

### Museum News

August 23 - November 3: Native American Baskets Exhibit; from the Gatekeepers Museum, Tahoe City

California Indians basket weavers are renowned for their skill and the beauty of their baskets.

This year's exhibit features stunning Washoe baskets from The Gatekeeper's Museum in Tahoe City, used for storage and gifts. Here is your chance to view rarely displayed baskets by talented basket weavers from the early twentieth century.

September 14 – November 3: Indian Life Exhibit & Program

November 13 – December 29: Christmas Memories Exhibit

#### Walking Tours

#### Alamo Historic Cemetery Tours

2012 Town of Danville Tours

Saturday, October 27

Fridays at 6:15 (third Friday of each month)

Open to the public, no reservation required.

Meet at the Village Theatre

The requested donation is \$3 per person

Led by Town Council Member Karen Stepper

Meet at the Alamo Cemetery at 10am.

September 21, October 19

Saturdays at 10am (second Saturday of each month) Meet at the Museum

September 8, October 13 The requested donation is \$3 per person. No reservations required.

#### General

When the Museum is open, a trained docent is always on duty and can provide exhibit tours for visitors who drop in. Reserved tours are also available during open or closed hours by appointment. Large groups are encouraged to call ahead to assure that a docent is available specifically for your group.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is located on the southwest corner of Prospect and Railroad Avenues [P.O. Box 39, Danville, CA, 94526, (925) 837-3750]. Hours: 1-4 pm Tuesday-Friday, 10 am.-1 pm. Saturday.

The information above was taken from the Museum's informative website, [www.museumsv.org](http://www.museumsv.org).

**Need a Ride To The Society Meeting On September 20th? Contact Bill Lloyd: 837-**

*Over 42 Years Looking Back!*



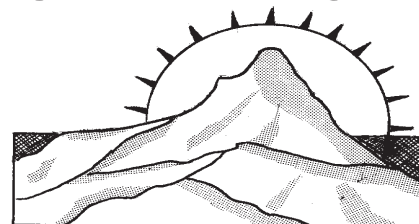
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SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 521 • DANVILLE, CALIFORNIA 94526

**NEXT MEETING  
THURSDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 20TH  
"Contra Costa Place Names"  
Streets, Neighborhoods,  
Towns**

## SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



September 2012

ALAMO · BLACKHAWK · DANVILLE · DIABLO · SAN RAMON

### Sourdough Steve Brought Gold Flakes And Told Us About Life In The Mines At March Dinner Meeting

Steve Johnson is a high school history teacher. At the dinner meeting on May 17th, Steve was dressed as Sourdough Steve who had just returned from the Sierra gold mines. He related tales of life in the gold diggings.

Steve began by addressing his Indiana audience as to why he left his responsibilities at the school to seek his fortune in gold in California. It was hard to believe that there were mountains of gold in California. But President Polk delivered a message saying there was a lot of gold there, and Steve believed it.

Steve with four other fellows in town put together an association and pooled their resources to go to California.

There were three ways to get to California.

One way was to take a steamer down the river and meet a sailing ship that would go all the way to California. The advantage was that you could take all the supplies you wanted with you on the ship, The cost was about \$600 and would take six months to get there. If you might get \$200 for your farm or do day labor for \$2 per day, \$600 was a lot of money.

Another way was to take a steamer down to New Orleans, catch a ship to Panama, make that walk across the isthmus, and hope that there was another ship going up to California. This way seemed too risky.

There was a book. "Two Years Before the Mast. The book described the experience of sailing around the horn with waves ten feet high and everyone becoming sea sick.

It was decided that the best way was to go by land. Steve's group was used to walking. If they could make 20 miles a day, they would be in California in three months.

The group pooled their money (\$400), decided to go to St Louis and acquire more stuff, travel to Independence and begin from there.

They took the steamer down the river to St. Louis. It was a big city. They came across an auction. A Negro was being auctioned. He sold for \$800. The group was repulsed by the issue and thought it was wrong.

They got two oxen for \$8 and a wagon for \$100. They bought supplies including flour, salt, sugar, dried fruit, and meat.

*(Continued on Page 2)*

### Contra Costa County's Place Names Will Be Interesting, Enjoyable Topic Of September 20th Dinner Meeting

William Mero, author of Shadows on the Hills will enlighten us about the place names of Contra Costa County at the September 20th meeting of the San Ramon Valley Historical Society . Have you ever wondered at the origins of your own street name – perhaps those of your neighborhood or town?

