

# TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

October 2015  
Volume 15 Issue 10

*It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Temecula Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.*

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A Publication of the

**Temecula Valley Historical Society**

**P.O. Box 157 Temecula, CA 92593**

**951-303-6860**

[www.temeculahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.temeculahistoricalsociety.org)



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## THE JACKASS MAIL

By Duane Preimsberger

Many of us who are fortunate enough to be Temeculites are very much aware of the Butterfield Stage and its mail delivery journey through Temecula as it traversed the 2800 mile odyssey between St. Louis, MO. and San Francisco, California and then 2800 miles back. Fewer are aware of another stagecoach line that pre-dates the September 1858 inauguration of the Butterfield operation and passed through Southern California. 2007 was the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of that little known stage line and it was celebrated in San Diego.

Shrinking the continent with the delivery of mail on a regular schedule began one of the most important transportation efforts in American history. Prior mail delivery has occurred when U.S. Military units needed to communicate with each other and on those treks, civilian mail was sometimes carried, but it wasn't done on a routine basis

The San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line began mail delivery operations in San Antonio, Texas on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1857; only 27 days after the contract was let. The first mail arrived in San Diego, California on August 31, some 57 days and 1457 miles later. In many respects this was not a very pleasant or comfortable journey for the passengers who ventured along the route. They endured bumpy, rough roads, sweltering temperatures, dust, poor sleep, equipment failures, delays and terrible food. Since the stagecoach stopped each night, the passengers were subjected to accommodations at the often unmanned, 87 stage stops that ranged from vermin infested mud walled adobe huts to sleeping next to a campfire, on the ground, near gila monsters, rattlers, prairie dogs, tarantulas, scorpions and coyotes. In one stretch of the route where the road was so rough, passengers disembarked from the stagecoach and were saddled up, often on stubborn and balky mules, for a 90 mile, often waterless, several days long journey across a portion of the California Desert. It was this portion of the trip that caused the nickname Jackass Mail to come into being.

Much of the trail went through Apache Indian territory and there were frequent raids on the stage stop stations and the stagecoaches as well. Armed military escorts traveled with the coaches over many miles of the trouble prone route. Each man choosing to travel the San Antonio (Continued on page #2)

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& San Diego Mail Line route was encouraged to bring along a rifle and 100 cartridges, a Colt revolver and two pounds of balls for that weapon as well as a stout knife in a sheath. Because of the difficulties and hazards of the journey, the trip and the stage line was frequently and vociferously criticized by passengers who had endured the experience. Business was terrible and the route never showed a profit.

The man responsible for the initiation of the San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line was 29 year old, James E. Birch, who obtained a 4 year contract from the U.S. Postal Service for an annual payment of \$149,800.00. Records show that the Post Office received total receipts of \$601.00 making it the poorest return on dollars of any postal route in the Nation.

Birch, however, worked diligently in his attempts to make the route profitable. He was unsuccessful primarily because on August 20<sup>th</sup> 1857 Birch left San Francisco by sea hoping to get to Washington, D.C. in time to bid on yet another postal route contract .

On September 12, 1857, he was sailing from the Isthmus of Panama through the Caribbean on the side-wheeler steamship, Central America. The ship encountered a tremendous gale south of Cape Hatteras, off the coast of North Carolina, and went down with 400 passengers, only a few survived. As the ship was sinking, one of the ship's crew, Gabriel Brush, saw Birch without a life preserver and offered to buckle one onto him. Birch replied that he didn't think that would keep him alive in the cold water and would probably only prolong his suffering, so he refused the offer. He then lit a cigar and was never seen again.

The line San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line survived for a while but in December of 1860, Postmaster General Joseph Holt, reported that much of the route was discontinued as entirely useless. There were a few attempts to re-ignite interest in a viable stage line but by 1861 the Civil War and other aspects of dissension, not the least of which was

public dissatisfaction with the effort, doomed the future of a southern stagecoach route to failure.

The Jackass Mail is one of those side bars to history about which little is recorded. Perhaps, if James Birch had survived, his energy, enthusiasm and determination might have allowed a different end to a project with an interesting nickname; but that was not to be and so another tale in the annals of stagecoach history was concluded.

## How much do you know about our local history?

1. Historians have disagreed about the location of Willow Springs in the Temecula Valley. Where was it located? (1) Near Wildomar; (2) North of the Murrieta Library; (3) In Old Town Temecula; or (4) Northwest of Jefferson and Winchester where Cline and Moody lived.

2. In the early 1860s, John Magee's store was in a building just south of the Temecula Creek (near today's Redhawk Parkway). Who owned this building and how long was Magee there?

Answers on page 3

## Gas Lamp Tour

*Gas lamp tour in San Diego on Thursday October 22nd 2015 meet at 8:45 in the parking lot across from the Red Barn. Car pooling will be available. Leave at 9:00 am. Tour is from 10:00 to 12:00. You may sign up at the meeting on Mon. the 28th or by calling Phil Washum, tour chairman, at 951-201-0020 or emailing him at [pcwashum@Verizon.net](mailto:pcwashum@Verizon.net).*

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS AND SAVE THE DATE  
OF NOVEMBER 20TH.**

The TVHS Annual Dinner will be held at 5:30 pm at the Convention Center at the Temecula City Hall. Dinner will be served while listening to classical guitarist, David Adele. You will have the opportunity to meet Freda Knott, Bessie Barnett and Jean Bethell who lived in the Temecula Valley during the 1900's.

