



Figure 1: During all the years I drove Pierce Brothers hearses like the 1955 Cadillac shown above, I never heard a complaint from any passenger. Photo courtesy of the Hearse Classifieds Web Page.

Die Now, Pay Later

Adventures of a Youthful Undertaker, 1951-1958

Msgr. Francis J. Weber

During the winter months of 1950, a defunct boilermakers' union began efforts to organize embalmers working at the three major mortuaries in Los Angeles: Forest Lawn, Utter-McKinley, and Pierce Brothers. Mark Pierce, upon hearing that a half dozen or so of his people were involved in the campaign, fired them on the spot. An ugly boycott ensued and pickets surrounded the sixteen Pierce mortuaries thus impairing their efficient operation. Charles T. Powers, President of Pierce Brothers, a long-time family friend

and a fellow Kiwanian with my father in the Miracle Mile Club, offered me a job for the summer months of 1951 thus beginning a relationship that stretched over the following eight years. Essentially, at the beginning, I was a strike breaker and though I was never personally accosted, several others were verbally and/or physically abused that first year.

William and Fred were the first of the Pierce Brothers to arrive in Los Angeles. In 1880 they opened a livery stable which

(Continued on Page 3)

The Branding Iron

Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners
Published Quarterly
 Winter - Spring – Summer – Fall

2020 TRAIL BOSSES

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| ANN SHEA | <i>Sheriff</i> |
| THERESE MELBAR | <i>Deputy Sheriff</i> |
| MIKE JOHNSON | <i>Registrar of Marks & Brands</i> |
| JOHN SHEA | <i>Keeper of the Chips</i> |
| JOHN DILLON | <i>Publications Editor</i> |
| JIM MACKLIN | <i>Past Sheriff</i> |
| BRIAN D. DILLON | <i>Past Sheriff</i> |

2020 APPOINTED OFFICERS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| MICHELE CLARK | <i>Gatekeeper Sunshine Wrangler</i> |
| JOSEPH CAVALLO | <i>Archive Wrangler</i> |

APPOINTED OFFICERS (continued)

| | |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| JOHN DILLON | <i>A.V./Magic Lantern Wranglers</i> |
| AARON TATE | |
| PATRICK MULVEY | <i>Daguerreotype Wrangler</i> |
| FRANCIS J. WEBER | <i>Living Legend No. 60</i> |
| ABRAHAM HOFFMAN | <i>Living Legend No. 61</i> |
| GARY TURNER | <i>Living Legend No. 62</i> |
| ROBERT CLARK | <i>Living Legend No. 65</i> |
| PATRICK MULVEY | <i>John Robinson Fellow</i> |
| AARON TATE | <i>Gary Turner Fellow</i> |
| JOHN DILLON | <i>Jerry Selmer Fellow</i> |
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| BRIAN D. DILLON | <i>Westerners International Rep.</i> |

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The Branding Iron is always seeking articles of up to around 20 pages dealing with every phase of the history of the Old West and California. Contributions from both members and friends are always welcome.
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Editor's Corner . . .

The Branding Iron kicks off a new year and decade with a trip down memory lane—to the morgue! For our lead article, Westerners Living Legend Monsignor Francis J. Weber shares his experiences as a young mortuary assistant. Following up, we have Frank Brito on an article about the Frémont, Stockton, and Kearny leadership dispute in the California theater of the Mexican War. Finally, we remember the exciting life of Phil Brigandi, with a tribute by Mark Hall-Patton.

If you missed any Corral meetings this winter, feel free to catch up by reading the Roundup summaries by Aaron Tate and

Arkaz Vardanyan, our new Abraham Hoffman Fellow. Welcome to the Corral!

Speaking of Abe and Arkaz, they, along with Brian Dillon, have written reviews of recent Western history books for your consideration. And if you're still looking out for more books for your collection, the Los Angeles Westerners are back in biz with *Brand Book* 23 and 24. More details at the end!

Thank you all for being my fantastic contributors and readers.

Happy Trails!

