

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

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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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California's Great Silkworm Calamity

by Steve Williamson

Perhaps the greatest long-term benefit to California of the Gold Rush of 1849 was the influx of “dreamers” and “risk-takers” from not only across the country, but from around the world. That benefit is still being felt today, particularly in the Silicon Valley. Those who came to California in the 1850s with dreams of striking it rich eventually had to find some other way of earning a living. You know what they say, “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” But there seems to be no end to smooth-talking salespeople who can make something sound good enough to try. That seems particularly true when things get bad enough that people will try just about anything.

The Gold Rush happened to take place following thirteen years of secularization by the Mexican government, the period that created the great ranchos of California. The huge influx of people coming into California in 1849 created an immediate demand for food, particularly beef. The Spanish and Mexican land barons were perfectly poised to provide that beef. There was plenty of good grazing land and the demand for beef provided plenty of work for Mexican *vaqueros*. Gold, of course, was the great draw and a valuable natural resource for the State, but cattle was the commodity of most importance to the rancheros.

By the mid-1850s, however, local demand for beef was already beginning to wane. Driving cattle to markets in the East was too costly a proposition. The same problem existed in the farm industry – too small a market locally, too high a cost to ship farm products east. California's isolation was a liability. The drought of 1864-65 was the death knell for many of the great Mexican Dons. They had fallen prey to the money lenders and had mortgaged their land. These two years of drought meant the loss of their most valuable commodity. Whole herds died for lack of water and many of the ranchos fell into foreclosure.

California and its residents were in desperate need of a viable primary industry – preferably one which could produce a marketable export, and one that might take advantage of the vast land resources of this State. Among the people who had come to California in 1852 seeking opportunity was a Frenchman named Louis Prevost. He was a botanist who settled in San Jose where he became a nurseryman. In 1854 Prevost began experimenting in sericulture (the growing of silkworms) based on his knowledge of the European silk industry. He understood the relationship between silkworms and mulberry trees, which provide

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the food source for silkworms. It was in 1854 that Prevost asked Henry Hentsch, a banker in San Francisco, to fund an order for some mulberry tree seeds and silkworm eggs. The trees grew into fine specimens, and the silkworm eggs developed into cocoons. By 1860 Prevost was enjoying a great deal of success. He was selling mulberry trees and silkworm eggs and promoting the notion that these could be used to develop a viable enterprise in the production of silk. In letters and articles published in the newspapers, Prevost argued that California had conditions far superior to France. There was little doubt that California could very easily develop a silk industry that could "put China out of business."

Louis Prevost's promotional efforts were bolstered by a report to the State Committee on Agriculture by W.S. Letcher, assemblyman from Santa Clara County, suggesting the State promote the cultivation of "mulberry trees affording food for worms that might clothe the people in silk and satin." In 1867, to help stimulate the silk industry, the State legislature approved a bill that would pay a modest bounty of \$250 to anyone with a plantation of 5,000 or more mulberry trees, and \$300 to anyone with 100,000 or more silkworm cocoons.

If these promotional efforts did nothing to produce a single yard of silk fabric, they certainly succeeded in stimulating the planting of mulberry trees. By 1869 it is estimated that there were ten million mulberry trees in various stages of growth in Southern and Central California. There were two million trees growing in and around Los Angeles alone. In the April 11, 1869 edition of their newspaper, the *Los Angeles News* proudly proclaimed, "We risk nothing when we express the belief that in two years from this time the silk products of this county will amount to several million dollars."

Enthusiasm for the industry led to the creation of the California Silk Center Association, a consortium of investors eager to capitalize on the prospect of an exciting new industry for California. Using the initial capital at its disposal, the association purchased four thousand acres of property in the inland area which later became the City of Riverside. Based on the commitment of sixty families, the association envisioned the establishment of a colony of silk growers and weavers. Silkworm eggs were selling for \$10 per ounce. One sericulturist claimed a net profit of \$1,000 per acre in only two months time. He bragged that the net profit on his three acres of property exceeded the net profit of his neighbor who had 30,000 acres planted in grain.