The heritage of many peoples and many events are echoed in Contra Costa County place names.

After both the scoundrels and heroes are gone, only their names remain on the land fading and fleeting like shadows on the hills.

The meeting will be held at the San Ramon Golf Club, 9430 Fircrest Lane, San Ramon. We will gather at 6:30 pm, eat at 7:00 pm, and enjoy our speaker. We hope to see you there.

### Life In The Gold Mines With Sourdough Steve (Continued)

They started out. At their first camp, many people were sick. It was Cholera. They tried to avoid the sick people. They carried Tincture of Opium if they needed it. They also carried ammonia, cloves, and peppermint.. They felt these items kept them healthy.

They made their way to the Platte River. It was a nice river to follow.

Three weeks into their journey, they encountered their first Indians, the Sioux. They were tall and handsome looking people. They wanted a tribute before allowing passage along the trail. So a tribute was paid, and the group proceeded.

As they followed the Platte, the river became muddy. They got to Fort Kearney. This was the first place they could drop off their letters. \$1 per letter was charged. Wow. These letters had to be taken back to St. Louis to get them into the postal system. But at least they could stay in touch with family and friends.

They continued to follow the Platte River and soon encountered a real prairie storm. The rain poured and hail came down as big as goose eggs. The hail destroyed the wagon covers. So they had to stop and make repairs. They had to free the animals in the hail storm and then get them back together again.

They proceeded and came to their first river crossing. Enterprising folks were there ahead of them. They had a ferry. They charged \$2 a wagon and \$1 a person to ride the ferry across the river. The water here was too swift and too deep to avoid the ferry. There were also sixty wagons lined up ahead of them. This took three days for their turn.

The group crossed the Platte and soon came to a huge rock sticking up in the middle of the plains, some 200 feet high. They stopped. Some of them went to carve their initials into the rock. Others were there before them. Steps were dug into the rock to get up some 30 feet to find fresh rock for initials.

They continued on to their second river crossing and came to South Pass. This was a milestone, the half way point on the journey. They had traveled 1,000 miles without losing anyone. Now they were at the Continental Divide.

They continued onward and their troubles started. They had to travel 100 miles before they came to any river or stream. There were a few little creeks. But it took two days to free the animals to graze and then bring them back. They finally got to the Green River. The Mormons ran the crossing and were charging \$3 per wagon and \$1 per person. Worse, a four day wait was required to get the ferry across the river.

They came to a divide. One route went north and another went south to Salt Lake City. They had provisions and decided go the northern route. This turned out to be the hardest part of the journey.

It was the Humbolt Basin, and it was all alkaline. The dust was mixed with salt. The mixture got into their lungs and all over them. At the end of a day, they looked like they had been through a snow storm. It caused burning eyes and mouths. The animals didn't like it either. If the animals drank the alkaline water, they were dead within a day. Fresh springs had to be found.

Soon they came across a hot springs with water bubbling out that was too hot to touch. Still, they used the water to bathe.

They continued and came to the Humboldt River. River is a very kind term for this body of water. It was more like a pink creek. It wasn't pretty to look at, but at least it was clean. Some suffered from diarrhea.

They traveled along the Humboldt River and met a different kind of Indian. They were much shorter. At night, they would come up and shoot arrows at the animals. In the morning the group found a dead carcass, which had to be left. The Indians would return and claim the carcass for their food.

They passed the Humboldt and came to the Humboldt Sink. This was a fifty mile stretch of the hottest desert imaginable. They filled their water vessels but still lost oxen. They could see the Sierra's, tall beautiful mountains with snow on the top. But that fifty mile stretch was the hardest part of the trip. They traveled at night to make it a little easier, but it was still very hot. Two people were lost due to heat prostration.

They made it to the Truckee River. It took four days to get to the top of the trail. Then they came into the Sacramento Valley.

(Continued on Page 4)

### The Sales Table — Nancy Ramsey

(Nancy Ramsey)

The Alamo Grammar School 1876 notes and envelopes are available. There are Mount Diablo, Front Street, Southern Pacific Depot, Tassajara School, the "Grand Dames" series of three San Ramon older homes, and miscellaneous packages with eight historical scenes for sale. Our price to members is \$3.50 per package. Lots of postcards with historic scenes are available for \$0.20 each. Postcards of the one room school at Tassajara are out of print.

Do stop by the Sales Table.

