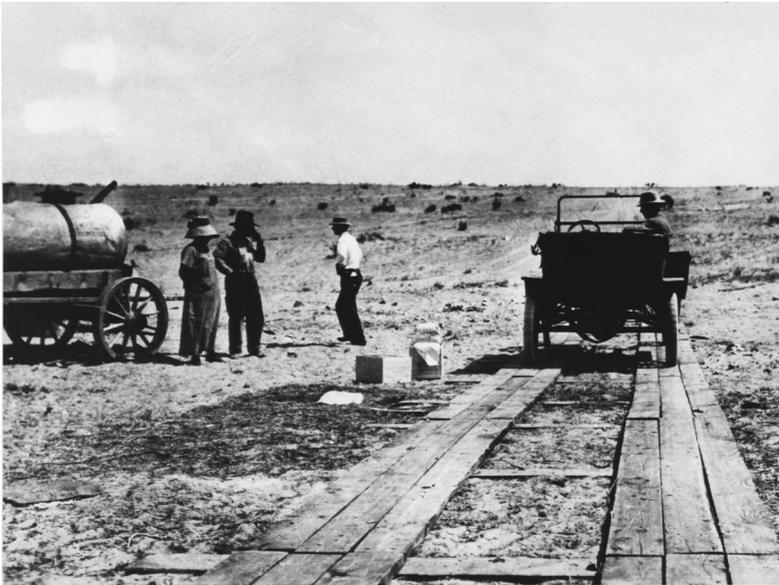




Crossing California's Little Sahara Imperial County's Plank Road

by John W. Robinson



*First of the Imperial Valley's plank roads, circa 1913, shortly after completion.
(California Department of Public Works Collection)*

Forming an imposing rampart along the eastern edge of Southern California's Imperial Valley are the Algodones Sand Dunes, a fifty-mile-long barrier of shifting sands and hump-backed dunes, some of which reach heights of 300 feet. The sand of this "Little Sahara Desert" was heaved

up many centuries ago from the beaches of ancient Lake Cahuilla, predecessor of today's much smaller Salton Sea. These sands, which swirl and shift with the prevailing desert winds, long posed a formidable obstacle to early travelers.

(Continued on Page 3)

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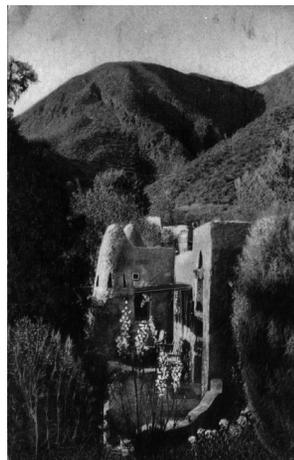
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The Branding Iron is always seeking articles of
2,500 words or less dealing with every phase
of the history of the Old West and California.

Contributions from both members and
friends are always welcome.

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Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners



Editor's Corner . . .

In this first edition of the Branding Iron for 2014, our stalwart researcher John Robinson offers up a fascinating look at the development of the old plank road that brought motorists across the sand dunes of Imperial County for many years during the beginnings of the automotive age. The ingenuity that it took to create this road has garnered much attention in the past few years as historians and others have looked toward our old highways as objects of serious and intense studies.

Next, our esteemed former Sheriff Eric Nelson revisits a topic he wrote about in the Branding Iron for Summer, 1998. Here, he takes a further look at "A Visit to the Post Office in 1848" and gives us some updated research that he has done in the intervening years about the players involved in that visit some 165 years ago.

As always, please feel free to contact me regarding ideas for articles. I'm always looking for material to put in the Branding Iron. Luckily, several of you have come forward already and I appreciate it - but there's always room for more! Please consider putting something together that you think may interest the greater Corral as a whole.

Happy Trails!

Steve Lech
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The ancient Yuma Trail, followed by Juan Bautista de Anza on his two historic expeditions from Sonora to California in 1774 and 1775-76, detoured south to get around the tallest of the dunes, but still crossed extensive areas of soft sand. Several thousand gold rushers followed the Yuma Trail, long known as the Southern Emigrant Trail, in 1849. A few, impatient to reach the mines and unwilling to take the southern detour, struggled straight over the dunes, but most made the "end run" through northern Baja California.

William Chamberlin, after fording the Colorado River in August 1849, gazed ahead at the harrowing scene:

Nothing but a high and apparently desolate waste bounded the horizon. A hazy atmosphere hung over the scene, on fire, as it were, by the intense heat of the sun, the rays of which are reflected upward by this immense mirror of sand, all combined to form a picture once grand, gloomy, and foreboding.¹

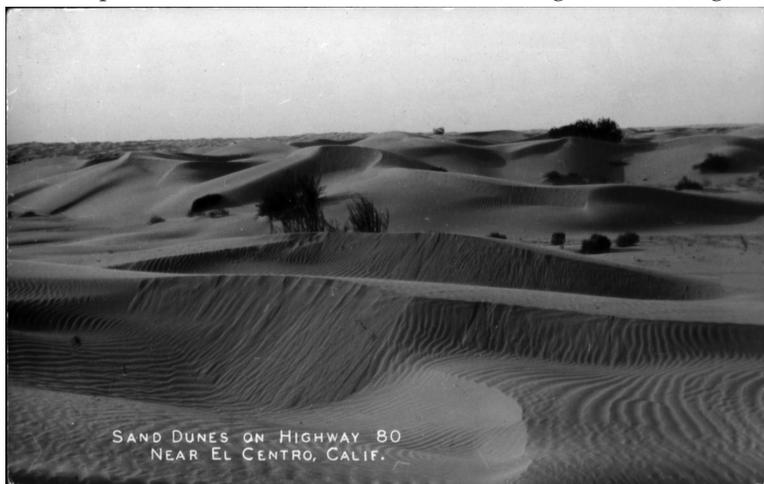
In 1857, the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line-the famed "Jackass Mail"-tried and failed to force wagons over the hellish barrier of soft sand. Passengers and mail were carried across by mule back. John Butterfield's Overland Mail Company stages, in the years 1858 to 1861, managed to cross the sand dunes, but it was not easy. A correspondent from the *San Francisco Bulletin*, riding on the first Butterfield stage, wrote:

Six horses are commonly used on the desert, the sand being so deep in some places that the passengers are compelled to walk, the horses being scarcely able to drag the empty vehicle.²

The Algodones Dunes continued to defy direct east-west travel through the end of the 19th century. Most of the wagon traffic between Yuma and San Diego either detoured fifty miles around the north end of the sand barrier, or dipped into Baja California to the south, following the route of the historic Southern Emigrant Trail. Some attempted a direct crossing and became hopelessly immobilized, wheels deep in the soft sand.

So it remained until the arrival of the Age of the Automobile. When Henry Ford came out with the Model T in 1908, the automobile became much more than a rich man's toy. Suddenly average Americans became much enamored with the motor car and clamored for the opportunity to "hit the road."