Not surprisingly, with such reports of staggering profits being made by producers of silkworm eggs, the sericulture craze became epidemic. An article appearing in the *Overland Monthly* in 1869 made a bold prediction, "It is almost startling to think that from a calling so apparently insignificant we may be able to realize in a short time a larger sum and infinitely greater gains than from one-half of all our other agricultural products of the State." Enthusiasm for the planting of mulberry trees and the growing of silkworm cocoons was completely out of anyone's ability to control it. The State legislature was forced to repeal its own sericulture subsidy act to prevent the State treasury from going into bankruptcy.

Sadly, a combination of factors brought a swift end to what could have been a very successful State industry. Shortly after the creation of the California Silk Center Association, Louis Prevost, the great architect and promoter of this grand scheme, died. Secondly, there was tremendous enthusiasm for the planting of mulberry trees and the cultivation of silkworm cocoons, but there was no one investing in a factory or facility for the actual production of silk fabric. Finally, aggressive promotion of the sale of silkworm eggs resulted in such a flooding of the market that it became all supply and no demand. Enthusiasm for the entire scheme waned until, eventually, everyone lost interest in investing in any further effort. The California Silk Center Association became defunct. Of the millions of mulberry trees planted in support of this exciting new industry, not one survived. They all died from neglect. With the loss of a food source, the silkworms died of starvation.

The failure of this grand experiment was not based on poor climate or soil conditions. Louis Prevost was most likely correct in his assessment that California had conditions far superior to France for the growing of mulberry trees. The failure of the plan was based on a focus on the "immediate" profits available in the production of silkworm eggs, with no concerted effort, and no capital investment, in creation of a silk fabric production facility. Surely there was an understanding that a production facility and weavers would ultimately be needed, but there was no one in the entire State who knew the slightest thing about silk fabric production.

Ironically, only one piece of silk fabric was ever created as the result of this exhaustive effort to create an industry out of "whole cloth" (pardon the pun). It was a hand-made state flag which was ultimately raised over the State capital building. The State could well be proud of this flag, for it had cost the State a quarter of a million dollars.

How much do you know about our local history?

1. People were often displaced when dams were built. Were there any people living under what is now Vail Lake?
2. A very large airport was planned for the Temecula Valley area in the 1970s. Where was that airport going to be located?

Answers on page 5

Does anyone Recognize this man? The photo was probably taken in the 1980's-1990s. We believe he is the artist who designed the wonderful Wolf Store miniature that was found near Moreno Valley in 2015. The miniature is now on display in the History Center.

Please let us know at sunbrook@hotmail.com if you know who this man is.

Rebecca



He Passed This Way...

Our longtime TVHS member Vincenzo Cilurzo passed into the eternal vineyard a few weeks ago at the age of 91. He and his wife Audrey planted the first commercial vineyard in Temecula in 1968, kicking off the Temecula Wine Country.

We lift a glass of Petite Sirah to salute you, Vince.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Welcome new members:

Peter & Mary Sue Escutin

Thank you for renewing your membership:

Alta Pacific Bank

Ray, Rebecca & Josh Brown

Carolyn Cron

Roger and Lynn Cudé

Suzanne Dechert

Martin Dinsenbacher

Dr. David Elliott & Dr. Anne Miller

Rod & Charlene Fink

Dick & Charolette Fox

Don & Julie Gilbert

Jerry & Darlene Gilbert

Patty Gollnick

Forrest Greenwood & Marti Scott

Douglas & Sally Haserot

Lynn Hornecker

Barbara Mina

Jimmy & Peg Moore

Sally Myers

Dick & Evelyn Norris

William & Claudia Perozzi

Nicholas Shestople

Ray & Rosemary Smith

David Strauss

Mike & Carol Strode

Norm & Betty Taylor

Dana Thoman

Ronald Turco

Karl Weiler

Anthony & Myra Zamora

DICK FELLOWS: HAPLESS HIGHWAYMAN

By Julie Gilbert

On a windy afternoon in 1870, a horsebacked outlaw pointed his pistol at the Santa Barbara stage driver and ordered, "Throw down the box and don't make any sudden moves!"

