

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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The Fate of the Spanish Archives

By Steve Williamson

(Author's note: The primary source of information for this article comes from an article written in 1946 by Jacob N. Bowman entitled, "History of the Provincial Archives of California.")

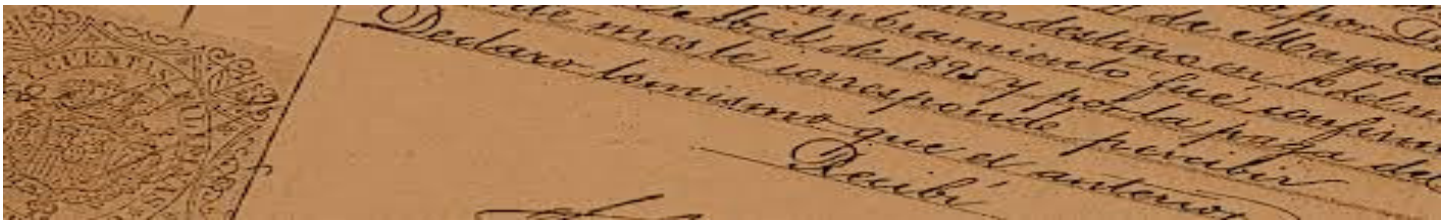
The preservation and archiving of images, maps, and historical documents has always had its challenges. No matter how intense the desire to preserve important documents (which are, after all, only paper), there is an ever-present threat of loss or destruction due to any number of causes.

In our own daily lives, we find ourselves constantly making decisions about which papers can be thrown away and which should be preserved and how. The computer age has made it possible to scan documents for digital preservation. In this way the information can be preserved, whether or not the original document survives. There may still remain a desire to preserve certain original documents, particularly if they have sentimental value – a high school or college diploma, for example. Successive generations may or may not consider these documents worth saving and may very well choose to throw them away. Add to that the potential for loss during a move, or accidental destruction by fire or flood. It thus becomes exceedingly rare to find personal documents that survive more than a hundred years or so.

When it comes to public documents, there is a need for preservation *and*, in many cases, duplication of documents for both legal as well as historical reasons. Imagine, for a moment, what it meant in 1840 to have to make multiple copies of a document, such as a land grant deed. A successful applicant for a Mexican land grant in 1840 would be presented a grant deed, signed by the governor, to hold in his possession as evidence of his right to the land he had been granted. The exact same document would have to be hand-written and signed by the governor to keep in the public records. Either, *or both*, of these records could be lost, damaged, or destroyed, potentially leaving no record whatsoever of the transaction. If a collector, historian, or archival

(Continued on Page 2)





(Continued from Page 1)

The Fate of the Spanish Archives . . .

custodian wanted to have additional copies of any document or file, it meant hiring someone to painstakingly transcribe the document or file by hand. In many cases, a translation also had to be written and transcribed. And now, these documents fall under the threat of loss, damage, or destruction as well.

As one might imagine, the Spanish archives related to the colonization and development of California are extremely important to historians wishing to study the topic today. Yet, many of the Spanish documents which might have been of particular interest to historians today had already been lost by the time anyone took an interest in copying and/or preserving them. It is to the private collectors in the late-1800s and to the State and County officials who were appointed and/or deemed themselves “Keepers of the Archives” that historians today owe their greatest debt of gratitude. Otherwise, all may have been lost.

The first documents to come to California were brought by the Spanish and kept in San Diego in 1769. They were subsequently moved to Monterey, when that location was confirmed as the capital of the province in 1776. There they remained, more or less permanently, until the conquest of California by United States forces in 1846 during the Mexican/American War. It would be helpful, at this time, to note that both the Spanish and Mexican governments divided records into two categories – current files and “dead” files. The meanings of these terms are self-explanatory. Once a “current” issue was completely resolved, documents related to that issue could be relegated to the “dead” file, and at that point became part of the historical record. There was often no central location for the storing of records. In many cases, public records were simply kept at the home of a public official. When a Custom House was built in Monterey, it became a convenient location for storing “dead files.” This prac-

tice would turn out to be particularly unfortunate, as we shall soon see.