Early automobile roads were built largely by cities and counties, or by private entrepreneurs who collected a toll for their efforts. Interstate motor vehicle routes, particularly in the west, were almost nonexistent. Impetus for state and national highway improvement was provided by a number of "Good Roads" associations that sprang up, almost simultaneously, in cities throughout the nation. A southern transcontinental automobile route, to be known as the "Ocean-to-Ocean Highway," was first proposed by "Good Roads" groups in Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Arizona in 1910. A convention of the western branch of the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway Association was held in Phoenix, Arizona in December 1911. Among the 84 delegates



were enthusiastic representatives from Los Angeles, San Diego, and fast-booming Imperial Valley. Both San Diego and Los Angeles desired to be the western terminus of the southern transcontinental route. Los Angeles, with the most delegates, won the vote to be the Pacific terminus.³

Unhappy with the Phoenix convention's vote, the San Diego and Imperial Valley delegates bolted and formed the Imperial Yuma Highway Association. The group's main objective was to promote a good automobile road between San Diego and Yuma, a road that would be the western link of the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway. A first class road would be a powerful incentive for the California Highway Commission, which would have the final say in the matter, to make San Diego the western terminus.

The great barrier to the completion of a through automobile road from San Diego via El Centro to Yuma were the Algodones Sand Dunes, California's "Little Sahara," which stood directly athwart the proposed highway route.

Early motorists attempting to drive from Imperial Valley to Yuma faced a difficult round-about desert trip up Mammoth Wash to the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and across the northern end of the sand dunes before turning south to Yuma.

The trip required two or three days or even more, depending on how many times the machine got stuck and the number of times the roadway had to be "brushed." Frequently it was impossible to proceed until after breaking the desert brush along the trail and laying it in a mat over the ruts the tires were to follow. There was one section of over a mile where ridges of sand made progress of an automobile almost impossible. An enterprising teamster camped at the start of this



difficult section with a team of four mules, and was ready, for a fee, to pull unfortunate travelers across the sand ridges. It was said that he would always drag the heavy timber evener, to which his mules were hitched, back to his camp, filling in the ruts made by the last customer to make sure that the next motorist would need his services.⁴

In 1911 the first highly ballyhooed Los Angeles-to-Phoenix automobile race went via San Diego but avoided the sand dunes by detouring 46 miles north. The second annual Los Angeles-to-Phoenix auto race in 1912 followed a more northerly route, via Indio and Blythe, bypassing San Diego. Feeling snubbed, San Diego scheduled its own race to Phoenix. Both contests-from Los Angeles and San Diego-would begin the same day, October 26, 1912. For San Diego to win, a more direct route east across the sand dunes would have to be found. The *San Diego Tribune-Gazette* sponsored a "pathfinder" car in advance of the race to locate the best route across the dunes. Unfortunately, this first pathfinder broke down in the sand and failed to cross. Ed Fletcher, a San Diego realtor and developer and strong advocate of the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway, set out in an air-cooled Franklin automobile on a second pathfinder expedition. He avoided his predecessor's fate by arranging to have six horses pull his vehicle over the worst section of the dunes. Fletcher realized that San Diego had no

chance of winning the Phoenix race unless the drivers were able to negotiate the sand hills. In response to Fletcher's pleas, Imperial County residents cut and hauled brush to the "Little Sahara" to form a passable roadway.⁵

On October 26, ten drivers left Los Angeles and twenty-two left San Diego, bound for Phoenix. Most of the San Diego motorists were able to cross the sand dunes via the temporary brush-covered path. Both cities claimed victory in the well-publicized contest. A Los Angeles automobile recorded the fastest time by fourteen minutes over the first San Diego motor car, but only four of the Los Angeles vehicles reached Phoenix while twelve from San Diego completed the course.⁶

Rivalry between the two Southern California cities was so intense that some San Diego residents favored a plan advanced by C. H. Akers, editor of the *Phoenix Gazette*, that San Diego and Imperial counties secede from California and be annexed by Arizona, which was just receiving statehood in 1912. San Diego's mayor, James Wadham, favored the plan, and Ed Fletcher's pathfinder car sported a banner reading "Arizona - San Diego Bay is Yours!"⁷

The Phoenix automobile race made it crystal clear to those who favored a southern

Ocean-to-Ocean route that a permanent, readily passable roadway over the sand dunes was a vital necessity. The brush matt used in the race proved grossly inadequate and soon disintegrated in the shifting sands.

Edwin Boyd of Holtville, an Imperial County supervisor, came up with the idea of a wooden track road over the dunes. The idea was tested on a short stretch of sand and the results were favorable. The county supervisors accepted Boyd's plan, and after some discussion on just which path to follow, voted in favor of a direct route between Holtville and Yuma. Ed Fletcher, after procuring the support of the San Diego County supervisors, stated that San Diego businessmen would furnish the money if Imperial County would supply the labor.

Construction on this first plank road commenced on September 19, 1912. In just three weeks of work, the volunteer Imperial County farmers laid down a wooden track over six miles of the most imposing dunes. This first plank road consisted of twin tracks, each 24 inches wide, nailed to crossties. It resembled a railroad in appearance but was all wooden. Turnouts were constructed every mile to allow vehicles to pass. If two autos met in the middle, one had to back up



Two men stopping on the original plank road, circa 1915.
(California Department of Public Works Collection)

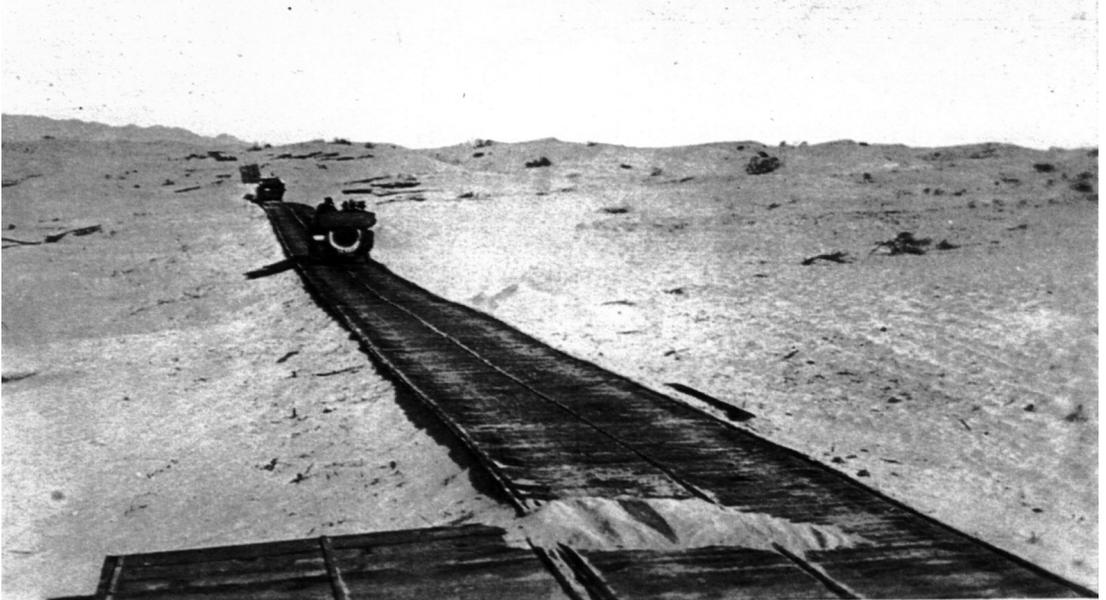
to the nearest turnout to allow the other to pass.⁸

This first plank road lasted until 1915, by which time it needed serious repairs and more turnouts to accommodate steadily increasing traffic. Whereas in 1912 some five or six cars used the road most days, by 1915 that number was approaching 25. Furthermore, the twin tracks proved inadequate for safe driving, particularly when drifting sand covered the boards. Many a vehicle left the tracks and became stuck in the sand, and had to await the next driver to help pull his vehicle back on the boards.