Invitations will arrive in the mail on October 15th.

The ticket price is \$35 per person to include dinner, music and a presentation by three Notable Women of Temecula.

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**How much do you know about  
our local history?**

Answers:

1. North of the Murrieta Library. While Willow Springs was not a stop on the original Butterfield Overland Mail route in 1858, it had been added by 1860. It was halfway between the Temecula and Laguna (Lake Elsinore) stage stops. The exact location is still unknown, but it was between Kalmia and Lemon, and Jefferson and Washington in Murrieta.
2. The building and about a half-acre of land around it was leased to Magee in August 1859 by María Antonia Apis for five years at \$5 a month. Magee was to build an addition to the building which he did. María died in 1863 and before long Magee had a store on the north side of the creek (east of where the Wolf Store was later built in 1867). In 1867, Magee sold all the personal property he owned on the Little Temecula Rancho. He had never owned any land on the rancho.

For additional information or questions, contact Anne Miller at [DMEAJM@earthlink.net](mailto:DMEAJM@earthlink.net)

**TVHS MEETING NEWS**

On October 26th, Barbara Waite will give an entertaining program about her grandmother's life. Elsie Reed Hayes was a mail order teacher who taught in a one-room school house in rural Arizona 1913-1916, when the newly formed state was still the Wild West. Elsie later owned and operated an apple ranch on Mt. Palomar and sometimes came to Temecula and stayed at the Temecula Hotel. Barbara will read excerpts from Elsie's diaries about experiences in Temecula and the surrounding area.

We will not have a general meeting in either November or December but we have a full slate of entertaining programs for 2016 beginning with a presentation by Bonnie Martland in January.

**MEETINGS ARE HELD AT THE LITTLE TEMECULA HISTORY CENTER, THE RED BARN AT THE CORNER OF WOLF STORE ROAD AND REDHAWK PARKWAY (NEXT TO KOHL'S DEPARTMENT STORE). THERE IS NO CHARGE AND THE PUBLIC IS INVITED. A SOCIAL TIME WITH REFRESHMENTS BEGINS AT 5:30 P.M.**

**For more information, call Rebecca Farnbach at 951-775-6057.**

**ITEMS NEEDED FOR RAFFLE  
BASKETS & SILENT AUCTION**

We are seeking donated items for the raffle baskets and silent auction for Friday, Nov. 20th, at the TVHS Annual Dinner.

If you have wine, or items in good condition such as jewelry, scarves, purses, artwork, paintings, pottery, antiques or any other decorative items, please email LisaWoodward at [lwoodward@verizon.net](mailto:lwoodward@verizon.net) or call Lisa at 951 514-7406.

We need to have the items by Nov. 15th.

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

THANK YOU FOR RENEWING  
YOUR MEMBERSHIP:

Malcolm & Loretta Barnett  
David & Louise Beesley  
Chris & Shari Crall  
Robert & Elaine Culverhouse  
Joe & Sue Diorio  
Darell & Rebecca Farnbach  
Gary & Judy Giles  
Bob & Pam Grender  
Rhine & Sandy Helzer  
Roger & Carole Honberger  
Mike & Shelley Leddy  
Bob & Suzie Kent  
Mr. & Mrs. James Lawton  
Richard & Mahlon Lawton  
Duane and Judy Preimsberger  
John & Jerri Lynn Randall  
Dale & Ann Silimperi  
Phil & Char Washum  
George & Mary Ziegler

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### WELCOME BACK:

**Welcome back to Peggy Webb who we've all missed and are so happy to see.**

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Please join us for a MEET & GREET with refreshments at 5:30 pm on Monday, October 26th, prior to the 6:00 pm meeting at the Little Temecula History Center (red barn next to Kohl's) on Temecula Pkwy/Redhawk Pkwy.



## President's Message

**SAVE THE DATES !!** Yes, as we all plunge into a traditionally busy time of year, what with Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years – all which have multiple activities and demands on our time – be sure to “Save some dates” for the cultural side of life.

**Monday, October 26 – 6 p.m.** Monthly program as part of the societies' regular monthly meeting.

**Thursday, November 12 – 7 p.m.** A special event at the Temecula City Hall Community Room as part of the November Pu'éska Mountain Day celebration. All TVHS members are encouraged to attend this special presentation by Pechanga.

**Saturday, November 14 – 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.** Pu'éska Mountain Day Event at City Hall Town Square Park. This annual holiday celebration will have cultural exhibits, a mobile museum, and family friendly activities.

**Friday, November 20 – 6 p.m.** Annual Dinner Meeting and program of the Temecula Valley Historical Society. A great dinner with live music, always fun silent auction items, presentation and installation of TVHS Board of Directors for 2016, and an opportunity to meet the latest Notable Women of Temecula.

Dick Fox  
President

### CAN YOU PLEASE HELP?

Our Public Relations Chairperson, Cheryl Cady, needs help with distributing the TVHS Walking Tour Maps to local businesses. If you can help Cheryl, Please contact her by email at [ccbissi63@gmail.com](mailto:ccbissi63@gmail.com).