The first threat to the Spanish archives was in 1818, when the French privateer, Hipólito Bouchard, sailing under the flag of Argentina, attacked the Spanish capital of Monterey, forcing Spanish authorities to quickly move as many records as they could to the safety of Mission Soledad. Once the threat subsided, the records were returned to Monterey.

It is important to note here that, in addition to the classification of “current” and “dead” files, there was also a huge volume of correspondence, decrees, military orders, and mission records that was being generated and being kept by a variety of custodians in a variety of locations. The missions, the presidios, and the homes of a variety of government officials became the *de facto* storage facilities for many of these documents.

In 1826 some of the document files (most likely those of a “current” nature) were transferred from Monterey to San Diego, the seat of government for then governor José Maria de Echelandía, while many of the “dead” files remained in Monterey. In 1845 Governor Pio Pico ordered that all archival records be moved to his seat of government in Pueblo de Los Angeles. That order was never fully implemented due to the outbreak of war between Mexico and the United States the following year. As often happens in the face of war and political upheaval, things got a little complicated regarding the disposition of archival records at that point.

First, it was the understanding of the invading American forces that the seat of power for the Mexican government in California at that time was in Los Angeles where the governor resided. It was presumed that any and all important government documents would be kept there. Thus, the documents located in Monterey were considered to be of little or

(Continued on Page 3)



(Continued from Page 2)

The Fate of the Spanish Archives . . .

no importance, particularly those kept at the Custom House. Unable to read the Spanish documents, U.S. soldiers used the paper for making cartridges for their weapons. Worse yet, the Custom House was turned into a makeshift hospital and the documents being stored there were used as “waste paper” (I’ll leave it to the reader to imagine what the term “waste paper” could possibly mean). It would not be until 1847 that the true importance of the Monterey archives was realized. It is impossible to know exactly how many important Spanish documents may have been lost during this period of time.

In Los Angeles, with the threat of invasion imminent, Governor Pio Pico moved many of the government papers being stored there to the home of his friend, prominent businessman Luis Vignes, for safekeeping. Pico then left for Baja California to plead his case for the opportunity to organize a civilian militia to repel the invading American forces. When Commodore Robert F. Stockton sailed into the harbor at San Pedro and captured the City of Los Angeles on August 13, 1846, he found the Spanish archives missing. The next day, Stockton issued an order to the citizens of Los Angeles requiring that whosoever was secreting any Mexican government documents immediately turn them over. Vignes, and others, had no choice but to comply.

According to testimony offered years later by Abel Stearns, Stockton had a number of boxes of government papers loaded onto his ship for transport back to Monterey. However, there is also testimony by John C. Fremont that Stockton put him in charge of some of the material (further testimony suggests that these were land grant documents), which he had loaded onto mules and transported overland to Sutter’s Fort, near modern-day Sacramento.

Fremont maintained possession of these documents until the end of September, 1846, when he left them in care of Lt. Edward Kern while Fremont and

his California Battalion left Sutter’s Fort to descend upon and capture the presidio at Santa Barbara.

The records being stored at Sutter’s Fort remained there until March 17, 1847, when General Stephen Kearney ordered they be brought to Monterey and added to the stores of Spanish documents being collected there. These two collections of Spanish documents by representatives of the United States government – the first in Los Angeles and the second in Monterey – represent the first two attempts to collect together in one place all known Spanish archival documents. There would be three more: one in 1858 following the work of the U.S. Land Commission; another in 1863; and a final collection of Spanish archives in 1891.

It is estimated that roughly 85% of all known Spanish archival material had been collected in Monterey by 1849. Put in charge of all of this material was Henry W. Halleck, who hired William Hartnell, who was bilingual, to help him categorize and index the archives.

In 1850 the archives were transported to the town of Sonoma and Henry Halleck transferred responsibility for the archives to Major Edward Canby. By March of 1851 the United States government had established a U.S. Surveyor General’s office in San Francisco to survey the public lands of the State. On July 1, 1851 the archives, including the private land *expedientes*, were transported to the Surveyor General’s office in San Francisco.

