia Publishing just in time for the year-long centennial celebration at the Dominguez Adobe.

Michelle Zack's new book, *Southern California Story: Seeking the Better Life in Sierra Madre*, was released in December with a book signing at Vroman's in Pasadena.

As our November meeting fell on Veterans Day, Sheriff **Froy Tiscareño** invited all the veterans in the room to introduce themselves. Quite a few members shared a little of their story, including eight veterans of World War II.

For the past 30-odd years, famed Western artist and Honorary Member **Bill Bender** has been donating an original painting as a gift for our outgoing Sheriff, following the in the footsteps of **Clarence Ellsworth** and **Don Louis Perceval**. In recent years, **John Robinson** has organized an annual trip to Victorville to pick up the painting. This past December, **Willis Osborne** and **Bob Kern** accompanied him. They are shown, left and right, posing with Bender. They found him in fine health and spirits. This year's painting was presented to 2009 Sheriff **Froy Tiscareño** at the close of our December meeting.

Rendezvous 2009

Rendezvous 2009 returned to Ramon and Mary Ann Orteo's stately Victorian home in Monrovia for an afternoon of books, food, and fun. Past Sheriff Dee Dee Ruhlow was our honored guest, and Eric Nelson and Jerry Selmer rode herd on the auction.

YUKON DOG TEAM TALE

There are tall tales told 'round campfires bold
Of foolish men and their quest.
Of fortunes now lost at the ultimate cost
On this one tale I'll attest.
Not of fortune or fame, I forgot the man's name
For years he's been stone cold,
Having died all alone, no one heard his last moan,
His epitaph reads: "No Gold."
He was found on his sled, six weeks he'd been dead,
Three huskies were also found.
Frozen in time, no clock hour did chime
Just silence and stillness, no sound.
But I know it is true, for I found him froze blue,
rock hard with eyes opened wide.
And his dead ghostly stare and his grave haunting air
Still shivers my bones deep inside.
I could feel the man's fear through that dead frozen leer
It's etched on my soul for all time.
And it haunts me each day to have found him that way
His hand still froze to the line.
I can only imagine what actually happened
So many years ago.
But if I had to guess and finally put it to rest
This is the tale that I know.

The Yukon wind slashed harsh deep within
The fur covered parka that day.
The shrill of the North let its fury come forth
Death waited His time to prey.
The dogs, they knew, as they mushed their way through
Drifts of a seven day storm.
That to stop was to die, only God heard their cry
Keep running, keep howling, keep warm.
The man on the sled was already half dead
And the cold played games with his mind.
This was not California, where winters were warmer,
This was Hell of a frozen kind.
Gold dreams lured him forth, to these lands of the North
Where fame and fortune were found.
But all was now lost, his life was the cost.
There was no gold in his ground.
Stiff, cold and blue, he could barely see through
The ice that covered his face,

The dogs led the way on this cursed-to-hell sleigh,
No winners allowed in "Death's Race."
And then came the vision, of life not worth liven'
Death was making His pitch.
Serene, warm and secure, acquiescing the lure,
Relaxed and without a hitch.
His eyes opened wide as he gave up inside
And exhaled his last earthly breath.
Crossing the valley as the Reaper did tally
His quota complete, then death.

The lead dog could sense, as the line grew less tense
Slower his footfalls fell.
As the main line broke free each dog turned to see
And then came their mournful yell.
It started from one as they halted their run
A low, long, deathly cry.
Then all joined the chorus, which echoed the forest,
Harmonies macabre filled the sky.
The huskies howled long through the night with their song
Then quickly did instinct set in.
Death would now stay unless each found a way
With dawn, escape would begin.
The cold was not feared for the dogs had been reared
In the freezing Yukon North.
But pangs shot through and each animal knew
That hunger would not be put off.
With the coming of day a more primitive way
Encompassed all of the hounds.
And as each snarled and fought, fear infected the lot
Their cries were primordial sounds.
The lead dog chewed through the attached line he knew
Would set him totally free.
But some did not try and curled up to die,
They, like their master would be.
Two half malamutes lashed out at the loops
Of leather tangled and tight.
And with slashing white teeth ripping free from their sheath
Joined the lead dog ready for flight.
For deep down inside came an instinctive cry
When life it is threatened so.
Sparking a will to survive which did keep them alive
Overcoming their reins, cold and snow.