Need a Ride  
To The Society Meeting  
On September 20th?  
Contact Bill Lloyd: 837-9382.

**R E C O R D**

Published by  
San Ramon Valley Historical Society  
Founded 1970  
P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526

OFFICERS  
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Jerry Warren *Vice President*  
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### Member's Memorial Gift

NAMES HONORED BY MEMORIAL AND COMMEMORATIVE GIFTS, AND NAMES OF DONORS, ARE ENTERED IN A BOOK OF MEMORY AND WILL BE PLACED IN OUR MUSEUM. For tax purposes, we are a non-profit organization. You may make your donation to the Society or to the Museum — Please check box, below.

Make check to: San Ramon Valley Historical Society Memorial Fund.  
Mail to: SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526  
This contribution to the Society REMEMBERS ( ), HONORS ( ), EXPRESSES APPRECIATION ( ), OTHER ( ). Please check one.

This Donation for:  
 SRVHS  MSRV

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
DONOR(S): Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE NOTIFY: Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

### Dinner Reservations

\$20.00 per person

**Thursday, September 20, 7 p.m.**

San Ramon Royal Vista Golf Clubhouse  
9430 Fircrest Lane  
(North of Alcosta Blvd., San Ramon)

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO S.R.V.H.S. (Deadline September 18, 2011)  
Mail to: S.R.V.H.S., P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526

NAMES: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Bob Brennan Told History Of Jose Maria Amador - Who Owned 19,000 Acres At Interstate 580 & 680

Bob Brennan spoke at the SRVHS Summer Social on August 5, 2012. Bob is a great-great grandson of Jose Maria Amador.

Jose at one time had 17,517 acres near the intersection of Interstate 580 and 680 as a Spanish Land Grant. He wanted to build his hacienda closer to Alameda Creek. He received another grant for 2,000 acres to make this possible.

Jose was married three times and outlived each of his wives. His first wife was Maria Bernal. His second wife was a Sanchez. His third wife was Maria Soledad Alviso. He sired 20 to 27 children.

Jose was the first Californian born at Mission Delores in San Francisco. He died in 1888, age 106 in Watsonville, and is buried in a Gilroy cemetery.

Jose taught Mexicans and Indians about farming including vegetable gardens, vineyards, and orchards. He had about 150 workers (1830's - 1840's). Their main products were leather, blankets, and saddle soap. The trading products were hides and tallow that they would take to Alviso and trade with people coming in on ships.

The Spanish wanted to convert everybody to the church. He would take people to Amador. In the streams there, people could wash their hands in the water and gold would come up. This was about eight years before the gold rush. The material would be collected, brought back, and used to make chalices for the church and some coins. Jose said he was able to collect 114 pounds of gold on one trip lasting 14 days.

Jose was an administrator at Mission San Jose for about fifteen years. He supervised some construction there.

Jose also was a soldier under General Vallejo in Mission Sonoma.

California became a state in 1850 and Jose became concerned about his Spanish Land Grant. So he sold off portions of his land to Leo Norris, Michael Murray, Jeremiah Fallon, and James Dougherty. Bob said that James Dougherty bought 10,000 acres at \$2.20 per acre.

When the Irish arrived, the area near the hacienda was called Limerick. It was later changed to Dublin.

When Jose's son Antonio was married, there was a celebration at the mission that lasted for three days.

Jose also christened Mount Diablo.

There is a county, a town, a valley, and a creek named after Amador.

Amador County (named in honor of Jose Maria Amador, who was a miner in that region in 1848, and was previously mayor of Mission San Jose) was created in 1854 and Jackson was made the county seat. Amador County is in the center of the Mother Lode district in the Sierra Nevada. Its southern border is the Mokelumne River, while on the north side is the Cosumnes River, both linked inseparably with the "days of '49".

The last paragraph was taken from a book, "Historic Spots in California", by M. Hoover, H. Rensch, and E. Rensch, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1966.

## Members' Corner

The Board of Directors and fellow members of the Society extend a warm welcome to five new members:

Camilla Ewing	Danville, CA
Steve & Cheryl Larmore	Alamo, CA
Ray and Jerilyn Strong	Danville, CA.

We hope that you will enjoy this organization. We urge you to attend the field trips and the bi-monthly dinner meetings with guest speakers discussing their areas of expertise, participate in the selection of historic sites in the San Ramon Valley, and share your views and experiences with other Society members. We also urge you to join and support the activities of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and the San Ramon Historic Foundation.