In that same year, the U.S. government authorized the creation of a Board of Land Commissioners to hear and make decisions as to the rights of hundreds of Mexican citizens with deeds to land granted them by the Mexican government. The work of the Land Commission commenced in 1852. During the four years the Land Commission considered these claims, they retained possession of

(Continued on Page 4)



(Continued from Page 3)

The Fate of the Spanish Archives . . .

thousands of expedientes and diseños needed to help them make their legal determinations. In 1856 the Commission returned to the Surveyor General's office all of the land grant documents in their possession.

On May 18, 1858 the United States Congress passed legislation authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to "collect and deposit in the office of the California Surveyor General all documents and archives in the State pertaining to the former provincial government..." This legislation included search and seizure warrants, plus fines of up to \$5,000 and/or ten years in prison for defiance of this legislation. Because litigation regarding the Mexican land grants continued for many more years, the expedientes were kept separate from the general Spanish archives and on March 3, 1879 Congress provided for the expenditure of \$1,000 for the purchase of an iron safe to be installed in the Surveyor General's office in San Francisco for the protection and preservation of the land grant expedientes. The idea of gathering in one place, in this case San Francisco since it was the most populous city in the west and therefore the most convenient location for accessing material, may have seemed like a good idea at the time. However, fifty years later it would prove to have been the gravest of mistakes.

Between 1866 and 1871 the State of California authorized the expenditure of funds necessary to procure its own copies of the Mexican land grant documents to make it more convenient for State officials there to answer the many questions coming from the citizens of California regarding the legal title to land within the State. These handwritten certified copies of the Mexican land grant *expedientes* remain to this day among the Spanish Documents of the State Archives in Sacramento.

During the entire second half of the 19th century, historian Hubert Bancroft was compiling his own pri-

vate collection of historical documents related to California, New Mexico, and Arizona as part of his determination to write the definitive history of the Great American West. On May 15, 1876 he sent S. M. Rollins and Thomas Savage, along with 15 clerks under their supervision, to San Francisco to begin the painstaking work of transcribing by hand every Spanish document contained in the archives being held at the U.S. Surveyor General's office, including every page of Mexican land grant documents. The project took more than a year to complete at a total cost of \$18,000. The Bancroft collection is in 63 volumes which contain a total of 23,890 pages. This collection represents the most complete collection of Spanish and Mexican documents known to exist. They formed the basis for Bancroft's monumental work on the history of the West and have been invaluable to historians ever since their creation.

By 1894 Hubert Bancroft realized the value of his vast collection of historical documents. He began a search for a permanent home for his thousands of volumes of documents and records. On November 24, 1905 Bancroft sold his complete collection to the University of California at Berkeley for \$250,000 (a fraction of its true value). The process of transporting the collection from Bancroft's bookstore warehouse in San Francisco to the University campus in Berkeley began immediately.

The transportation of the Bancroft collection was very nearly complete when, on April 18, 1906 an earthquake struck the City of San Francisco. The fire that followed the earthquake destroyed some 80% of the city over the course of the next few days. In the center of the city, the U.S. Surveyor General's office and all of its contents burned completely to the ground. Lost in the fire was the entire collection of Spanish archives which had been stored at the Surveyor General's office for more than fifty years. The

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(Continued from Page 4)

The Fate of the Spanish Archives . . .

only documents that survived the fire were the Mexican land grant expedientes which had been locked in the iron safe in which they had been stored since 1879. A number of those documents were charred and blackened. Nevertheless, they did survive and are now part of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

The State of California's copies of the land grant expedientes, which were copied between 1866 and 1871, remain to this day in the State Archives in Sacramento. As for the thousands of original Spanish documents which made up the general archives relating to the colonization and development of Alta California, they were completely destroyed by the fire of 1906. The only record that exists today of what information they contained is in the handwritten copies of the Spanish archives commissioned by Hubert Bancroft in 1876-77 and currently being preserved and protected by the University of California at Berkeley. It is by pure luck (or providence) that these documents left San Francisco for Berkeley only months before the earthquake and fire which likely would have consumed them as well.