The old driver struggled to comply, but wasn't fast enough to suit the bandit. "I said be quick about it!" he growled. To encourage the man's cooperation, he fired a shot into the air.

Unfortunately for the desperado, his panic-stricken horse reared, tossing him into cactus. Gingerly he extricated himself, only to tumble down a rocky slope to the bottom of a canyon where, moments later, he found himself looking up the business end of the guard's Winchester.

To his dismay, such was a typical day in the criminal career of Dick Fellows. Only months before, he had successfully pulled another stage heist, after which, with the coach departed, he had gleefully shattered the strongbox lock with his pistol. But his frightened horse galloped off, stranding him 15 miles from town, with a chest too heavy to lug.

Earning no sympathy for his calamity in these and similar efforts, Dick served four years in San Quentin, where prison records show he was a Harvard graduate. Upon his release, the parole board admonished, "try to live within the pale of society". Briefly, Dick did. But soon thereafter he decided his aptitudes and work ethic, if not his equestrian skills, were far more suited to his previous line of employment.

So on December 4, 1875, he again found himself lying in wait for a noon stage, bound south for Caliente. This time, he'd rented a horse from the livery. Everything went like clockwork until, just outside of town, the balky beast threw Dick into the dirt, where he was knocked unconscious.

When he came to, the horse was gone. Never one to panic, he pondered his dilemma and decided, resourcefully, to rob the northbound stage instead, due in two hours. Of course, first he needed a horse.

Striding into town, he found one, stole it, and pulled the heist, during which it is reported he surprised the stage passengers by whistling "The Arkansas Traveler". ("A most credible performance," wrote the San Francisco Chronicle later.) Once the stage had disappeared, however, Dick discovered he had forgotten his lock tools, as well as a sack for the loot.

With darkness falling, and options dwindling, he laboriously began lugging the strongbox toward the horse. But when the animal saw the weighty chest headed his way, he bolted. So, in time-honored outlaw tradition,

Dick buried the treasure, then started for town on foot.

Bone-weary, stumbling along in the dark, he plunged headlong off an 18-foot embankment, sustaining extensive injuries, including a broken ankle. At daybreak, he crawled up to a hilltop where, to his great relief, he spied a farmhouse 200 yards distant.

As he began his slow and painful downhill descent, he spotted an unsaddled horse grazing nearby. Taking heart at his seeming good fortune (simultaneously revealing a streak of admirable optimism), Dick managed to hobble to it, mount and ride away.

Regrettably, this particular horse had thrown a shoe that had been replaced by a mule shoe. The distinctive tracks led a posse to Dick directly.

On June 8, 1876, he was sentenced to eight years in prison. He managed to escape, however, by tunneling under the jail floor with a crutch.

He spent the next few months recuperating from his harrowing experiences, but then, displaying remarkable perseverance, resumed his career more industriously than ever. Virtually declaring war on the stage lines, Dick held up dozens of them throughout California over the next six years. Wanted posters offering \$800 were tacked on every tree and fence post, but he eluded all comers, including Wells Fargo agents.

Finally one cold December morning in 1881, Dick accosted a stage heading through Bakersfield, California. Pride apparently boosted by his growing notoriety, he shouted, "Throw down your weapons and the money box and live to tell your grandchildren that you were robbed by Dick Fellows!"

He got the loot. Unfortunately, with a posse on his heels, he was caught after his horse stepped in a gopher hole and broke its leg.

Things looked unquestionably bleak when Dick was sentenced to life at Folsom Prison. But en route there from jail on February 4, 1882, he made one last desperate attempt for freedom. Overpowering his jailer, he grabbed his gun and fled down an alleyway.