A second, more substantial plank road was designed by Ed Fletcher. Instead of parallel tracks, this would consist of eight-foot planks, laid crosswise and bolted to stringers. Both Edward Fletcher and Edwin Boyd campaigned tirelessly for this new plank road; both could be considered "fathers" of the unique project. Thanks largely to efforts of Boyd, the Imperial County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution asking the newly-formed California State Highway Commission to include the El Centro-Yuma road in the state highway system. Boyd went to Sacramento to lobby state legislators in behalf of the supervisors' resolution. Fletcher appeared before the State Highway

Commission, meeting in San Francisco, to urge the road be built and incorporated into the state system. Opposition to Fletcher's plan was voiced by Los Angeles, which wanted a state road from that city via Indio and Blythe to Arizona. Engineer J. B. Lippincott, representing Los Angeles, called the idea of a road over the sand dunes "(t)he most asinine thing I ever heard of."⁹ But Fletcher and Boyd would not be denied. Boyd returned from Sacramento with a pledge from the legislature's Transportation Committee that the El Centro-Yuma link would become part of the state highway network. Furthermore, the legislators indicated that \$200,000 would be set aside for the eventual construction of a concrete highway, financed by a \$15 million state highway bond issue that would be submitted to the voters at a later date.¹⁰

The immediate cost to build the new plank road would need to be borne by local interests. Fletcher and Boyd used their persuasive talents to gain the necessary funds. Mainly through Fletcher's efforts, \$17,000 was raised in San Diego. Boyd provided over \$2,000 of his own money, and secured a pledge by a hundred Imperial Valley residents to spend one day each week in assembling the plank road. Yuma businessmen kicked in \$3,000.¹¹



*Automobile on the new, second plank road, 1916
(California Department of Highways)*

Construction began on February 13, 1915. The road over the dunes was lengthened from six to eight miles, and kept volunteer work crews busy for almost six months. Lumber for the road came from Northern California sawmills, shipped south to San Pedro, and via Southern Pacific rails to Imperial Valley and Yuma. A construction camp was established near the west end of the dunes by Newt Gray of Holtville. It was first called Camp Boyd, later Gray's Well. A preliminary plank road was completed, except for a mile at the eastern end, by the end of April. Turnouts were placed every half mile for easier passing. The speed limit was pegged at ten miles per hour, although it was claimed that some daredevil drivers reached the phenomenal speed of 40 miles per hour.¹²

A caravan of some fifty cars from San Diego negotiated the almost completed plank road to Yuma to celebrate the opening of a modern highway bridge across the Colorado River. A crowd of several hundred witnessed the formal opening of the bridge on May 27, 1915. Among these celebrating were California Lieutenant Governor John Eshleman and Arizona Governor George Hut. Highlight of the event was the turning on of a high electric sign with the words "Ocean-to-Ocean Highway," and a grand parade across the bridge.¹³ San Diego at last had an unobstructed automobile road to Arizona and points east!

In May, 1915, the California legislature passed a bill providing \$100,000 for the final completion and maintenance of the road between El Centro and Yuma. It was now an official state highway. Final reconstruction of the plank road commenced in March 1916 and was completed by June, financed largely by state funds. The eight-foot planks were assembled into 20- to 32-foot sections, bound lengthwise by steel bands. In an ingenious improvement, sections of the roadway could be moved about in response to changes in the drifting dunes. A mule-drawn scraper was provided to move sections when they were undermined by shifting dunes.¹⁴

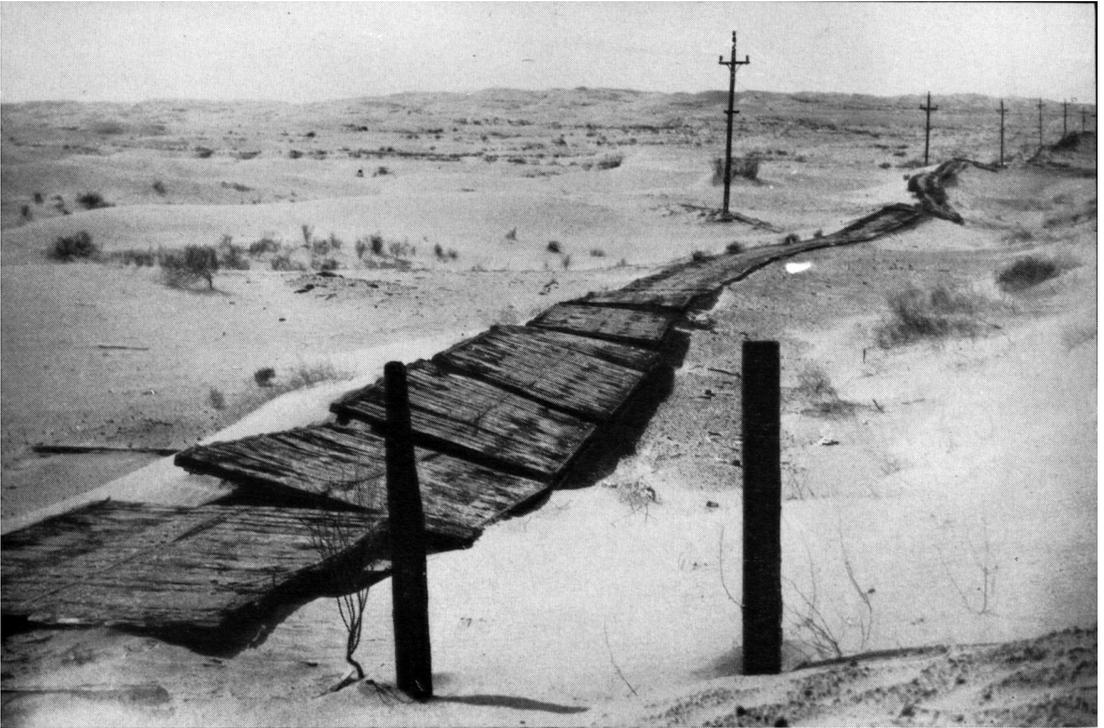
To provide services to the 30 or 40 motor vehicles that traveled the plank road per

day, Newt Gray built a café, store, gasoline station and garage at his ranch now known as Gray's Well. He also offered towing service to unfortunate drivers stuck in the dunes. When blowing sand closed sections of the road, stranded travelers could spend the night in one of Newt's shacks.¹⁵

Driving the plank road was often a dangerous and harrowing experience. Drifting sand, high winds, and auto breakdowns often caused by sand getting into the engine were major problems. "Each driver had to be constantly on the alert for sand dunes on the road, high wind pockets, oncoming cars, places where the road had been undermined by wind erosion, and the hazard of slipping off the planks into the sand, to be stuck until a fellow driver arrived."¹⁶ Occasionally, disputes arose over who had the right-of-way and which vehicle should back up to the nearest turnout. Traffic jams involving eight or ten cars stuck behind a broken-down vehicle were a common experience. These problems multiplied with the great increase in auto travel after World War I. The *Imperial Valley Post Press* (April 29, 1919) posted a warning to drivers on its front page:

Avoid the plank road. A public warning was issued yesterday by the El Centro branch of the Auto Club of Southern California that travel to Yuma via the plank road is dangerous. Several cars which recently attempted the trip were badly damaged and owners were put to heavy expense to get through. Cars are injured in the driving gears, engines are sacked and shattered, and in many cases the machines have to be pulled many miles by teams. Parties attempting travel suffer from thirst and hunger and are sometimes in danger of death as there is little chance of succor arriving unless a call for aid reaches Holtville or Yuma.

