



San Juan Capistrano HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Journal

WINTER 2020

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at the Mission

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O'Neill Museum

Home of the San Juan Capistrano
Historical Society

Hours: Wed-Sun
9 am - noon 1 - 4 pm
(949) 493-8444

www.sjchistoricalociety.org

MARCH GENERAL MEETING

We will be having our semi-annual General Meeting with a special Guest Speaker on Sunday, March 1, 2020. General meetings are held in March and November and are open to all guests and members. Please join us at the San Juan Capistrano Community Center 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

An update on the Society's activities and accomplishments will be presented, and we will have the annual election of Board members.

Harrison Taylor, Jan Siegel, Sheree Ito, and Rhonda deHaan are seeking reelection. Matt Gaffney has decided not to continue with the board. Nominations will be accepted at the meeting for the vacancy. Board members are elected for 3-year terms.

HISTORIC ADOBE AND ART GALLERY

We have recently had gallery showings in the Silvas Adobe for artists Kathy Harder and David Imlay. They were enthusiastically received and very successful. The adobe has become an incredible venue, and we are looking forward to having more art events and private parties at this quaint historic site. Contact Chevron at (949) 493-8444 for more information.



Kathy Harder
"Panadero Study"
Watercolor

SWALLOWS DAY PARADE

See us in the parade!

The San Juan Capistrano Historical Society has an entry in the Swallows Day parade. Look for us on Saturday, March 21, 2020. Parade starts at 11 am.

Society Christmas Tree



The Festival of Lights at Mission San Juan Capistrano had a new component this year. Non-profits and businesses were asked to participate in decorating Christmas trees provided by the Mission. The Society Board unanimously agreed to participate. Jan Siegel readily lead an incredible committee, which included Diane Lewis, Mozelle Sukut, Monique Rae, Arlene Menon, and Cindy Tortomasi, that made ornaments for the tree.

The theme was Celebrating Capistrano Cultures, and the Society's tree displayed it with incredible creativity. Various aspects of the city's heritage were represented in recognition of the Native Americans, Spaniards, Missionaries, English, Yankees, Basques, and Mexicans, among others, who have contributed to this city's unique history.

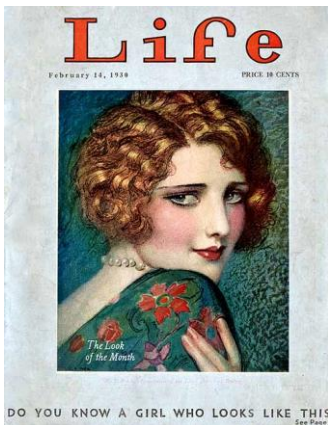
Diane Lewis, Mozelle Sukut, and Monique Rae made ornaments in the form of historical figures. Acu was shown giving grapes to Fr. O'Sullivan. Modjeska was fashioned in the costume of one of her favorite roles. Bouchard was with his ship, Oscar Rosenbaum with a Christmas tree, Richard Egan with a telegraph, and Isadora Forster to name a few. The actual faces of the figures were put on the models, and they were all dressed in appropriate period dress. They were amazing!

The historic figures were placed all over the tree. Acorns, berries, and baskets represented the Native American culture, and the Juaneño god Chinigchinich was placed at the top. A nativity scene at the bottom of the tree represented the Mexican culture of celebrating Christmas before the tree came to San Juan Capistrano. The thirteen flags that flew over California were also represented.

It was a tremendous effort by a very creative group of volunteers. Kudos and thank you all for an inspired tree.

The Close of An Incredible Exhibit

After seven months, the W.T. Benda exhibit ended. Thanks to Diane Lewis and her amazing collection of Benda memorabilia, this exhibit was a huge success. Diane was the chief docent for the entire seven months, keeping the Leck House open 4 days a week.



Benda had two incredible careers, and it is unfortunate that his creativity has not been more celebrated. As an illustrator for magazines and books, he was able to bring characters to life. Whether black and white or color, his images were compelling. The females in his art were exotic figures, inspired by those of his native Poland. They struck a chord with first-and second-generation American women and helped them feel part of this country. He spent 30 years at Colliers and also did work for many other major magazines of the day. His second career was as a mask maker. Benda became a world-renowned authority, and he was so good at his craft that he wrote the article on the art of mask making in the 1932 Encyclopedia Britannica. Diane's talk on Benda at our semi-annual meeting in November helped everyone understand the importance of this man's work.

Decade in Review

Many changes have happened at the Historical Society over the past decade. While the Society has its foundation in the past, it has eyes on preserving that foundation for the future. "Remembering Our Past Ensures our Future" is not just our motto but our daily commitment, as proven by recent years of hard work at the Society.