To the casual viewer today, the handwritten Bancroft copies of the Mexican expedientes might look for all the world like "original" Mexican documents, except for one thing – at the bottom of each of the land grant deeds, where the official seal of the governor would normally be, is what looks like a hand-drawn flower with the word "Seal" written in the middle of it, reflecting the fact that this is where

the governor's seal was located on the original document. This is a sad and poignant reminder of the tragic loss of so many valuable and irreplaceable documents.

Author's Note: There is an additional bit of irony to this story which I will include as a post script to this article, to wit:

Following on the heels of Congress's appropriation in 1879 of \$1,000 for the purchase of an iron safe for the preservation and protection of the Spanish land grant expedientes, Congress further ordered that a complete set of copies, abstracts, translations, and indexes of the Spanish archives be prepared. (Congress seems to have been content to leave the original archives in San Francisco, but wanted a second copy, perhaps for the National Archives.) Work on this project began in 1880 and continued for ten years. By 1891, \$20,000 had been spent and it was estimated that two more years was needed to complete the task. A new Surveyor General was appointed and work was suspended until 1898, when Frederick Hall was named the new Keeper of the Archives. Work resumed and, by 1902, 134 of the 301 bound volumes of the Spanish archives had been transcribed. A total of 14,694 pages had been painstakingly copied by hand up to that point. The work was being done at the Surveyor General's office under the supervision of the Keeper of the Archives.

Since this work was being performed at the behest of Congress, one might presume that, when the work was completed, the complete set of transcriptions, translations, and indexes would have been transported to the National Archives in Washington, D.C. However, since the work was still incomplete and the project was still ongoing, these 13 volumes of transcriptions were still at the U.S. Surveyor General's office in April of 1906 and met the same fate as the original Spanish archives.

Miguel Diaz: Vail Cowboy, Storied Local Bank Robber and POET

*Read about this interesting twist to a local legend
In next month's issue of the TVHS Newsletter.*

The Yeggman's Surprise

By Jeffery Harmon

In May 1920, the First National Bank of Temecula installed in the vault a device called the Yeggman's Surprise. A Yeggman was a safecracker who worked at night. He would drill a hole in the safe door, pour a little nitroglycerin in, and blow the safe door open. The Yeggman's Surprise was manufactured by the Surprise Manufacturing Company in Peru, Indiana. The device was a glass bottle filled with chemicals. When the Yeggman broke the bottle, he would be gassed by the released chemicals and knocked unconscious. Not surprising, the product was not on the market for long.

John E. Braun and his wife, Katherine, owners of the Surprise Manufacturing Co., were arrested for mail fraud in June 1920. The couple also operated the Christian Health Institute. The institute sold "blessed handkerchiefs" that Katherine would lay her hands on, imparting a healing power. The purchaser would then receive the handkerchief in the mail and experience a miraculous healing. After many dissatisfied customers filed complaints, the couple was arrested.

Mr. Braun explained to the judge that he had already taken two trips to Leavenworth State Prison for similar mail fraud charges. The Surprise Manufacturing Co. was his way of trying to make an honest living. The judge sentenced John Braun to three years in the Atlanta, Georgia penitentiary. Mrs. Braun was asked if she could stop her "healing" ministry. She stated she could, but she never told the judge she would. She was sentenced to one year in a woman's prison.

To date, research has revealed no evidence of a Yeggman attempting to rob Temecula's bank. In 1930, Miguel Diaz, an armed robber entered the bank, forced the two employees into the vault to lock them in, and escaped with the cash. It was not the Yeggman's Surprise that thwarted Diaz's crime, but a simple screwdriver. The bank manager jammed the screwdriver into the vault door, allowing the employees to escape and raise the alarm before Diaz made away with the loot.

The Braun couple was charged with mail fraud because of the "blessed handkerchiefs". There are no known cases of mail fraud related to the Yeggman's Surprise. The device was sold for a brief time before the company was closed due to the imprisonment of its owners. Research has not revealed any known cases of a Yeggman being gassed by the safe's device and that is no surprise.

(Additional research provided by Shirley Griffin, Archivist, Miami County Museum)

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From the Archives: May 21, 1920 Lake Elsinore Valley Press

Temecula Bank Offers Safety

Edward Greenfield, cashier of the First National Bank of Temecula, recently conducted a representative of the PRESS through the banking rooms and vaults of that strong and growing institution. Particular attention was directed in a new device installed in the vault entrance known as "Yeggman's Surprise," rendering the burglarizing of the vaults impossible.