John Dillon
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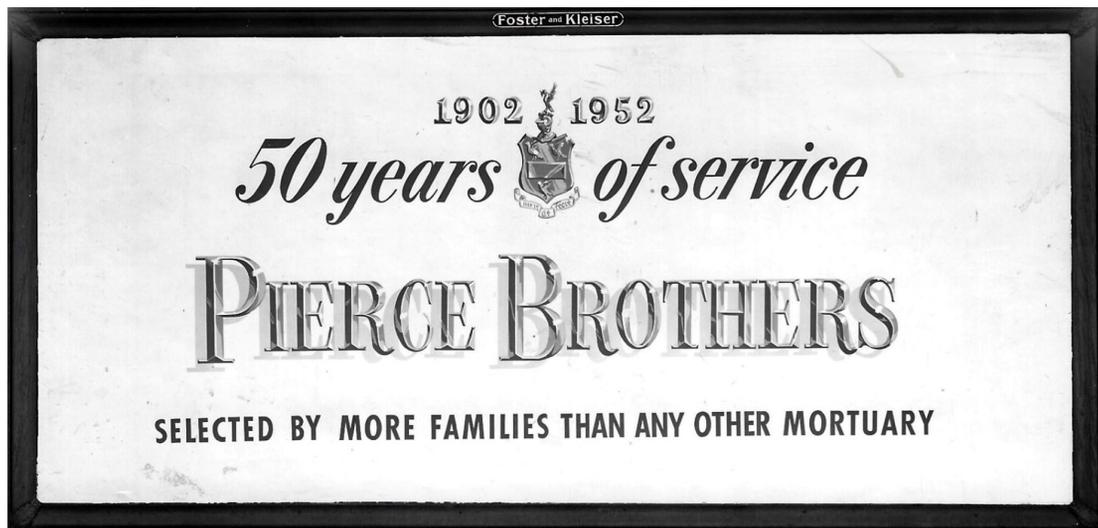


Figure 2: During the Truman and Eisenhower years, while a seminary student, I worked at Pierce Brothers Mortuary, Los Angeles, in every capacity but that of embalmer. When I began my employment with them, they had already been in business for half a century. Foster and Kleiser billboard image, courtesy of Pierce Brothers Mortuary.

gradually evolved into a mortuary. The other members of the clan, descendants of President Franklin Pierce, subsequently immigrated to Los Angeles. Inasmuch as there were seven physicians in the city and only two undertakers, the Pierces found a ready market for dispensing their services. In 1924, the Pierces built and opened what would become their landmark mission-style mortuary at 720 West Washington Boulevard (Figure 4). It was the first full-service funeral home in Los Angeles, providing removal, embalming, casketing, funeral cremation, and, eventually, a cemetery at Valhalla in the San Fernando Valley. After Mark Pierce took over leadership, in the 1950s, the company became the U.S.'s largest chain, with a myriad of mortuaries scattered across Southern California.

While I was hired specifically as a limousine driver, my immediate supervisor, Webb Hendricks, began "loaning me out" for house calls and flower runs, both of which were easier for me than for the other employees, most of whom were many years my senior. Before my quasi-career as a mortician had run its course, I held every position except that of embalmer, for which a state license was required. Though the company didn't pay overtime, I generally drew the General Hospital run at 3:30 in the afternoon which

meant I would get home late for dinner.

In an average seven-day time slot, I was on duty over eighty hours a week. Every third day I worked all day, through the night and then all the following day. True enough, after 5 o'clock, we were "on call" for home or hospital removal, but we weren't allowed to leave the premises. Mark Pierce advertised that his mortuaries were "ten minutes away at time of need" and he meant that literally. Our two-man teams averaged two or three calls every evening and between them we could nap or watch television in the little bungalow located adjacent to 720. Several times I drew night duty at the mortuary in Venice or in some other outlying place. That was easier because there were fewer night calls. About the most that would happen there would be an occasional Rosary service.

The employees at Pierce Brothers were uniformly lovely people, most of them totally dedicated to the corporal work of mercy known as burying the dead. Salaries were rather meager and it always fascinated me how the average employee could raise and support a family. Yet, most did. They were career people and some of them had worked with the Pierces for upwards of forty years. My favorite co-workers were Alpha Moses, John Pierce (not a member of the family) and



Figure 3: While working for Pierce Brothers I drove every kind of funeral vehicle from hearses carrying the deceased, through flower cars, to limousines in which the bereaved rode. One of the more spectacular vehicles was an ancient, pre-WWII, Pierce-Arrow limo like the one shown above. Photo courtesy of the Antique Automobile Club of America.

Joseph Wiley. Mary Dougherty was just beginning her stint there as the first licensed woman embalmer in the State of California. She later managed Rosedale Cemetery where I subsequently served as a board member.