There, he spotted a horse.

He leaped bareback on the mangy animal and raced madly – for about 50 yards. Then the pony started a frenzy of bucking, with Dick holding on for dear life. Finally, the filly won, launching him airborne. Somewhat less spry after landing, Dick was led quietly back to jail by waiting lawmen. For weeks, the townspeople could do nothing but laugh about the outlaw who'd mounted the horse that was awaiting recovery from eating locoweed.

At Folsom Prison, it was said Dick was a model prisoner and could converse engagingly on any subject – save one. When the topic drifted to horses, Dick got a glazed expression and excused himself.

How much do you know about our local history?

Answers:

1. There were at least two non-Native American families farming in that area on Rancho Pauba from the 1850s into the 1870s. They are mentioned in journals of travelers passing through the area. Their names, James Hamilton and Jesse Teel, were included on the list of people to be evicted from the Temecula and Pauba Ranchos when the judgment was issued in 1873. They were probably evicted in 1875, if they had not already left the area. By the 1890s, the owners of Rancho Pauba had begun plans for a dam. After the Vails purchased the rancho in 1905, plans for the dam continued. It was not completed until 1948.

2. In the Spring of 1975, plans were proposed for a large tri-county airport with two 14,000 foot runways to serve Riverside, San Diego, and Orange Counties. The site was to be on 10,000 acres on the Santa Rosa Plateau in the area known as Mesa de Burro. Access from Orange County was planned via a very much-improved Ortega Highway. While at first there was some enthusiasm for the airport, before long there was considerable opposition to it. Within a year or so, the plan died.

For more information, contact Anne Miller at
DMEAJM@earthlink.net

Historical and Genealogical Records: How to Find and Use Them

Interested in learning more about finding and interpreting historical and genealogical documents?

Anne Miller has scheduled a one-hour class for Sunday, May 1st from 1:30 to 2:30 at the History Center. Class size is limited and sign-ups are required so that there will be enough seating and handouts for everyone.

If you would like to attend this class, please e-mail Anne at DMEAJM@earthlink.net

From The President

There is a lot going on—a lot of great activities and learning opportunities.

Through May, a Temecula Valley Museum exhibit “Firepower and Food”—The relationship in the late 1800s.

April 9th a hiking tour “In the footsteps of Delfina Cuero” in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, see www.sandiegoarchaeology.org

Several weekends in April, the Ramona Pageant, see www.ramonabowl.com

May 1st, Anne Miller will give a class at the History Center on conducting research. To sign up, contact her at dmeajm@earthlink.net

May 7th, Riverside County History Symposium and tours at Murrieta Hot Springs, see: www.rivcohistorysymposium.wwbly.com

June 4th Western Heritage Days in Sam Hicks Monument Park, also on June 4th a Civil War conference in the Temecula Civic Center Conference room, see www.gazette665.com/cw-conference-2016.

You are probably aware the Vail Headquarters renovation is coming near to completion. We will announce the dates and times of the grand opening events as soon as we know when they will be. We will need volunteers to present historic displays and to be available to answer visitor’s questions.

We will also need volunteers for some other events:

- Dutch Sister City tour at the History Center on April 25th,
- Nonprofit Expo at Mayor’s State of the City event on April 28th from 7-9:30 a.m. to staff an information table.
- Third grade student tours at the History Center on the mornings of May 3rd, 10th and 12th.
- At the Western Heritage Day celebration TVHS information table June 4th
- At the Temecula Valley Museum Bazaar information table on June 11th.

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Upcoming Events

April 16 - May 1 - The Ramona Pageant will perform their adaptation of Helen Hunt Jackson's story about Native Americans in Southern California at the Ramona Bowl.