The decade opened with an exhibit recognizing the 100th anniversary of the founding of Mission San Juan Capistrano by Father St. John O'Sullivan. This exhibit was put together with the help of Father Bill Keckelberg, Mission Archivist. In 1912, Fr. O'Sullivan wrote a pamphlet titled "Little Chapters About San Juan Capistrano" and the booklet was sold for ten cents a copy to raise money for the Mission's restoration. In 2010, the Society published "Little Chapters About Father St. John O'Sullivan" to commemorate his life.

The year 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of the city of San Juan Capistrano. The Society participated in many year-long memorial activities. David Belardes helped kick off the year with a presentation of never before seen photographs from his Alfonso Yorba photographic collection. The culmination of anniversary events occurred in January 2012 when the Society welcomed Governor Jerry Brown to San Juan Capistrano. Since his father, Pat Brown, was California's governor in 1961 and had attended the city's incorporation ceremonies, it seemed fitting to invite his son to help celebrate the landmark anniversary. A short time later, the Society buried a time capsule containing memorabilia from Society members as well as a flag the governor signed and a copy of a newspaper article about his visit. The site of the time capsule is marked by a plaque set in the walkway as visitors approach the stairs leading into the O'Neill Museum.

The 50th anniversary of the Historical Society was in 2013, and several events celebrated the milestone. Steve Oedekerck produced a special video, and a dinner dance at El Adobe Restaurant wrapped up the festivities in remembrance of the Society's first fundraiser held there. 2013 was also when the Society started its Fiesta Days community outreach program. This annual event is the kick-off of National Preservation Month in May. It is free to the public and features exhibits, games, demonstrations, arts and crafts to highlight life as it was over 100 years ago. Two of the day's favorites are Bea Torres and her demonstration on the art of making tortillas and Bob Minty's whaling exhibit. They are part of a fun event brings more and more people to the Society every year.

This past decade was one of outstanding volunteerism for the Society. Led by El Presidente Tom Ostensen, a dedicated group of volunteers started a five-year journey to restore the Silvas Adobe. The "experts" said that the Adobe could not be saved. Fighting words to historical preservationists. Scott Gates, Harrison Taylor, Steve Behmerwohld, Dick Paulsen, and Fred Frank along with Tom Ostensen spent nearly every weekend proving the experts wrong. Other team members



who contributed many hours were Mark Rottmann, Jim Reid, and David Fabrick. They learned how to make handmade adobe bricks and how to restore a 150-year old roof. In doing all this work, they discovered that the foundation of this adobe was built on top of a 1794 adobe! After a half decade of tireless effort, the Society now has not only a beautifully restored historic adobe but also additional space for exhibits and special events.



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There is always work to do at the Society, and this intrepid group of volunteers was not done. Unfortunately, after years of trying to save the grand old oak tree, it died due to a bore beetle infestation and had to be removed. Our volunteer workers constructed a “dance floor” in the area where the tree had been. The Society now has additional even, stone-paved space for events as well as a place for setting up special demonstrations.

The Society has hosted a number of events over the past decade. We’ve enjoyed "A Talk with Judge Egan", which was moderated by Michelle Kelly and starred Judge Warren Siegel in the title role, and viewed a screening of Bob Kline’s movie on the history of Camp Pendleton. The popular Annual Heritage BBQ moved from the O’Neill Ranch to the Society’s grounds and will be incorporated with our Annual June Mixer starting this year. A long-time favorite, the annual Ghost Tours have been expanded with Harrison Taylor at the helm, seeing increased visitor enthusiasm and attendance. This Halloween event has become a major fund raiser for the Society and just keeps getting better and better.

Last year the Society began Historical Walks on the grounds. With the Leck House and completed restoration of the Silvas Adobe, there is much to talk about. Ann Ronan and Monica Makai run this program which also includes a brief narrative about the Historic Los Rios District. Tours are given every Saturday at 10:00 a.m. and by appointment during the week.

The Leck House has featured exhibits throughout the decade. Starting with Father O’Sullivan, featured topics have included Bill Hardy at 90,



Madame Modejska, the Founding Fathers of San Juan Capistrano, the Women of San Juan Capistrano, the Leck House at 100, the History of Farming in the Capistrano Valley, the History of Camp Pendleton, the Avila Family, the Forster Family, Father Junipero Serra, the 250th Anniversary of the Portola Ride, Bouchard the Pirate, and the artist W.T. Benda. These exhibits were made possible by Diane Lewis, Mozelle Sukut, Mark Rottman, Karen Rottman, Bill Minty, the Camp Pendleton Historical Society, Mission San Juan Capistrano, Fr. Bill Keckelberg, the Avila Family, and the Forster Family. Diane Lewis is the ‘docent of the decade’ for the Leck exhibits, keeping them open three to four days a week as well as contributing memorabilia for displays.