**Lee Halverson, Zack Halverson, Karen Stepper, and Newell Arnerich at the plaque dedication at the Veterans Hall.**



## Summer Social — Enjoyable Event Held On August 5th!

The San Ramon Valley Historical Society hosted this years Summer Social at the new Veterans Hall in Danville on 5 August 2012. Members and guests from the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and from the San Ramon Historic Foundation joined us. Over 84 people attended this event. Many are members of all three organizations.

There was a SRVHS plaque dedication.

Each organization had displays featuring some of its activities.

This year featured two speakers. Bob Brennan is the great-great grandson of Jose Maria Amador. David Rogers is the great-great grandson of Silas Stone.

## Silas Stone's Great-Great Grandson, David Rogers, Provided Great Stories Of The "Old Days" At Social

David Rogers spoke at the SRVHS Summer Social on August 5, 2012. David is a great-great grandson of Silas Stone and grandson of Elwin Rix (Rocky) Stone.

Elwin Rix (Rocky) Stone was born October 30, 1909 in Oakland, CA. He was a grandson of Silas Stone. When Rocky was ten years old he had many adventures with his grandfather and got to know him well. In family tradition when David was ten years old, he had adventures with Rocky.

Silas taught Rocky to drive the Model T Ford, complete with trailer hitch. Rocky helped on the ranch by hauling pears and other field crops.

When he was ten and a half, he saved his money and bought a "cat whisker radio" or crystal set. The purchase was made in Oakland via the Niles Canyon Road. It was a full day trip. Gas was then 15 cents a gallon.

Rocky graduated from the Alamo Grammar School in 1922 and started working at Diablo Country Club.

He enjoyed visiting his cousins who lived in Morgan Hill. At that time it was a two hour drive. Today the same trip might take longer!

Another excursion David told about was when Rocky and his Uncle Edwin drove two Model T's to Yosemite. They were eager to see the fire fall. They traveled Highway 120 to the Tioga Pass Road which was a narrow road with monitored one way traffic. Passage was allowed one direction starting on the even hours, the opposite direction on odd numbered hours. Rocky and Uncle Erwin missed their direction scheduled time and had to wait. They missed seeing the fire fall. Not to be easily deterred, they stayed overnight and were ready for the next evening. This time the fire fall was cancelled. President Harding had died that day, 2 August 1923, in San Francisco at the Palace Hotel.

Rocky often visited the Jones family. David recalled visiting the Alamo home with 92 year old Rocky. Sitting on the porch, visiting, and drinking Chardonnay was a favorite pastime. Around the 4th of July, after the pears had been harvested, people would gather pears off the ground for their own canning.

David mentioned the weddings of the three Jackson daughters: Doris, Alice, and Barbara. They were married at the dirt road down by the creek. Rocky enjoyed going to such events.

He also told of attending the Montclair Presbyterian Church with Rocky. Rocky also attended an Oakland Evangelical Church.

David brought the tuba that Rocky played each Christmas. David remembered him playing in the orchestra of productions of Man from LaMoncha and Fiddler on the Roof.

Rocky left David a small hundred year old Bible. Rocky wrote a note that he put inside.

"Know yourself and judge yourself accordingly, confident that things are in order with the expectation that the demonstration of truth and love are the harmonious ingredients to pass along. The ultimate of what God should be in you, not of fear nor vengeance but to worship and adore."

Rocky died in 2001 at the age of 92 years and is buried in the Alamo Cemetery.

*(Enjoy Bob Brennan on Page 6)*

## Sourdough Steve Brought Gold Flakes And Told Us About Life In The Mines At March Dinner Meeting (Continued)

The valley wasn't very green. They discovered that it doesn't rain in the California valleys during the summer. It was September and everything was dry. Boxes and barrels were piled up along the river, and the streets were only four blocks long.

The south side of Sacramento was full of tents. People in these tents were from all over the world, including Chinese, who kept to themselves.

The Chinese were not able to mine much because the miners would kick them out. But the Chinese were very enterprising and started businesses doing laundry, something the miners hated to do. The miners viewed doing laundry as woman's work, and there weren't any women in the gold fields. The Chinese charged \$1 for a days worth of clothes and they would wash, iron, and fold the garments. The Chinese also started eateries. The food was good. The Chinese made more money than most miners.

Steve related some stories from other miners.