Four finally chewed loose, there'd be no abuse
From the driver now frozen ash blue.
But they remained 'round the sled howling in dread,
When the lead dog stopped, and each knew.
That to stay was to die, move out was his cry,
And the four moved quickly away
From the rank scene of death. They still had their breath,
Each would live a new day.
Breaking into a run, a new life begun,
Faster and faster they tread.
Death scared them all, tho' none harkened His call,
To life and to freedom they fled.

Tho' the winter was long, to survive they grew strong
And formed a formidable pack.
In their search for food, together they stood
And soon learned survival's knack.
They fought for their place in the great Yukon space
And bred with a wolf or two.
And traversed the new land with their large family band,
Downing deer, elk, and caribou.
It was sometimes said from a man on his sled
That high on a distant rise
He was watched from afar by a curious cur
Silhouetted against the night skies.
A great strong beast with a silver-white crest
And piercing blue-green eyes,
Unafraid, he'd watch long, till the sled dogs were gone
Then howl deep, his mournful cries.
A bitch not bound, oft leapt straight for the sound
That beckoned each dog away.
The haunting low call would entice each and all
They're out there still, today.
Generations have gone each moving along
The snow capped mountains of time.
Alive, living true, nature's way, making new
Life circles, endless, sublime.

– Gary Turner

Monthly Roundup . . .

November 2009

The Mountains Meadows Massacre – that "awful … depressing event" – continues to be a source of pain and controversy, says Robert Briggs, whose great-great-grandfather was one of the Mormon settlers involved in the killing of some 120 Arkansas emigrants in southern Utah in 1857.

Briggs briefly outlined the events leading up to the attack, emphasizing the fear of approaching Federal troops, and previous attacks on the Mormons before their move to Utah. The Mormon settlers "came to view the Arkansas company as surrogates for the army," he said, and once the attacks began, they felt they could not let any witnesses escape. Only 17 very young children were spared.

Briggs then discussed the various ways the Mormon Church, historians, and descendants of both the victims and the Mormon militiamen have described and memorialized the tragedy over the years. A number of monuments have been erected at Mountain Meadows, and more are planned for the future. But as late as 1990, when Mormon President Gordon Hinckley spoke at the dedication of a new memorial, he seemed unwilling to offer any apologies or regrets, saying instead, "Let the book of the past be closed."

But it has not. The massacre remains a contentious issue, and has left descendants on both sides with "this sense of incompleteness … [and] pain that just won't go away," Briggs said. He has hopes, though, that "this challenge of reconciliation" can someday be met.

December 2009

With pardonable pride, former Sheriff Gary Turner shared the story of his great-grandfather, Thomas Jefferson Turner (1861-1937), and his adventures in the West as a lawman and cattleman.

Turner began working trail drives north from Texas as a teenager. As a rancher in Arizona, he fought a deadly gun battle against a group of cattle rustlers.

In 1890, Turner was trail boss for the last big cattle drive from Arizona to California. Local cattlemen were protesting the Southern Pacific's rate increases, and decided they would just go back to trailing cattle across the desert. The Vail Company led the way, moving more than 900 head from the Empire Ranch near Tucson to the Warner Ranch in San Diego County, with Tom Turner in the lead. The SP capitulated, and lowered their rates.

From 1900-04, Turner served as Sheriff of Santa Cruz County, Arizona, and is credited with cleaning up the tough border town of Nogales. Unlike some famous Western lawmen, his great-grandson said, Turner was known for his "down-to-earth honesty and basic integrity."

Turner's later years were spent in California, including a few years in the Eastern Mojave.