Many stories were told regarding travel on the plank road. Perhaps the strangest



*The plank road after just a few years of use due and drifting sand dunes
(California Highway and Public Works)*

yarn involved a motorist who spotted a hat laying in the sand just off the roadway after a dust storm. He picked up the hat and was amazed to find a man's head sticking out of the sand. "I'll get a shovel and dig you out," said the good Samaritan. "Better go back to town and hire a tractor," replied the buried driver, "I'm sittin' at the wheel of my Model T."¹⁷

Maintenance crews were kept busy the year around. Shortly after the State takeover, the plank road was oiled. Sand drifting over the oil made a gritty surface which provided enough friction to help vehicles stay on the roadway.

San Diego was disappointed when the State Highway Commission voted in favor of Los Angeles as the western terminus of the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway in 1915. The California portion of the transcontinental automobile route would enter the state at Yuma, follow the plank road and concrete highway to El Centro, then turn northwest through the Coachella Valley and San Geronio Pass to Los Angeles.

The early 1920s witnessed a phenomenal increase in automobile traffic. The motor car was fast approaching the passenger train as the major mode of long-distance travel. By 1925, an average of 300 vehicles per day were traveling over the plank road, many more than the narrow wooden roadway could successfully handle. Traffic tie-ups were frequent, more accidents occurred, and the plank road itself was deteriorating because of heavy use, constant shifting of the dunes, and exposure to weather extremes.

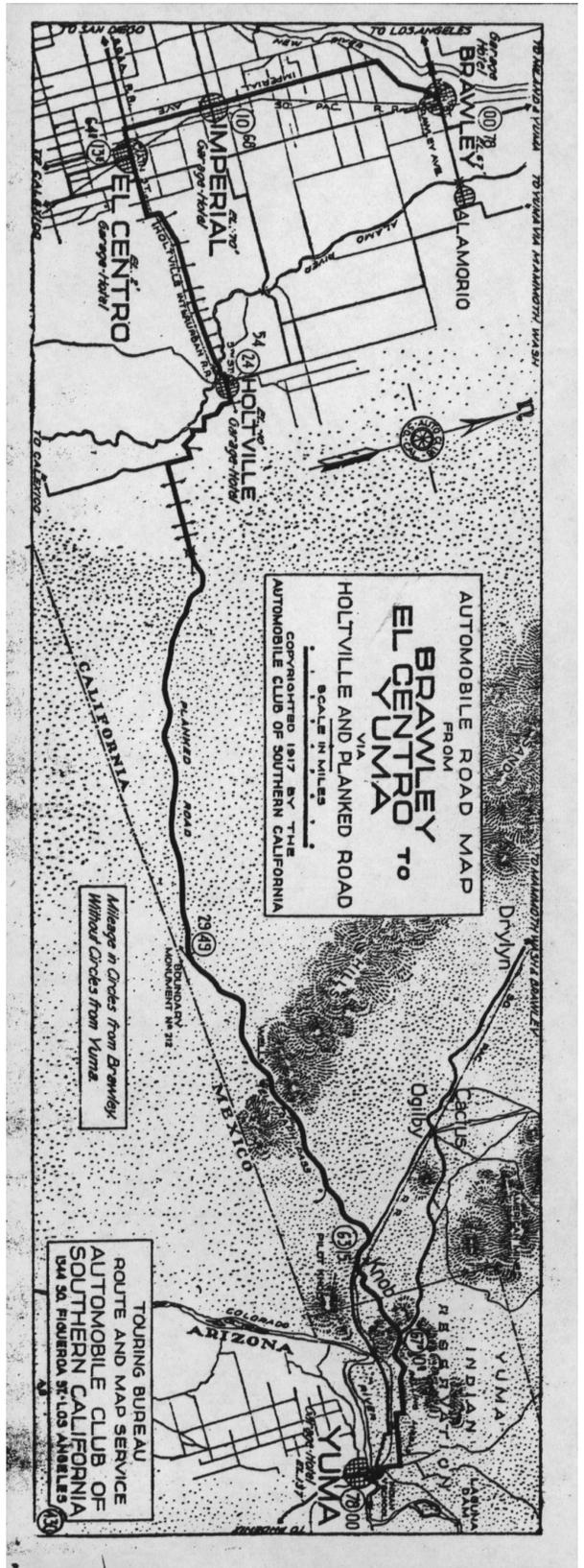
Edward Q. Sullivan, one of California Division of Highways' top engineers, was sent south to study the imperiled road. Upon careful examination of the pattern of sand movement, Sullivan discovered that most of the movement occurred in the lower dunes, while the higher ones were relatively stable. He devised a plan to flatten the taller dunes and use them as piers to stabilize a 20-foot wide asphalt concrete highway, suitable for two-way traffic. The lower sand areas would be watered and packed down into a stable surface covered with a thick layer of asphalt.¹⁸

Sullivan's plan was accepted by the State Highway Commission, and construction of an entirely new, blacktop highway over the Algodones Sand Dunes commenced in December 1925. Leveling and packing the oceans of sand was a tedious job that required five months of work. As spring turned into summer, the heat became so intense that most of the construction work was done at night. With the roadbed finally stabilized, the asphalt paving went fast, and the new highway was opened for public travel on August 11, 1926. A correspondent for a national magazine marveled at this "miracle highway across America's Sahara," and called it "the most spectacular paving project" ever attempted in the nation.¹⁹

A few months later the new highway was incorporated into the transcontinental ribbon of U. S. 80. This southern cross-country corridor, soon to be paved all the way from Savannah, Georgia to San Diego, was not long in becoming a major artery of travel. Drivers speeding over the asphalt highway, closely paralleling the old plank road, could see broken segments of the old wooden track, much of it tipped sideways like rafts on a stormy sea.

World War II saw U. S. 80 become a major military conduit for men, supplies, and equipment bound for San Diego's vital naval base. San Diego's population, 203,000 in 1940, jumped to almost 300,000 by war's end. Imperial Valley, nourished by water diverted from the Colorado River, grew into one of the nation's major agricultural centers. More people brought more traffic on U. S. 80. Two lanes were not enough. The desert highway was increased to four lanes in the early 1950s.