See www.riversidecountyhistory.org

Saturday, April 23rd 1—5 P.M. TVHS Open House at David Elliott and Anne Millers Home

Sunday, May 1st, 2016 Class by Anne Miller from 1:30-2:30 on learning more about finding and interpreting historical documents. To be held at the History Center.

Saturday, May 7th, 2016 The Riverside County Symposium will be at the Murrieta Hot Springs Conference Center and will include tours of the historic resort. For more information see www.riversidecountyhistory.org

Saturday, June 4th, 2016 The Temecula Valley Museum is hosting the Western Cultural Days celebration in Sam Hicks Monument Park.

For our regular meetings:

April 25th - Christina Perris will present research she has done on her ancestor Fred Perris, the surveyor who designed the route for the railroad through Temecula Canyon and laid out the town site of Temecula.

May 23rd - Dale Garcia will give a virtual tour of his popular walking tours of Old Town Temecula.

Monthly Meetings are held at the Little Temecula History Center. The Red Barn next to Kohl's Department Store, 32085 Temecula Parkway.

Please join us for a "Meet & Greet" time at 5:30 p.m. prior to the meeting on Monday, April 25th. We would like to get to know you. The one hour meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m.

REFRESHMENTS will be served.

Temecula Valley Historical Society Open House

Saturday April 23rd, 1 to 5 p.m.

TVHS members David Elliott and Anne Miller are having a Open House for TVHS members at their home in La Cresta on Saturday, April 23rd, from 1 to 5 p.m. They have a number of things of interest in their home, from historic items, such a 1800s surveyor's chain, cradleboards, branding irons, Hopi kachinas, and Edward Curtis photographs, to some rather unique contemporary items. They also have a number of paintings and photographs. They will have some displays related to Temecula's history. Light refreshments will be served.

TVHS members should sign-up by calling Phil Washum at (951) 201-0020.

Directions will be provided via email to TVHS members who sign to up to attend this event. Carpooling is strongly encouraged. A good place to meet for carpooling would be near the Starbucks in the Albertson's parking lot on the southeast corner of I-15 and Clinton Keith.

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We will need to supply volunteers at the Vail Headquarters grand openings and ongoing especially on Saturdays, and docents at the History Center on Sunday afternoons.

Please contact me at sunbrook@hotmail.com if you would like to volunteer to help with any of the events above.

It would be wonderful if someone would like to volunteer to take on the task of scheduling volunteers.

Rebecca Farnbach

P.S. For those who were unable to attend the March meeting, here is a link to the topic of the presentation: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/mar/22/walt-disney-presentation-temecula-historical/>

May 2016 TVHS Newsletter ... Anyone having items to be included in the May 2016 Newsletter should submit them to me by April 28, 2016.

Judy Preimsberger, editor

Email: pberger30@verizon.net

Presentation of a TVHS Historical marker to Dax and Kristin Judy, owners of the former Mahlon Vail home, Casa Loma. The plaque reads: Casa Loma, This adobe "house on the hill" overlooking the headquarters of the 87,500 acre Vail/Pauba Ranch was built in 1926 for Mahlon and Irene Vail with an airstrip, golf course and swimming pool. Ranch foreman Louis Roripaugh and his wife Hedy and their family lived there for many years. Temecula Valley Historical Society 2015.



Dax Judy holding the TVHS historical marker



Members of TVHS with Dax, Kristin and their son, Marius

TVHS Tour of Historic Homes

On March 16th, twenty-one TVHS members toured two historic homes in Riverside. The first house was the beautiful Heritage House built in 1891. The Queen Anne-style house was richly decorated and furnished with period pieces offering visitors a glimpse at an earlier lifestyle.

The second home was the Jensen-Alvarado Historical Ranch & Museum. In 1868 Cornelius and Mercedes Alvarado Jensen built a house which was different from any other house in California, in that it was built entirely of brick. Completed in 1870, the house was a mansion for its day. The Jensen home was similar to sea captains houses that Cornelius remembered from his homeland, the Isle of Sylt.