January 2010

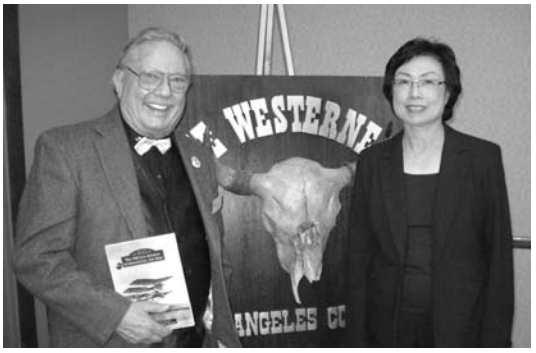
One hundred years to the day since pioneer pilots flew at Dominguez Hill, former Sheriff Ken Pauley described the First International Air Meet of 1910. Coming barely six years after the Wright Brothers first flight, the meet was a historic event, and laid the groundwork for Southern California's vital role in the American aviation industry.

The meet was the brainchild of a group of early fliers, including Glenn Curtis, and Los Angeles booster quickly seized on the idea. It was the first of three air meets held on the Dominguez Rancho, and featured airplanes, balloons, and powered dirigibles. There were more than 40 entrants, though many of them never got off the ground.

A grandstand seating 26,000 people was built, along with a carnival area, with side shows and concessions that gave the meet a "circus atmosphere," Pauley said.

There were ten events, including timed laps, an endurance flight, and accuracy tests. Cash prizes were offered, and several records were set, including French flier Louis Paulham's climb to a new altitude record of 4,165 feet. There were a few mishaps, but not serious injuries, Pauley added.

The meet closed with a parade of vehicles "From Ox Cart to Aeroplane." Pauley's presentation closed with a book signing for his new Arcadia book *The Los Angeles International Air Meet.* A year-long celebration of the centennial is being held at the Dominguez Rancho, where several other Corral members will be guest speakers.



Ken and Carol Pauley

FROM OUR FILES

#51 December 1959

"For the first time in many years Los Angeles Corral of Westerners opened its meeting to the ladies. Previous to this momentous occasion, the affair of November 1949 was the last recorded instance when the frail sex invaded the corral gates to observe the peculiar carryings-on of this organization." The meeting, held October 14 at the Southwest Museum's Casa Adobe, also featured a female speaker, Ruth Magood of the Los Angeles County Museum, who spoke on photographer Adam Clark Vroman.

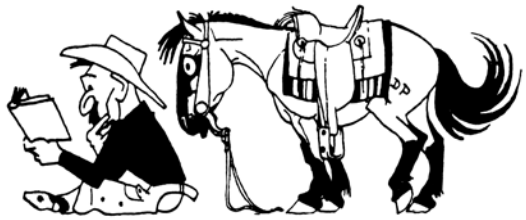
Don Ashbaugh and Everett G. Hager were among 26 new corresponding members listed.

#157 December 1984

"A capacity crowd at the November meeting heard Active Member Ray Wood address the Corral on 'Clarence King and the First Ascent of Mt. Whitney,' highest point in the 48 contiguous states. Wood pointed out that the argument over first credit for climbing Mt. Whitney persists to this day, and he offered his own conclusions concerning the controversy…. Wood believes the 'three indomitable fishermen' from Lone Pine were the first to ascend the real Mt. Whitney."

At the December meeting, Elmer Taylor was introduced as a new Associate Member.

Down the Western Book Trail . . .



Devil's Gate: Brigham Young and the Great Mormon Handcart Tragedy, by David Roberts. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. 402 pp, photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth $26. Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

This is the little known story of the biggest tragedy to occur during the migration of the American West. In 1856, five handcart brigades made the trek from Iowa City, Iowa, to the new Zion in the wilderness near the Great Salt Lake. Most of them were European converts, many of them couldn't speak English. Somewhere between 200 to 240 of these emigrants, in the last two brigades alone, would perish along the trail, or shortly after their journey ended. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints would cover up the true story of the hardships, deaths, and inept planning that caused this fiasco for over twenty years. It wasn't until after the death of Brigham Young that conflicting versions of this debacle would surface.

For most of the emigrants their journey started at the end of 1855 in Europe. The new converts were English, Scots, Welsh, and Scandinavian. After a long sea voyage, the travelers made their way by train, stagecoach, wagon, or steamboat to Iowa City. This is where their ordeal truly started.