Interstate 8, that great brute of a freeway, replaced U. S. 80 in 1974. Motorists now traverse the Algodones Sand Dunes-now generally known as the Imperial Sand Dunes-in minutes. For those with a sense of history, it is well



worth taking a short detour to view the stone monument commemorating the old plank road and a 1,500-foot section of the historic wooden causeway that has been reassembled by the Bureau of Land Management. Turn off I-8 onto Grays Well Road, 34 miles east of Holtville, and follow a short remaining stretch of old U. S. 80 to the monument and plank road segment. One can only marvel at the audacity of the early road builders.²⁰

Endnotes

1. William H. Chamberlin, "Lewisburg to Los Angeles in 1849," in George M. Ellis (ed.), *Gold Rush Trails to San Diego and Los Angeles in 1849*. San Diego Corral of Westerners, *Brand Book* #9, 1999, p. 47.
2. Walter Lang, *The First Overland Mail: Butterfield's Trail* (San Francisco, privately printed, 1945), p. 18. Lang's little book is a compilation of articles that appeared in the *San Francisco Bulletin*, 1858-1859.
3. *Touring Topics*, monthly publication of the Automobile Club of Southern California, January 1912.
4. Robert Sperry, "Early Roads Across Imperial County Sand Hills," *The Wrangler*, San Diego Corral of Westerners, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1973, p. 2.
5. Ed Fletcher *Memoirs* (1952), cited in Raymond C. Chaney, "Racetrack to Highway: San Diego's Early Automobile Days," *Journal of San Diego History*, Spring 1971, p. 33.

6. Chaney, p. 33.
7. *Ibid.*
8. James B. Bates, "The Plank Road," *Journal of San Diego History*, Spring 1970, p. 27.
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10. B. Johnny Rube, *A Wooden Road Through the Hollow of God's Hand: Taming the American Sahara* (Yuma County Historical Society, 1996), p. 18.
11. Bates, p. 28.
12. Arash Hashemi, "A Brief History of the Plank Road of Imperial County," *Branding Iron*, Los Angeles Corral of Westerners, No. 215, Spring 1999, pp. 9-10.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
14. Bates, p. 29.
15. Bob Michaelis "Splinters off the Plank Road," *The Wrangler*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1981, p. 5.
16. Bates, p. 31.
17. Rube, p. 41.
18. Chaney, pp. 36-37; *Touring Topics*, various issues, 1915-1919.
19. "Paving America's Sahara," *Literary Digest*, weekly magazine published in New York, December 18, 1926.
20. Eric J. Finley, *The Old U. S. 80 Traveler's Guide* (Phoenix: Narrow Road Communications, 1997) gives driving directions and describes the BLM Monument and restored section of the Plank Road.



Affairs of the Heart in Early Los Angeles

By Eric A. Nelson

Appearing in the Summer, 1998 edition of the Los Angeles Westerners' *Branding Iron* (Number 212), was an article I wrote entitled "A Trip to the Post Office in 1848." The primary topic of that article was a description of the travels of the very first overland delivery of mail from California. The mail, carried by Kit Carson from Los Angeles to St. Louis, was deposited at the St. Louis post office for final delivery. The mail which Carson carried in his bags included a letter datelined *Puebla de Los Angeles*, May 1, 1848.

The letter was written by an individual using the *nom de plume* "A. Valentine." The subject of the letter was a duel which had occurred between a First Lieutenant of the New York volunteers, stationed in Los Angeles during the military occupation of that city, and an American Supercargo "stopping in town a few days." Valentine stated that "the difficulty was respecting a Spanish Lady living alone in the place," and that "[H]er husband (a mexican [sic] officer) was obliged to flee to Mexico at the time of Gen. Kearny's entering the country."

The weapons of choice were rifles. Referring to the Lieutenant by his initials, "J.C.B.," Valentine related that the Lieutenant fired before the count was finished, missing the mark. The Supercargo then fired. The bullet went straight for its mark, traveled the length of the Lieutenant's rifle barrel, and caused the Lieutenant to lose a finger.

In the Postscript to my *Branding Iron* article, I wrote that although I could not identify with certainty the author of the letter, I assumed that the lieutenant described as "J.C.B." was Lieutenant John C. Bonnycastle, assigned to Company C of Stevenson's Regiment, then occupying Los Angeles. I have

not been able to identify the Supercargo nor do I have any further information regarding A. Valentine, although I am quite certain that he was a member of Company C. Upon further research, though, I was able to confirm with certainty that "J.C.B." was John C. Bonnycastle of Company C. I have also been able to identify both the "Spanish Lady" and the fleeing Mexican officer.

The fleeing Mexican officer was none other than Jose Maria Flores. Flores had been an army Captain when he came to California in 1842 with Governor Micheltorena, serving as the Governor's secretary. In 1846, he was active in resisting American forces while acting as governor of Alta California in the absence of Pio Pico. He was arrested by the Americans and was placed in irons. Eventually, he was paroled on condition that he would not take up arms against the United States. He broke his parole by acting as a general commandant, directing all operations of the final campaign of the Mexican War in California. Near the war's end, he retreated to Sonora, Mexico in January, 1847, rather than surrendering to the Americans since he had committed the dishonorable act of breaking his parole. He never returned to Alta California, thereby deserting his wife (the "Spanish lady"), and three children.

The "Spanish Lady" was Maria Dolores Francisca Zamorano (hereafter referred to as "Dolores"), the eldest daughter of Don Agustin Vicente Zamorano (hereafter referred to as "Zamorano"). She was born in 1827. At the age of fifteen years and eight months, she married Captain Flores. Her father, Zamorano, served as executive secretary of the Territory of Alta California, and performed other duties for the Mexican government

there, including Acting Governor for a period in 1832-1833. It is generally accepted that Zamorano set up the first printing press in California, although there is no written evidence of that fact. Nevertheless, Zamorano is hailed as having been California's first printer. Zamorano died in 1842.

Maria de Guadalupe Zamorano was Zamorano's fourth child and second eldest daughter (hereafter referred to as "Guadalupe"). She was born in 1832. At the age of fourteen years and eight months, Guadalupe married Henry Dalton who at that time was a few months short of forty-four years old. Dalton was the owner of Rancho Azusa.

Sisters Dolores and Guadalupe, along with Isidora Bandini, were considered to be the most beautiful women in Los Angeles (some people expanded the claim to include all of California). It appears that Dolores was a flirt, resulting in amorous activities by the soldiers of Stephenson's Regiment in Los Angeles. Included among those soldiers, of course, was Lieutenant John C. Bonnycastle and his sidekick, Lieutenant John McHenry Hollingsworth. Hollingsworth wrote a diary of his military and other experiences. The diary was transcribed and printed by the California Historical Society in 1923. It is entitled *The Journal of Lieutenant John McHenry Hollingsworth of the First New York Volunteers [Stevenson's Regiment] September 1846 – August 1849* (hereafter referred to as "*Hollingsworth Journal*").

The *Hollingsworth Journal* is replete with tales of attempts at amorous adventures by these two Lieutenants. A few examples should suffice:

"MAY 18 [1847]. Walked over to Don Luis, met a large party of ladies. Spent a pleasant time . . . Saw a beautiful Spanish girl there, gave her a bouquet, & murdered Spanish at her at a great rate." NOTE: Reference to Don Luis is believed to have been Luis Vignes, the Los Angeles vineyardist and winemaker; the Spanish girl is most

likely Guadalupe, soon to marry Henry Dalton.

"MAY 23 [1847]. Been visiting. Had some pleasant evenings. Saw Mrs. General Flores at Don Luis. She is a very interesting woman. The lady I met at Don Luis. She is a great belle and a great flirt. Col Fremont has always been the favourite beau, but I have cut them all out, and when I walk in the rest stand back."