Al Moses' memory was crammed with his funeral exploits over the previous half century. So was John Pierce's memory; he had spent most of his life at Kirkelie, Bernard, and Peek Mortuary in Venice. John began in the days before embalmers were certified; when licensing came, he never bothered to file for one. Those two men were totally professional and I never observed them ruffled or upset at the many goofy and unexpected things that happened almost every day. Once John was leading a funeral procession on Washington Boulevard, eating his lunch as he drove along in the hearse. As he passed under a railroad trestle, the incoming San Diego train crossed overhead, and just as John handed part of his sandwich to the motorcycle escort, someone flushed a toilet which rendered the rest of his meal rather unattractive.

Another time we had gone to North Hollywood on a house call. The deceased was lying on a couch in the parlor of an apartment and, when we arrived, the widow was concerned that her husband "wasn't really dead, he keeps moaning." John Pierce took one look and pronounced the man "quite dead." But when we moved him, he groaned and all the way back to the mortuary, every time we hit a bump, the poor man emitted a noise. I was concerned and when we arrived at 720 I called Dr. Clarence Pierce, the last of the original brothers, and asked him to meet us in the operation room. He was gracious and indulgent to my inexperienced concern that the man might still be alive. He took one look and said, "Oh, no, he's gone. No doubt about that." Apparently, I looked incredulous, so he took a scalpel and sliced open the femoral artery. "See that, son, the blood is not flowing. A man cannot live if his blood stops flowing." He explained that the man probably died of a sudden heart seizure, ingesting several liters of air into his lungs.



Figure 4: Pierce Brothers had mortuary branches all over the greater Los Angeles area. Most were built in “California Mission” style like their main facility at 720 West Washington Street, Los Angeles, shown above. Photo from a contemporary advertising brochure, Pierce Brothers Mortuary.

The air was trapped there and whenever the body was moved, there was a belch-like sound. He then pushed down heavily on the decedent’s chest and out came the remaining air, rather unceremoniously.

Speaking of Dr. Pierce, he was one fine gentleman. To my knowledge, he was never active in the business. He stopped by quite often and I was his chauffeur of choice. His medical degree was acquired in 1898 from the University of Southern California Medical School and for the thirty years after his graduation, he delivered a goodly percentage of the babies born in Los Angeles. Known for his charm and persuasion, he served for a long time on the city school board. At his urging an agricultural college was opened on 392 acres in Woodland Hills in 1947, later becoming one of the nine campuses of the Los Angeles College District. Several times I drove the good doctor to Pierce College where he was held in high esteem.

Over the years, I drove other personalities, including Dr. Hubert Eaton (founder of Forest Lawn Memorial Park), the Orthodox Patriarch of Istanbul, Mayor Fletcher Bowron, and Governor “Goodie” Knight. Traffic was not so hectic in those years and chauffeuring was quite pleasant. On five occasions, our fleet was leased to Tanner Livery for the New Year’s holiday. We were asked to meet people arriving in private railroad

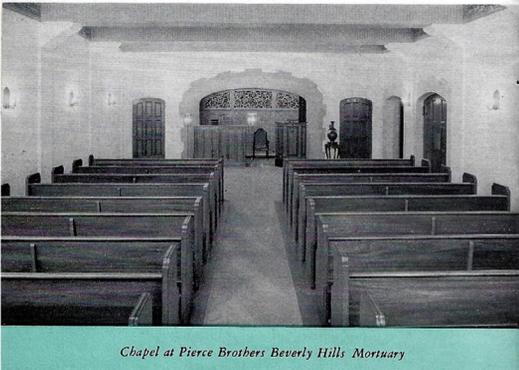
cars and deliver them to the parade and Rose Bowl football game. One group of four, who arrived at Union Station quite inebriated, remained that way for both the parade and the game. Sensing that tips would be unlikely from people in their condition, I decided to take matters into my own hands. After I had “poured” them into the Rose Bowl, I removed the sumptuous meals that had been neatly stored for them in the trunk and sold them for a hefty price, more than enough to compensate for the day’s tip. That year Vice President Richard Nixon was Grand Marshall: maybe it was he who inspired that ethically questionable tactic.

Though he rarely surfaced at 720, the shadow of Mark Pierce, son of an original brother and the CEO of the mortuary, was always hovering in the background. He monitored operations from his home on Balboa Island and later, on June Street in Los Angeles, even to the extent of counting the daily obituaries in the Los Angeles *Times*. He liked me, probably because I was a seminarian, a status he never quite understood.