With the completion of the Silvas Adobe, the Society has additional exhibition space and been able to add a Day of the Dead exhibit as well as participate in the celebration. With the help of Nina Ostensen, the Forster family, and Abel Silvas, the initial exhibit in 2018 featured altars dedicated to Tony Forster and the Silvas Family. The 2019 exhibit was on the history of sugar skulls.

We are proud of the historic resources available at the Society, including a video on the history of San Juan Capistrano that was produced for the 50th event by Pam Gibson. The silent film "For the Soul of Rafael," which was filmed in San Juan Capistrano, was found and is also available for viewing (it’s

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In Memory of Phyllis (Baltierra) Aye

Phyllis was born in Pomona, CA. She was raised in Capistrano Beach until 1938 when she moved to San Juan Capistrano where she resided in a family of 10 siblings (she being the eldest of four girls). Phyllis attended Mission School 1st through 8th grade. She went on to graduate from Capistrano High and attended Orange Coast College for 1 year. She enjoyed academics, participating in Home Economics and GAA during her 4 years at Capo High.



Phyllis Aye
March 6, 1933 –
September 5, 2019

In 1955, she married and started her family of two sons, whom she raised on her own due to an accidental death of her first husband. In 1965, she met her final mate, Danny Aye, who took her and her children and gave them their home. On April 10, 1968, another miracle happened, their third son was born. For the next 22 years, Danny and Phyllis enjoyed the fun of moving a bus load of grand and great grandkids. Dan and Phyllis enjoyed great vacations including trips to Hawaii and Mexico. They covered 43 of our United States, covering 41 states in one trip of 30 plus days. Dan spent many years serving the community as an insurance agent in San Juan Capistrano, and, after 15 years of hard work, Phyllis retired from the Orange County Water District.

Phyllis leaves behind her husband of 53 years, two sons, four brothers, one sister and twenty nephews and nieces. She will be missed very much.

In Memory of Stephen “Steve” Hile



Steve Hile of Indio, CA, 71 years old passed peacefully on October 18, 2019, at home surrounded by his loving family after complications with cancer.

Born in Boulder, CO, he moved to Capistrano Beach, CA, when he was 3 years old. He became an avid swimmer in high school and was a formidable competitor on the San Clemente High School swim team. After graduating, he had the fortunate opportunity to be a team member of “The Magnificent 7” that swept all swim meets during a two-month tour through Washington state and Canada in the summer of 1967. From 1969 to 1970, Steve served honorably in the Army and was stationed throughout Vietnam,

Cambodia and Laos, and he was a “Bronze Star” recipient.

Steve was married to Mary Ann Newhart in September 1973, and they raised their two sons in San Juan Capistrano. He loved building cars (hot rods and coups).

Steve is survived by his wife of 46 years and his two sons, Cory Hile of San Clemente and Erik Hile, with daughter-in-law Matia and granddaughter Evangeline of Queen Creek, AZ; his sister Mary Hile Longpre and brother Randy Hile as well as many nieces and nephews and extended family he loved. Steve will be greatly missed by all his family and friends. His celebration of life was held at November 9, 2019, at the Community Presbyterian Church of San Juan Capistrano.

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amazing how the surrounding hillsides look the same now as in the movie). The Society also has a copy of the first movie made in Orange County, "Two Brothers". In 2018, the trial of Pirate/Patriot Bouchard was staged in collaboration by the San Juan Capistrano and Dana Point Historical Societies, an event that was also filmed and available for viewing. The Society library of books, housed at the O'Neill Museum, has been completely catalogued and represents one of the best collections of local history.

Since the beginning of the Historical Society one person has been a constant both as a volunteer and our only paid employee. At the age of 90, Gwen Vermeulen reluctantly retired. It is impossible to list all the things that she did for the Society. Without her years of dedication, the Society would not have grown into what it is today. At the June mixer of 2018, we celebrated her 90th birthday and recognized her for your forty years of service. In her honor, a brass plaque designates the "Gwen Vermeulen Reception Room."



The Historical Society saw the loss of old friends and members, but no one will be more missed than Don Tryon. Don, with his first wife Mary, took charge of the Society archives. When they began their efforts, photographs were in complete disarray. The couple started decades of sorting, organizing and preserving these local treasures. Our collection of over 13,000 local pictures are now being digitized. In addition to archiving, Don wrote articles about the history of San Juan Capistrano for both the Orange County Register and the Capistrano Dispatch. He, along with Mary, also wrote several books about the city which are available at the Society. Don Tryon, friend,

Board Member, volunteer will forever be remembered.

In May of 2019, the Society Matriarch, Helen McMullen, passed away. Cecelia Hunn was unanimously voted the new Matriarch. Cecelia was born in the Oyharzabal house, which is part of the Historical Society property. She is married to Happy Hunn, who is the Society Patriarch. This is the first time that we have had a husband and wife team as Matriarch and Patriarch, and we are honored to have them as Society representatives.