The first problem the emigrants would encounter was the lack of handcarts. Although the church had contracted for handcarts to be built and waiting for the groups, this didn't happen. Each brigade would spend precious time building handcarts before they could take to the trail. Seasoned lumber wasn't available and green lumber had to be substituted for construction of the carts. This would cause countless problems due to splitting, warping, and shrinkage for the next 1,300 miles.

The biggest problem for all five of the handcart brigades wasn't grappling with the "two-wheeled man-tormentors" though, it was supplies. Each person was only allowed 17 pounds of baggage, including cooking utensils, to be carried on the carts. A few supply wagons, carrying tents and food, accompanied each brigade. In good times, each adult was allotted one-half to one pound of flour per day. Children received half of that amount. When times were lean, these rations were severely reduced. All were weakened by the lack of food. At times, 100-pound sacks of flour had to be transported on the carts along with the baggage. Also, the weak and infirm, children, and the elderly, had to be carried on the handcarts when they couldn't walk any further.

These stories are told through the diaries, journals, and recollections of these pilgrims. They vividly relate tales of sleeping with the dead and dying, eating leather and bark, and watching loved ones lose limbs to frostbite. The horrors they lived through are best told in their own words.

The author gives much credit to the Mormon Church for allowing him full access to their archives. In particular, he lauds Ardis Parshall as the best researcher he has ever worked with. As a devout Mormon, Parshall quickly realized that her views and the author's were in conflict, yet she still went out of her way to help guide him through the LDS archives. It shows in this finely researched and fairly told history.

– Tim Heflin

California Odyssey. An Overland Journey on the Southern Trails, 1849, by William R. Goulding, edited by Patricia A. Etter. Norman: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2009. American Trails Series XXI. 360 pp. Illustrations, Maps, Appendices, Bibliography, Index. Cloth, $45. Order from Arthur H. Clark Company, 2800 Venture Drive, Norman, Oklahoma 73069; *www.ahclark.com*.

As Patricia Etter points out in *To California on the Southern Route* (1998), the vast number of gold seekers who came to California via the various southern routes (some 20,000 in 1849) has been largely ignored by Gold Rush scholars. William Goulding (1806-1865) has left one of the most detailed accounts of their travels, sometimes following the best-known routes, and other times taking some interesting variations. He describes both the country and the people he encountered along the way. This includes the various Indian tribes, which he writes up in detail (though not always in favorable terms).

Goulding started for California from New York on February 18, 1849 as part of the Knickerbocker Exploring Company (which later disintegrated into various smaller groups). He and his companions left Fort Smith, Arkansas on March 26, traveling by wagon to Santa Fe, where he switched to pack mules. He crossed the Colorado River near Yuma on July 30, and reached Isaac Williams' Rancho Santa Ana del Chino on August 12, where he was the first to sign the famed emigrant Register. Williams' ranch was rather the Sutter's Fort of the Southern Emigrant Trail.

Curiously, there is no indication Goulding ever visited the Mother Lode, and Etter suggests he may have set sail directly from San Francisco, which he reached on September 18, 1849. He was back in New York in time to be enumerated in the 1850 census. He re-wrote his journal apparently not too long after, converting it into a narrative, instead of a day-to-day diary. Along the way, he added many excerpts from Emory's *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance* (1848) without actually identifying them as such. Etter – who is familiar with most of the published and unpublished journals of the time from the Southern routes – has deleted them, always noting their removal in her notes.

Etter has done yeoman work to trace Goulding's descendants all the way to Australia, and provides a detailed biography of him as part of her introduction. She has also added footnotes on a wide variety of people, places, and things mentioned in his account, and compares it with other related journals. Tom Jonas' maps cover large swaths of territory, but still show enough detail to be interesting. Etter does not try to identify Goulding's exact route, step-for-step (as some of the "rut hounds" like to do), nor even every campsite, but mostly keeps the reader on track all the way.

There do seem to be some discrepancies, however. Goulding (p 256) speaks of stopping at the "Tomascoulla" [Temescal] ranch, after passing Lake Elsinore, which Etter takes to be "Bernardo Yorba's Rancho La Sierra." But if we take Goulding at his word, it was more likely Leandro Serrano who served as his host (and in any case, Yorba's home was off to the northwest, in the Santa Ana Canyon).