In my last year there, he summoned me to his office and offered me a full-time position as manager of a suburban mortuary. When I declined, he just glared into space, muttering something about the “hold” on me by the Catholic Church. Later on, he hosted a dinner for my family at the prestigious



Reception Room at Pierce Brothers Alhambra Mortuary



Chapel at Pierce Brothers Beverly Hills Mortuary

Figure 5: The Chapel at the Pierce Brothers Beverly Hills Mortuary. From a contemporary Pierce Brothers advertising brochure.

Perino's Restaurant on Wilshire Boulevard. He belonged to the Scottish Rite branch of the Masonic order and was quite religious in his own way. His benefactions to charity were frequent and bountiful.

The rolling fleet at Pierce Brothers was top-flight, Cadillac hearses (Figure 1), Chrysler limousines, Plymouth call cars and GMC floral wagons. We also had a number of vintage automobiles, including a Pierce Arrow limousine (Figure 3) and "Wrinkles," an elderly but still quite serviceable Buick hearse with a hand-carved wooden body. "Wrinkles" had the annoying habit of getting stuck in second gear. When that happened, it was necessary to stop the funeral procession, open the hood and manually lift the shift linkage back into place. Strangely, no one ever complained. After all, "Wrinkles" was a legendary vehicle that captured everyone's fancy. There was also an old Lincoln Zephyr call car which we cranked up for grand occasions. Over my eight years in the funeral profession, I probably drove hearses (Figure

1), limousines (Figure 3), call cars, and floral cars (Figure 6) well over 100,000 miles, with only one minor mishap which occurred in the company garage on Washington Boulevard when I sideswiped a call car in the full vision of Stu Turner, the director of transportation. He was anything but amused.

Pierce Brothers Mortuaries observed their golden anniversary in 1952 (Figure 2) with a gigantic bash at Mark's home on Balboa Island. I made a dramatic "cameo appearance" on that occasion when Mark asked "our little priest" to give the invocation. It was an honor greatly appreciated and one for which I waxed eloquently. Few were the churches and synagogues in and around Los Angeles into which I didn't roll a casket between 1951 and 1958. John Pierce and I did almost all the funerals at Santa Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral and I learned more about Trisagion services than most parishioners. We also serviced Saint Vincent's Church almost daily and Father William Ward would stand on the front porch fully vested with a pocket watch in one hand and an aspergillum in the other. We were expected to roll into the driveway at exactly fifty-seven minutes after the hour. He was hard to deal with if we were even a minute late. Sometimes the minister who officiated at one of our mortuaries would slip me \$5 to read the committal prayers at the gravesite. I didn't mind reciting the prayers but often I was troubled by what might have looked like simony. Fortunately, I had a very indulgent confessor. Once, between funerals, I stopped for a visit at my grandmother's home in Hollywood. I drove the hearse well into the driveway, hoping it wouldn't be noticed by the neighbors. I was barely inside when the phone rang and a lady across the street wanted to know, "Just when did Mrs. Weber pass?" Grandmother got quite a laugh out of that incident.

Not infrequently I was diverted to "chasing" death certificates. That task was difficult because most physicians didn't like signing them, probably because it proved their fallibility. Yet we could not file for a burial permit without a signed death certificate. Many times we had to delay a funeral simply because Dr. X hadn't returned from a journey. Absurd as



Figure 6: Very rare Detroit Iron: the most unusual vehicles I drove to Los Angeles funerals were highly-customized flower cars, like the 1952 Cadillac shown above. Photo courtesy of Classic Dream Cars/Autabuy.

it may sound, doctors would sometimes ask me the cause of death. Generally I would respond with something like, “Arteriosclerosis, due to elevated blood pressure,” terms that I had observed from other certificates. Legally, if a doctor wouldn’t sign, the case was referred to the coroner’s office for autopsy. That procedure was awkward, inaccurate, and open to abuses, some of which I could describe in considerable detail.

During most of those years, I was attached to the company’s headquarters at 720 West Washington Boulevard, just adjacent to property that later became the Harbor Freeway. Whenever possible at lunch time, I would drive south just a few blocks to Chester Place, a gate-enclosed enclave of beautifully-maintained turn-of-the-century homes and gardens belonging to Carrie Estelle Doheny. There was a uniformed guard on duty around the clock. When not patrolling the grounds, he sat in a sentry box, with an eagle eye on the two entrances. He ran me off on the several occasions I ventured into the park to eat my brown-bagged sandwich. I suspect he knew by experience that many visitors carelessly throw their refuse on the ground.