Turning to Lieutenant Bonnycastle, he of the missing finger, the following passages from the *Hollingsworth Journal* are of interest concerning his attentions to Dolores in her home and the resultant duel over her:

"NOV. 27 (1847): There was great excitement in Town last night in consequence of a gun being fired in the street. There was (sic) several amusing things took place during the alarm. Lieut Bonnycastle was paying a visit at Mrs Flores when the alarm was given heard the drum roll and at the same time their (sic) came a rap at the door Mrs. Flores exclaimed very gravely You are a prisoner sir. Lieut B sprung up from his seat and said in English No not a damn sight but at the sametime(sic) shewing (sic) by his manner and looking on all sides for some way of escape that he thought he was. Mrs. F. laughed heartily at him, and we have all plagued him to death ever since."

The following entry in the *Hollingsworth Journal* also appeared between an entry which bears directly on the subject:

"An important event has taken place – There has been a duel between my friend Lieut B and a citizen of this place –It has caused a wide breach between the citizens & officers (sic) and

it is much feared will lead to more— Lieut B was wounded in both hands his adversaries (sic) ball also cutting off the little finger of his left hand—I cannot describe my feelings on walking into my friends (sic) quarters on that morning and seeing him lying all bloody on the bed with the officers (sic) all around him—I felt very angry and could but say—had he killed you there would have been another duel.”

The war with Mexico was now over and the Regiment was in the process of being mustered out. Hollingsworth and Bonnycastle had decided to try their hands in the gold fields. Hollingsworth wrote a long piece, entitled “Farewell to Los Angeles,” naming the females they had been with and wishing them well.

The Regiment left Los Angeles in September, 1848. Members of the Regiment could not agree on the route to take north, resulting in the Regiment being broken up. Most took the coast route through Santa Barbara. Hollingsworth and Bonnycastle, with a few others, took the route through the Tulare mountains on to the Mokelumne River. They became mired in snow and Bonnycastle’s injured hand became an issue. Hollingsworth stated:

“I remained in the mines all night and set out early in the morning to join B— [Bonnycastle]. I found him buried in snow and half frozen. His fire having burnt down in the night he could not renew it owing to the situation of his hand.”

When Bonnycastle lost his finger in the duel, he was treated by the Company’s doctor, John S. Griffin, M.D. In 1949, Glen Dawson privately printed the contents of a letter written on March 11, 1849 by Dr. Griffin to Col. Stevenson, commander of the New York Volunteers in Monterey. The letter was written from Los Angeles and generally com-

ments on conditions then in the city and on the people who Col. Stevenson would have known. In that letter, he stated:

“I think it well for the peace of the Pueblo that Bonny [i.e. Bonnycastle] is not here. The old lady [see NOTE below] has a hopeful son, called Pepe, who she believes to be a perfect hero. This young gentleman is extremely attentive to Doña Dolores and it is said does all her small work; at all events he is extremely attentive. Now it is my opinion that if Bonny was here he would lick the said Pepe certainly, as he wanted to shoot, poison, or whip Dolores Sepulveda for much less.”
NOTE: The “old lady” referred to above is believed to have been the wife of a Los Angeles resident, Jose Maria Segura.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that Bonnycastle was an egotistical hothead and probably deserved what happened to him. He remained in the Regiment for a while and later stayed in touch with its members. There appears to be no record showing that the duel was reported to Col. Stevenson or any other military person or tribunal. Even if it had been reported, it was a black mark against the Regiment and would have been hushed.

Apparently, the fact that a duel had occurred in Los Angeles in 1848 was not something which was widely publicized among the populace. Maj. Horace Bell, author of *Reminiscences of a Ranger* (1881), although not being present in Los Angeles until 1852, had the opportunity to mix with many people in the city. In fact, Bell garnered a great deal of information for his book from citizens of Los Angeles. Notwithstanding, he stated in his book, on page 75, that only one duel was ever fought in Los Angeles. That duel occurred in 1852, and the contestants were a doctor and a Colonel of the Third Artillery, commanding

at San Diego. Thus, it appears that news of the 1848 duel over Maria Dolores Flores was either of little consequence to, or simply unknown by, what was then an extremely small portion of the general public which would have actually cared that it happened (perhaps contrary to Hollingsworth's comment that the duel created a wide breach between the citizens of the city and the officers).

Hollingsworth stayed in California, took part in the deliberations of the California Constitutional Convention, and was selected by Governor Riley as one of the persons to take the new constitution to the Government in Washington. Among other positions held

after leaving California, Hollingsworth's last position resulted from an appointment as Superintendent of Mount Vernon in 1872. He died in 1889.

Maria Dolores Flores remarried. That marriage bore three more children. The date and place of her death is not known for certain, but she is believed to have died at San Luis Obispo around 1870.

Maria Guadalupe Dalton was the mother of eleven children, seven of whom lived to maturity. Henry Dalton died at Los Angeles on January 21, 1884. Guadalupe died at Azusa on September 1, 1914.

Down the Western Book Trail . . .

Native Performers In Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill To Euro Disney, by Linda Scarangella McNenly. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. 254 pp. Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Cloth, \$34.95. Reviewed by John Selmer

Native Performers In Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney is a study of a unique American art form: the Wild West show. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century Wild West show was once a spectacle that America enjoyed along with certain destinations in Europe. Romantic and colorful, the Wild West show was certainly not to be missed. This fascinating study relates the Native American Indian outlook regarding working in these productions. This book describes a fresh perspective and is appropriate for the western scholar who has an interest in Wild West shows, additionally enjoying the backstory of the Native American point of view.

With today's super-sensitivity toward indigenous people, few non-natives have considered their story of employment in the Wild West show. Through interviews with present-day actors and performers and the offspring of original Wild West actors and performers, Ms. McNenly gains primary insight from these most important sources. Additionally, wonderful

photographs, other archival materials and an exhaustive bibliography enhance the book immeasurably.

Many beneficial opportunities rewarded the Wild West native performers. Travel, gainful employment, recognition and celebration of specific cultural traditions were all part of their participation. As a result, not every aspect of the Wild West show was as exploitative or harsh as one might perceive.

This work also explores contemporary Wild West shows such as Sheridan, Wyoming's Buffalo Bill Days and Paris' Euro Disney. The Euro Disney Wild West show exposition is insightful and informative for the non-European participant. Ms. McNenly relates a clear and informative discourse of the spectacle including the modern-day native perspective.

This scholarly book is an important resource for the student of Native American Indian history and culture. The research is very impressive. The Native viewpoint is vital for today's reader and historian. This book is fascinating, unique, well-written and important for students of this most unusual American theater: the Wild West show.



Rainbow Bridge to Monument Valley: Making the Modern Old West, by Thomas J. Harvey. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. 237 pp. Map, Illustrations, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index. Paper, \$19.95. Reviewed by Abraham Hoffman.

Despite its remoteness, the Colorado River Plateau, the area north of the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona and southern Utah, is the location for two important iconic landscape features—the Rainbow Bridge and Monument Valley. Thomas J. Harvey argues that these famous places have two sides to their history—the Euro-American and the Native American. Whereas the region has long been known to the Navajo people, Euro-American claims to “discovering” these natural features dominate the narrative. Harvey redresses the imbalance by examining how each culture has viewed the landscape and what Rainbow Bridge and Monument Valley mean to people today.