Greenfield stated that conditions in the Temecula section are better than in other parts of the state. There has been no damage by frost, the wheat and barley are (filling?) up and filling out splendidly, and old residents say that this is going to be the most prosperous year agriculturally of any for thirty years.

"Several ranchers," said the banker, "are meeting the scarcity of labor by buying harvesters, which will do the work of several men, and they will undoubtedly get through the season unhampered by reason of insufficient farm help."

Elsewhere in the issue appears the statement of condition of the First National Bank of Temecula as made to the Comptroller at the close of business on May 4th. It shows the bank in sound condition inspiring the confidence of all depositors.

The bank is considering the installation of additional safe deposit boxes, there now being only one unrented box. With the additional protection offered to safe deposit box renters, there is no longer a necessity of Temecula people getting out of town for safe deposit protection.

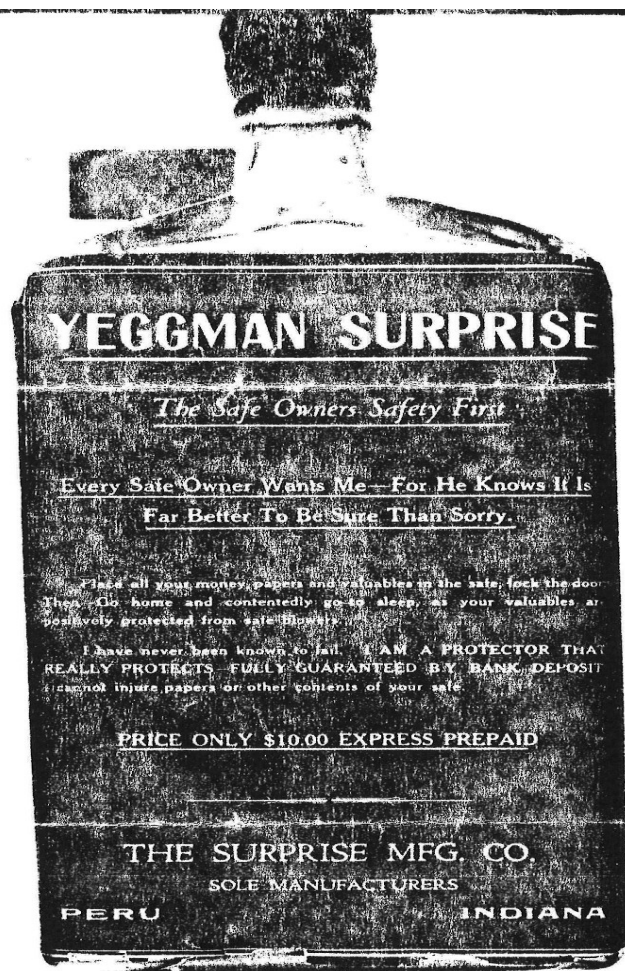


Photo Courtesy of the Miami County Museum

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



When we formed the Temecula Valley Historical Society our annual dinners were designed to be a time to give end of year committee reports and to announce changes in the officers and board of directors, but it has grown to be a not-to-be-missed signature event and an important fundraiser for our scholarship fund. You may know that we select four students each year who are planning careers in history related fields, four students from the Temecula and Murrieta high schools, and give them each a \$2,000 college scholarship. These are the people who will take our places when we are no longer able to advocate for local history. During our annual dinner in November we netted \$3,600 toward our \$4,000 scholarship goal for the year.

As far as our annual report, we are a thriving society. We are publishing a wonderful newsletter each month, thanks to Dick Fox. We have monthly history articles in Valley News, thanks to Bonnie Martland. Several lovely women go into the community to do living history programs with the Notable Women of Temecula, chaired by Lynn Cudé. We have a wonderful volunteer base, chaired by Sue Blanch and Suzanne Dechert.

Bob Kent has catalogued all the historical plaques in the area, Roger Cudé and others have revamped our website. Roger has digitized all of our past newsletters and has put them onto our website.