One day, in early July of 1951, I arrived later than usual at my regular spot on 23rd Street, just outside Chester Place. It must have been about 1:15, and I spotted Father William Ward and Mrs. Doheny walking toward the park’s north entrance. “Ma D,” as

she was known to her friends, was by then almost totally blind. During the time she took her daily walk with Father Ward the gates were normally closed, but this particular day, they were left ajar as the two slowly made their way along the tree-shrouded street. Spontaneously, I jumped out of my car and walked through the huge bronze gate. Being only nineteen years old, and totally unencumbered by the rules of proper decorum, I walked up to Mrs. Doheny and, before Father Ward could wave me off, I introduced myself, explaining that I was a seminarian.

I recall being immensely impressed by her. She was always formally dressed in public and that day she was wearing a blue silk dress. She carried an embroidered purse that resembled one my grandmother used when going to church on Sundays. She was extremely polite, her gracious kindness in stark contrast to Father Ward’s obvious annoyance at my presence. But she was also very inquisitive—where did I live, why was I there, what did I want...Happily my answers seemed to be the right ones. After a brief moment, I brazenly asked if I could eat my lunch inside the park. “Of course, young man, I would be delighted,” she replied. When I explained that the guard had evicted me several times previously, she signaled and he hastily came over from the sentry box. “Mr. Weber would like to park here and eat his lunch,” she said. “I don’t see any reason why that shouldn’t



*While working for Pierce Brothers Mortuary I had the honor of giving some famous persons their final ride, including: **Figure 7 (Left):** William Randolph Hearst (1875-1951), photo courtesy of the San Francisco Examiner, and: **Figure 8 (Right):** Oliver Hardy (1892-1957), photo courtesy of the Laurel and Hardy Tribute Page.*

be allowed. Do you?" The guard muttered his approval and from then onward, for several years, there was a place set aside in Chester Place for my little black Plymouth. But that's not the end of the story. About two years later, I was sitting in the car one afternoon eating lunch, when the guard came up with a box of pastry goodies. There was a typed card attached to the packet which said: "For the young man who comes each day to lunch." It was signed "Estelle Doheny." I still have that card and I cherish it highly.

Surely among the more interesting experiences that crowd my memory bank for those years occurred on August 14, 1951. It was a Tuesday and I was assigned to the motor fleet. I had just arrived back from an early morning funeral and had parked my hearse in the garage facilities on West Washington Boulevard. The dispatcher came rushing out of his office with directives that I take our seldom-used but still pristine Lincoln Zephyr call car to an address in Beverly Hills, where I would reconnoiter with our representative

who served that area. It was just after noon when I arrived at 1007 Beverly Drive. It was a handsome, three-story, Spanish, stucco mansion, enclosed behind a high wall and surrounded by several acres of palm trees and gardens. After waiting for half an hour or so in the car, F. W. Warlick, who had arrived earlier to make the necessary arrangements, came out of the residence. As we were rolling the carriage up the sidewalk, he told me that we were about to pick up the earthly remains of William Randolph Hearst (Figure 7).

We were greeted at the door by a houseman and a nurse who quietly ushered us to the room where Mr. Hearst had died alone at about 9:30 that morning. The "removal" was made hurriedly and, contrary to certain newspaper accounts, we did not see or otherwise encounter the legendary Marion Davies. Though once a robust man, Hearst had wasted away during the four years of his illness to a bony 125 pounds. I recall the house being unusually warm, apparently at the request of its eighty-eight-year-old occupant.

By the time I maneuvered the Lincoln Zephyr out of the driveway and onto the street, there were several dozen newspaper reporters and an equal number of onlookers standing around. It took about ten minutes for the drive to 417 North Maple Drive, where our mortuary was located. We took the "chief's" remains from the call car and prepared him for embalming. Shortly thereafter, I returned to the house where a valet had prepared a dark blue suit, a monogrammed shirt and a blue necktie woven with the family coat-of-arms. By the time I arrived back at the mortuary, the remains were ready for dressing, at which I assisted. Later Mr. Hearst was placed in a large bronze casket. Two days afterward, the body was flown to San Francisco for the obsequies which took place at Grace Cathedral on Nob Hill, just a few blocks from his boyhood home. Following the funeral, which I read about in the paper, he was interred in Cypress Lawn Cemetery at Colma, in the huge, marble Hearst family mausoleum which already contained the remains of Senator George Hearst and Phoebe Apperson Hearst. During my years in the funeral business, I was involved in burying hundreds of people, but none of them as prominent in the annals as William Randolph Hearst. Yet he, like all the others, ultimately fell victim to the universal democracy of death.