This has been an amazing decade for the Society. Join us for the next decade as we continue in the spirit of our motto, "Remembering Our Past Ensures Our Future".

Honoring Don Tryon

The San Juan Capistrano Historical Society is proud to honor Don Tryon's service to the Society and the preservation of San Juan's history. Don was the Archivist for the Society for over 25 years, and the Society's Archive Room now has a brass marker in dedication of his accomplishments.

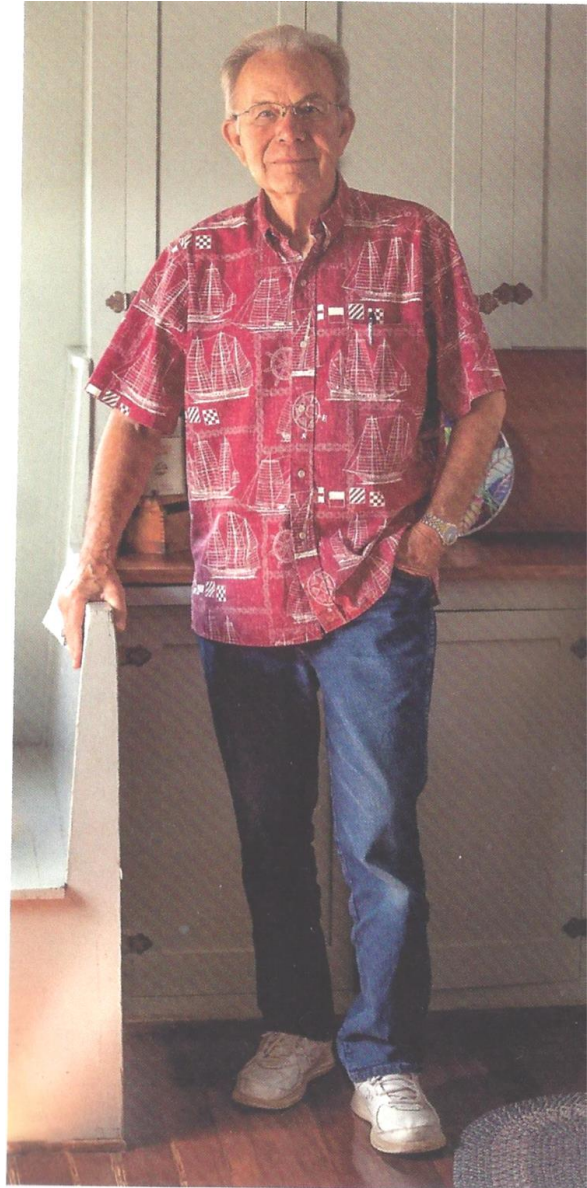
Don was a native Californian born in Los Angeles. He served for 3 years in the Coast Guard and 38 years in the oil industry, both of which moved Don to other states at various times, but he always returned to California.

In retirement, Don and his late wife, Mary, who died in March of 2008, moved from La Palma where they had been living, to San Juan Capistrano. After the move, Don became active with the Mission Archeological team and the Fiesta Association. While with the Fiesta Association, Don was on its board as Publicity Chairman, with the responsibility of creating the annual Swallows' Day Parade brochure. Mary invited Don to the O'Neill Museum to locate photos for the brochure. Don discovered the photo collection was in disarray. Thinking it would be a fairly simple exercise, Don laughingly says he made a mistake asking Gwen Vermeulen, Society secretary, to let Tony Forster, then Society president, know that he would like to organize the collection. Tony appreciated Don's efforts and successfully recruited him for the Society board of directors.

When many of San Juan's established families heard of Don, and the Society's photo archive, they offered their collections to be copied, and some gave their collections to the Society. In doing research, Don discovered that other institutions had excellent photos of the area and many of these were added to the Society's collection. The archived photo collection grew to over 10,000 images under Don's diligence and is still growing.

With all the research Don had done, when asked who some of his favorite characters were from San Juan's historic past, Don stated they were: Padre Junipero Serra, John and Marco Forster, and his very favorite, Judge Richard Egan. Don's inspiration for local history came largely from Tony and Pat Forster, Dick Mendelson, and David Belardes.

The San Juan Capistrano Historical Society is proud and exceedingly grateful of the work Don did on its behalf. We believe Don's dedication to preserving history has inspired countless others in their own pursuits of learning and preserving history for generations to come.





Remember to Renew Your Membership!



We appreciate all our members and friends, and thank them for all the support they give to the Society as it endeavors to continue its preservation and education efforts.

Contact Us

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Historical Society**
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Happy Birthday, Gwen!
March 22nd