Lynn Cudé has chaired a committee to provide refreshments during our pre-meeting social time. Phil Washum has led several enjoyable field trips. We have enjoyed ten wonderful presentations. And our membership has increased.

It is not difficult to be the president for an organization like this where so many people take on important responsibilities that make our organization thrive. When Judy Preimsberger became ill, Dick Fox and Roger Cudé stepped in and took over her responsibilities with our newsletter. When our well-loved Secretary Jimmy Moore passed away, Cheryl Cady stepped in to cover his position.

This has been a landmark year for us as we have watched and assisted our sister city Murrieta form their own historical society under the capable leadership of our board member Jeffery Harmon. It is also a milestone to witness the opening of the Historic Vail Ranch Headquarters site, a goal that some of our members have been working toward for 18 years.

Now, regarding our officers and board members; it is with sadness that I announce that Myra Masiel-Zamora will be stepping down from her board position to fulfill other responsibilities. Bonnie Reed is also leaving us. We hope both will be back on our board soon. We welcome Bonnie Martland, Elaine Culverhouse and Darell Farnbach who have agreed to return the board.

Going into 2017 we will continue to encourage the City of Temecula to enact the Mills Act to reduce tax liability for property owners who take on historic properties. We will continue to identify and preserve historic properties and will continue to present information about local history in print, and when we meet together monthly. And we will continue to have enjoyable social events that bring us together for fun and learning experiences.

Thanks to each of you for being members of the Temecula Valley Historical Society. Your participation means so much to all of us. Happy New Year!

Rebecca Farnbach



February TVHS Tour Planned To Riverside Mission Inn

In February, The Historical Society will be offering a docent-led tour to the famous Mission Inn located in Riverside. The tour lasts approximately 1-1/2 hours, is slow-paced, and the tour fee is \$11.00 per person.

As usual we will meet at the Red Barn to carpool together. The tour date will be announced at the TVHS January 23rd program, and a signup sheet will be passed around to everyone. Tour members can have lunch individually at any of the Inn restaurants or at a restaurant in the surrounding area. Contact Phil Washum for more information (951) 201-0020.

***** Membership News *****

Welcome New Members

Brad & Cori Dehore

Thank you for renewing your membership:

Arlie Bergman
Shari Crall
Dax & Kristin Judy
Mike & Shelley Leddy
Vernette Mackley
Margaret Melton
Manny & Linda Robles
Phil & Char Washum

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Every Sunday — Sunday Funday at the Vail Headquarters will resume Jan. 8th — 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Rides, demonstrations & activities. Consider volunteering. Don't forget Tuesday's Farmer's Market from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Tuesday, January 3, 2017 – 1:00 p.m. Bob Kent will be giving a presentation for the Lake Elsinore Historical Society, "Woman's Land Army of World War I in Riverside County" at the Lake Elsinore Museum.

Monday, January 9, 2017 – 6:00 p.m. Murrieta Valley Historical Society will be hosting Carl Love presenting stories from his book "From Two Lanes to the Fast Lane," followed by Q&A, and book signing. Hunt House, 41810 Juniper St., Murrieta.

Monday, January 23, 2017 – 6:00 p.m. monthly presentation & program by Dr. Anne Miller "Maria's Story: A Young Woman in Temecula in the Mid-1800s" about the life of Maria Apis. Regular board meeting to follow, public always welcome.

Monday, February 27, 2017 — 6:00 pm. monthly program with presentation by Roger Cudé about the preparations that were made for outfitting and provisioning the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Board meeting to follow, public always welcome.

Tuesday, March 14, 2017 — 1:30 p.m. at the Ronald Roberts Temecula Library on Pauba Road, The Notable Women of Temecula will perform. This is in conjunction with National Women's History Month, and is open to public.

Monday, March 27, 2017 — Join the Temecula Valley Historical Society for a presentation by The Notable Women of Temecula; Sue Sorg as Catherine Fernald; Lynn Cudé as Edna Swanguen; and Mindy Johnson presenting Maria Apis. Come and learn what life was like for these women who were living in the Temecula Valley in the past.