Archaeologist Byron Cummings “discovered” Rainbow Bridge in 1909, but his claim sparked a debate on the meaning of the word, given that the Navajo people knew of it long before the white man arrived. Starting with “Columbus discovered America,” European/American/Western society has controlled the history of the United States, and most history textbooks ignore the inconvenient truth that there are two sides (and sometimes more) to a story. Harvey deals with both sides, weaving a narrative that combines cooperation, rivalry, cultural adjustments, and image-making.

In 1914, Zane Grey visited the Rainbow Bridge and was struck by its natural beauty. He used the area as a setting for several of his novels and argued that anyone wishing to see the bridge had to endure the hardship of hiking to the site, an effort he believed tested masculinity. A generation later, John Ford made “Stagecoach,” the first of seven West-

erns he directed with Monument Valley as the background, including “My Darling Clementine” and “Fort Apache.” The success of these films helped bring national attention to Monument Valley as well as Grey’s depictions of Rainbow Bridge. What the public saw, however, was an Anglo view, a conquest of the West, not an Indian perspective. In fact, Ford employed Navajo men as Apaches, Comanches, and other tribesmen in his films even though the locations where he filmed had a history of Navajo culture.

In the mid-20th century, Rainbow Bridge became the center of a major controversy over construction of two dams on the Colorado River. Led by David Brower of the Sierra Club, plus other organizations, the fight to preserve Dinosaur Canyon from a dam succeeded, though a trade-off for Echo Park Dam meant that Lake Powell would cover much of traditional Navajo grounds. The lake also made it easy for tourists to travel by water to only a short distance from Rainbow Bridge.

Eventually the Navajo people were able to make the adjustment between their traditional culture and accepting some of the realities of modern society. They bought manufactured products at white men’s trading posts and operated their own businesses catering to tourists. This adjustment helped preserve some sacred spaces, though their stories of the Rainbow Bridge and Monument Valley remain largely unknown to a public that sees the iconic symbols in commercial advertisements and in everything from calendars to locations in the film *Star Wars*.

Harvey makes a compelling argument for telling both sides of the story. Although the sites continue to be exploited, their significance and interpretation offer opportunities for people to appreciate not just the white man’s view, but their importance for the first Americans and their descendants.



Pioneer Ranch Life In Orange: A Victorian Woman in Southern California, by Mary Teegarden Clark, edited by Paul Clark. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013. 192 pp. Paper, \$21.99. <http://historypress.net>. Reviewed by Mark Hall-Patton

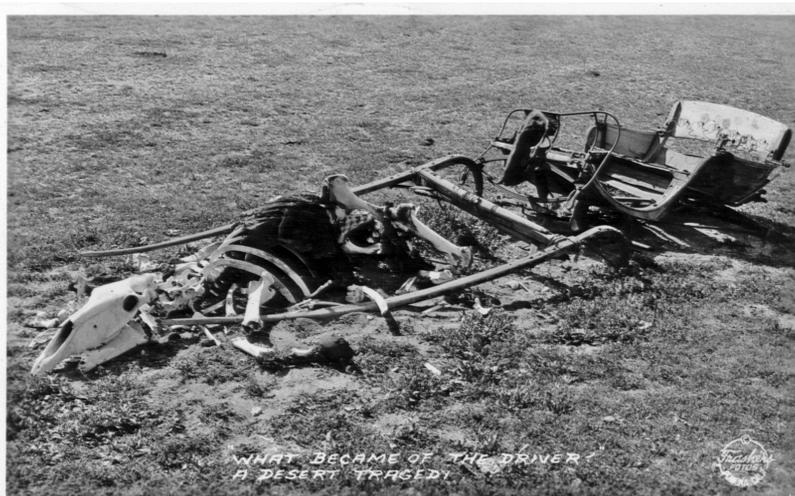
Many historians have access to, and read with great interest, diaries to get a first-hand feel for life in other eras. In the same way, we often have first hand accounts of ancestors which come down in our families and are fun and quite meaningful for one's family. Unfortunately, in both cases, many such diaries are best read by those family members or historians who need the information, as they tend to be somewhat boring or repetitious otherwise.

Thankfully, this is not the case in Paul Clark's editing of his great-grandmother's account of life in pioneer Orange, California. She came to Orange in 1875, and left in 1887. With her husband, Albert F. Clark, she helped build the Yale Grove. Her writing is interesting, and her Vassar training shows through. She writes about life in what was a fairly isolated, sparsely populated part of Los Angeles County at the time. Paul Clark's editing of the manuscripts she left behind is good, and does not seem to take at all away from her own voice. The history of

her manuscripts alone is a fascinating part of the story in this book. The idea that her hand-written original would be typed up by a descendant and peddled as a possible Hollywood movie treatment, is much more than most families would do with Grandmother's reminiscences.

Clark's annotations bring out a surprising depth of detail. He does his best to annotate anything which may not be obvious to the contemporary reader, allowing readers a much greater depth of understanding of her life. Paul shows his personal involvement with his Great-Grandmother's life, and obviously feels a personal connection to her time in Orange.

In the interest of openness, I should also note that I have known Paul for many years, since serving with him on the Board of the Orange Community Historical Society. It is highly likely that my family, who arrived in Orange in 1869, probably knew Mary and Albert, though no tales have come down in the family to connect us. None the less, I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the early history of Orange and southern California, or the amazing roles women assumed during the early years of settlement and growth in today's Orange County.



"Whatever happened to the driver?" asks Burton Frasher in this undated view of a very abandoned wagon and horse somewhere in the California desert (From the collection of Steve Lech)

Monthly Roundup . . .



November 2013

Ann Stalcup

Ann Stalcup, the speaker at our November 2013 meeting, is an author of many books and a compelling storyteller herself. The title of her talk was "Leo Politi, Artist of the Angels," also the title of her book. Ann is an authority on Leo Politi, the artist-illustrator of childrens books from Los Angeles, California. Ann delivered a very interesting talk that was both biographical and informative. It was also exciting as she detailed Politi's rise from humble beginnings to the later success of his work. Politi today is a famous artist woven into the fabric of Los Angeles history and Olvera Street. Ann explained how Politi used children's stories and books to preserve the memory of the Victorian time period through his art and writing and how his love of children, who he called the "angels" of Los Angeles, were his main theme in capturing the culture and growth of the diverse communities of Los Angeles, through the Mexican, Chinese and Japanese children. He gave them and all of us a sense of importance; this feeling is with us today. Ann explained that Politi's painting "Blessing of the Animals," which is in the Plaza at Olvera Street, is today a beautiful ongoing testament to his historical legacy. On exhibit during this evening, thanks to the efforts and col-

lections of our own members Danny Munoz and Dr. Richard Doyle, many of Leo Politi's paintings and posters were on display before and after the meeting. Ann today works as both a volunteer and employee at Leo Politi School. Besides a number of magazine articles, she now has sixteen published children's books in addition to other educational work for both adults and children. On hand during the talk, we had the opportunity to meet her friend and daughter of Leo Politi, Suzanne Politi Bischof. By Joseph Cavallo



December 2013

Stuart A. Forsyth

At our Holiday event, the December meeting, a time of happy thoughts of Christmas and New Years', and having just enjoyed a special annual dessert of Cherries Jubilee, the talk for this night was about a bomb plant. Bomb plant? Somehow this topic didn't seem to fit with the holiday time. Stuart A. Forsyth was our speaker and he gave a talk entitled "Cajon at War—The San Bernardino Bomb Plant." Los Angeles Westerners, however, is a history organization and Stuart A. Forsyth is an excellent speaker. In fact, this talk was so interesting, riveting and well-presented with visuals of photos and maps, that one came away with a better understanding of the greatness of our country, and of course, the role of this San Bernardino bomb plant. Just three months and two days after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the Western Stove Co. of Culver City started operating a newly built plant for the U.S. Army Chemical Warfare Service just northwest of San Bernardino. Stuart's presentation was

thoroughly researched, beautifully illustrated and fascinatingly-presented. His talk described the bomb material made at the plant, how the railroads and the U.S. Navy shipped the munitions out, and in general how America worked with brilliance at organizing and bringing the World War with Japan to an end and achieving victory. Stuart made the subject interesting and informative. His life-long interest in the railroads of Southern California and World War II, as well as his research of more than half century of the Cajon Pass area, was very well-received. By Joseph Cavallo.