It is also odd to find a historic photo of the Luiseño village at Pechanga (p 256), which did not come into existence until after the Temecula eviction of 1875. Goulding himself notes that he passed "no Indian lodges" along that portion of the trail.

Published trail diaries are always a boon to researchers, since the originals are now scattered across the country, and present other challenges to the reader. (Etter notes that "Goulding's handwriting is flamboyant, and he did not concern himself with commas, periods, or paragraphs.") It is also valuable to have an editor such as Etter, who is thoroughly familiar with so much of her subject, both in the archives and in the field.

– Phil Brigandi

Conquistadors, by Michael Wood. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. 288 pp. Maps, Illustrations, Further Reading, Index. Paper, $22.95. University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94704 (510) 642-4247. *www.ucpress.edu*

As the publicity sheet notes, this book is the "companion volume" to the four-part PBS series *Conquistadors*, which aired here again in the summer of 2009. Michael Wood is a journalist who makes documentaries, and anyone who has seen *Conquistadors*, *Legacy*, *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great*, or his other films will have no difficulty imagining him as a sort of British Huell Houser. Wood believes the way to make history come alive

is to juxtapose past and present. He therefore involves himself in the history he narrates, following the routes of conquistadors, Greeks, Trojans, or whomever it was who built the ruins he visits or tramped through the same swamp or jungle he penetrates. On occasion, however, he take the easy way out, admitting on page 184 of this book that having gone by horseback and foot to Espiritu Pampa, "we were lifted out by helicopter" when the weather turned bad. Too bad the convenient technology wasn't available to the Spaniards—or, for that matter, the Inca.

Personally, I find the inclusion of the narrator as his own character in a documentary film or book as rather intrusive, and mixing past and present can be disconcerting. In the Cortes episode Wood is on a bus along with Indian passengers, and he says he is taking the same route from Villa Rica to Mexico City as the conquistadors did to Tenochtitlan. I can't help but wonder: if I show this video to my history class, will some students ask why the conquistadors marched instead of taking the bus? Fortunately, putting past and present together in the book isn't as jarring as the video. For the most part Wood successfully weaves his narrative and his journey together, though at times the reader may have to double-check where Wood is heading since he shifts from past tense to present tense without advance notice.

Wood presents four stories here: Cortes and Montezuma, Pizarro and Atahualpa, Francisco de Orellana's involuntary voyage down the Amazon River, and Alvaro Nunez Cabeza de Vaca's odyssey from Galveston Island through the Southwest to Mexico City. Two stories of brutal conquest, two stories of heroic adventure and survival. The contrast is dramatic, and the reader is as impressed with Orellana's and Cabeza de Vaca's epic efforts as the greed and cruelty of Cortes and the Pizarro brothers may disgust him. Wood's use of history is selective, since Hernando de Soto and Francisco Vasquez de Coronado would have made an interesting contrast. Maybe the budget limited the series to four rather than five episodes.

Wood makes a point of citing from primary sources both in text and sidebars, quoting from diaries and letters as well as contemporary writers such as Bernal Diaz del Castillo and Cieza de Leon. In the video version we even see Wood consulting manuscripts and rare books in scenes resonant of the library in the movie *Citizen Kane*. This creates an aura of authority about what Wood writes and from whom he quotes. So it's a bit disconcerting that in using Father Gaspar de Carvajal's diary Wood strongly suggests the priest remained with Orellana all the way down the Amazon and over to the island of Margarita. The entry on Carvajal in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, however, states that Orellana left Carvajal at the Napo River and Gonzalo Pizarro rescued him. Given that Wood in the video version states that Carvajal supported Pizarro in seeing Orellana as a deserter, a student of history can justifiably be baffled at these contradictory versions. There are some other glosses, especially on Cortes's later career, that sound inaccurate at worst and vague at best.

Wood provides an excellent essay on primary and secondary sources, and the book offers a hundred color illustrations, including historical paintings and drawings and modern views. In fact, the book contains many more historical illustrations than did the video version! Sharp-eyed readers will spot an unintentionally hilarious juxtaposition of past and present in the color photograph of Ollantaytambo (pp 170-171): nestled against an ancient building in the lower right corner are two very modern portable outhouses.

– Abraham Hoffman