One miner on Carson Creek had died. Other miners gathered to bury him. They dug a hole and placed the body in it. As a preacher was delivering the eulogy, the miners noticed that the soil from the hole sparkled. They pulled the body out and immediately went to work. They eventually mined \$14,000 of gold from the hole. The dead miner was reburied a short distance away.

In another tale, two men got into a gun fight over a claim. A shot was fired that went into a quartz outcropping behind the target. The quartz sparkled. The gun fight was over. The two removed over \$10,000 in gold from the rock.

Steve told of a visit to Sutter's Fort. It was a little fort with an Indian army. At this visit, John Sutter wasn't there. Squatters had taken over his land, cut down his gates, and killed his cattle. Sutter couldn't deal with it. So he moved to his ranch further up the river.

John Marshal found quite a bit of gold, but did not continue mining. He started a blacksmith shop and stayed in that business.

Sam Brannan was a promoter. He got some gold from early miners and went to San Francisco. He bought mining tools and opened a tool store. Then he went to the streets and shouted about the gold he had found in Sacramento. He also developed plans to open a resort at some local hot springs he had found.

A man in Hangtown had accumulated a lot of gold, and then disappeared. The man was a bandit and he hid his loot there.

Steve spoke of Joaquin Murieta, a Mexican outlaw. Joaquin committed daring crimes, mostly against the Chinese in the Mother Lode during the winter of 1852-1853. Joaquin was an expert escape artist. A band of Texas style rangers claimed the \$1,000 reward for his head, which was severed, pickled, and placed on public display in Sacramento.

John Studebaker of Hangtown was a wagon maker in Indiana. He made wheelbarrows for the miners, which the miners did not like to do. He made a fortune.

Steve spoke about Domingo Ghirardelli, a candy maker. He had a store in Tulle Ville and later Sacramento. The miners loved his chocolate. He started a factory in San Francisco on Jackson Street.

Dancer Lola Montez was 35 when she came to California. She claimed sexual conquests including Franz Liszt and King Louis I of Bavaria. In San Francisco, she married Patrick Hull, a local journalist and her third husband. On their honeymoon, they toured the Mother Lode and settled in Grass Valley. Lola would perform her spider dance in the mining camps and actually bare her knees. The miners went wild. She had a pet bear.

Next door to Lola was a pretty young girl, Lotta Crabtree. Lola gave Lotta singing lessons. At age 6, Lotta's mother took Lotta into the mining camps singing sentimental songs about home. The miners were overwhelmed. They would throw a bag of gold on the stage as she performed. She may well have made \$1,000 at each gig.

By the time Steve and his group arrived in the gold fields in 1850, all of the easy gold was gone. But there was a new invention called the Long Tom and was worked by several miners. It was a long box. The upper

part, called the tom, was twelve or more feet long. This was the part into which the miners shoveled the gravel and rocks. At the lower end was an iron sheet with holes in it called the riddle. The gravel was screened here. Just below the end of the tom was a riffle box. As water passed through, the sand and gold was caught behind the riffle bars. The large pieces of gravel went out through the end of the tom.

Steve and his group went to the Yuba river and found a spot not yet claimed. Their claim was about a 100 foot square piece of land. Miners could leave their tools at their claim and no one else would touch them. Amazing.

Even with these tools, mining was back breaking work. Miners worked from dawn until dusk. All they were doing was picking and shoveling, and they were standing in cold

water. The cold water caused lots of health problems.

If the miners were lucky, they could make some money. Steve and his group were lucky. They found a place on the Yuba behind a boulder where a lot of sediment had settled. They dammed a tributary and dug down into the gravel. They dug about four feet down where they found color. They got about \$2,000 of gold from that spot.

But they weren't very successful after that. They decided to stop mining and go back to Indiana. They were grateful for the experiences they had.

Sourdough Steve returned to Indiana on a stage coach. He rode the stage coach day and night and the trip took only two weeks.

Steve brought some samples for the audience. One was Iron Pyrite, or fools gold. Steve also brought a few flakes of real gold



Sourdough Steve Johnson and Karen Stepper at the May 17th dinner meeting

### THE MUSEUM OF THE SAN RAMON VALLEY PRESENTS:

August 22 - November 4

California Indians basketweavers are renowned for their skill and the beauty of their baskets.

This year's exhibit features stunning Washoe baskets from The Gatekeeper's Museum in Tahoe City, used for storage and gifts. Here is your chance to view rarely displayed baskets by talented basketweavers from the early twentieth century.