January 2014

A. C. W. Bethel, Ph.D.

Walt Bethel began his presentation with an overview of Los Angeles's now-vanished Pacific Electric Railway--the famous Red cars. Then he focused on explaining why the Pacific Electric (PE) vanished. He refuted the often-heard claim that a conspiracy by National City Lines, a nationwide consortium formed by General Motors, Firestone Rubber, and Standard Oil, had systematically dismantled the PE, by pointing out that National City Lines had never owned it. He agreed with other historians that what doomed the PE was that all it could do was bring people downtown, and that downtown became increasingly irrelevant in the decentralized, multi-destination city that Los Angeles was already becoming in the 1920s. Walt argued that significant gaps in its track network prevented PE from becoming a truly regional transportation system. He pointed out that

in the 1920s PE proposed improvements that had two broad goals. First, the PE wanted to build subway and elevated lines that would get its interurban cars off city streets so that they could run faster through downtown. Second, the PE wanted to build a subway that would link its routes west from downtown with its routes to the San Gabriel Valley and to the harbor and to Orange County points, making it more like a regional transit system. Taken together these improvements would have enhanced PE's economic performance, which was its goal, but they were blocked by elaborate, unrealistically expensive transit plans that the city promoted instead. These plans were modeled on transit in densely concentrated eastern cities, which Angelenos disliked, and came to nothing. Meanwhile, the PE did build some major infrastructure improvements, such as the Hollywood-Glendale subway, but these weren't enough to make PE a regional transit system, and the unprofitable railway atrophied.



February 2014

Will Bagley

In February 2014, our Corral was treated to a talk by renowned historian, researcher, author and speechifier, Will Bagley. The title of his talk was "Hurrah for the Handcart Scheme!" - a significant and tragic event in the movement West and for Mormon history. He has written extensively about overland emigration, frontier violence, railroads, mining, and the Mormons. Will has written hundreds of articles, many books, and edited the excellent Arthur H. Clark Company's 16-vol-

ume documentary series *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*. In addition, he has appeared in dozens of films and won numerous literary awards. Consequently, there was much excited anticipation for this talk about the Mormons and the handcart experiment, an important Western Americana saga. We were not disappointed. Some 3,000 Mormon emigrants experienced this rugged, harsh and significant episode, which Bagley recounted with clarity, pathos, and detail. He balanced concern for the people and their faith with an examination of the cruel consequences of Brigham Young's 1855 orders to let the emigration "foot it." Bagley examined the business side of the enterprise and Young's financial motivations, which later historians usually ignored. Carefully and with the help of slides using contemporary images, Will painted a picture of the personal and individual harsh reality, the struggle of those who survived the overland migration and those who didn't, and the death of some ten percent of the handcart emigrants. He examined the odd celebration and perspective of the Mormon handcart legacy. The talk was balanced, interesting, informative - and disturbing. By Joseph Cavallo

Photos by Steve Crise



Corral Chips

Paul McClure

CURRENTLY WORKING ON: Paul is currently researching the citrus era of the Pomona Valley and working toward recognition of the Old Spanish Trail

RECENT PUBLICATIONS: *Folk History of the San Gabriel and Inland Valleys: The Settlement Years 1542-1878*, Infinity Publishing: West Conshohocken, PA, 2012.

RECENT TALKS: "Old Spanish Trail" at San Dimas City Hall; "A Tile in the Los Angeles Mosaic, Los Angelitas de Pueblo;" "Document Preservation" at the San Dimas Festival of Art; "Kwenangna Village" to the San Dimas Historical Society.

RECENT AWARDS: Fred Olds Cowboy Poetry Award, International Corral of Westerners, 2012.

Eric Warren

CURRENTLY WORKING ON: Eric is currently the president of the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS: Eric has recently authored a book entitled *Pioneers of Eagle Rock*, published through History Press.

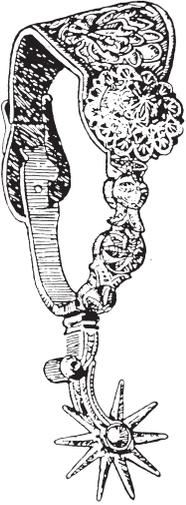


Steve Lech

CURRENTLY WORKING ON: Steve's main focus in research presently is the history of the development of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. He is also working on the story behind the incorporation of Cabazon, California in the 1950s. He is always working on several items for his continuing bi-weekly "Back in the Day" articles in the Press-Enterprise newspaper.

NEEDS INFORMATION ON/FOR: Would like to hear from any Westerners who may have information or reminiscences about the beginnings of either the Palm Springs Tramway or the City of Cabazon

RECENT PRESENTATIONS: He has given talks on the formation of Riverside County to the Westerners (April 2013) and other groups, along with presentations on Riverside County's Regional Parks, the Pines-to-Palms Highway, and various subjects related to the Mission Inn in Riverside.



RECENT ENDEAVORS: Steve was appointed to the Riverside County Historical Commission in January, 2014, and was appointed to the City of Riverside's Historic Preservation Fund Committee in October, 2013.

Steve also sponsors (with 2 friends) the annual Riverside County History Symposium held in various locations throughout Riverside County.

OTHER: Steve was born in Riverside, California, and lives in the home his grandparents built. He recently retired after 27+ years as a planner with various departments for Riverside County.



FROM OUR FILES

50 Years Ago
BI #68 March 1964

At the February meeting, author John Upton Terrell spoke to "the largest attendance we've had for many moons" on Father De Smet, and Westerners co-founder Leland Case talked about the origins of the organization.

Member Henry Clifford had just been elected President of the California Historical Society.

25 Years Ago
BI #175 Spring 1989

In January, historian Remi Nadeau (great-great-grandson and namesake of the pioneer teamster) spoke on California ghost towns. In February, Msgr. Francis Weber "regaled the Corral with his exploration of the 'high and mighty, lowly and insignificant' – the historical importance of graveyard inscriptions. History on headstones contains interesting information on rhymes, puns, wit, and wisdom of the departed or those who knew them." Msgr. Weber had also just published *Leo the Great*, "a bio-bibliography of the famed artist, Leo Politi."

Former Sheriff Jerry Selmer had been appointed Executive Director of the Southwest Museum.