Over the years, I picked up my share of "personalities" on the Hollywood scene. Among those which stand out are Oliver Hardy, the actor (Figure 8), and Mrs. Harry Chandler, whose husband had owned the *Los Angeles Times*. I was dispatched to Tehachapi to bring back several people killed in an earthquake there. There was a pecking order even at Pierce Brothers and my status as a temporary employee generally ruled me out of being involved with the "celebrities."

There were many other memorable occurrences during those years, some of which appear humorous in retrospect. Once, while approaching Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, I turned a funeral procession of twenty-seven cars into a dead-end street. Another time, while I was momentarily distracted, an elderly priest stepped into an open grave and would have slipped all the way

had not an observant bystander grabbed him. Then there was the time when a distraught widow rushed up to the open casket of her husband and tried to climb in, which caused the lid to fall on both of them. Finally, while at Inglewood Park Cemetery, our parked limousine somehow "jumped out of gear" while we were a hundred or so yards away at a gravesite. We simply had to stand there and watch it roll down a hill, over a curb and into a thicket of boxwood. Mercifully, there were only some minor scratches on the grill work.

My summers operating the switchboard were informative to say the least. I soon began to realize that a company operator knows all secrets, sometimes more than he or she wants to know. We had one executive who was "seeing" one of the company's bookkeepers on the side. He would call in to speak with her, disguising his voice. On one occasion, forgetting myself, I said: "Oh, Mr. D, Mabel is away from her desk at the moment." There was an instantaneous click on the line and never again did he call in, at least on my shift. There were nine trunk lines and eighty-four stations on the switchboard, including lines to two of our mortuaries which were being operated under their earlier family name. We still used the old cables and it was easy enough to cross the lines when things were busy. Elvera Pierce called in one day to speak with one of the top officials. Accidentally, I disconnected her, but was able to save her end of the line. The person to whom she had been speaking ran down the hallway to the telephone room and began yelling all manner of obscenities. So I pushed open her end of the line and she heard the entire exchange. She apologized for him and I am sure she had something to say to him too. She was a gracious and caring lady.

Though the remuneration was scanty, even by 1950s standards, I enjoyed working at Pierce Brothers. The people there were exceedingly kind and gracious to this lowly teenager and I was and remain edified by the commitment most morticians have to their work and their public. It was also a very valuable learning experience to work with people facing the loss of a loved one. They were generally appreciative of any acts of kindness.

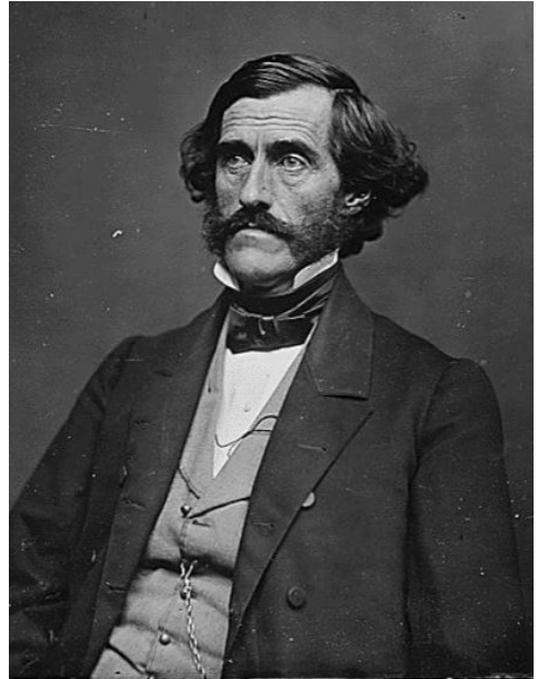


Figure 1 (Left): John C. Frémont. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. Figure 2 (Right): Robert F. Stockton. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

California Leadership in Conflict During the Mexican War

Frank J. Brito

Questions have continually surfaced regarding the relative position of the “Commodore” rank and the “Who is in charge?” confusion during the California phase of the Mexican War. Evidence suggests that a combination of egotism, disobedience, unclear orders, and communication delays all contributed to this confusion. In this research into the war with Mexico (1846-1848), we attempt to understand 1) why Stockton did not immediately transfer command to Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny upon their meeting; 2) why Commodore Stockton appointed Lt. Col. Frémont as Governor of California; and, 3) why Frémont refused to subordinate himself and his troops to Kearny except under final threat of Kearny’s superior force. For this infraction, Frémont was marched under arrest from California to Ft. Leavenworth and then court-martialed in Washington.

The conflict in leadership began when

Brevet Captain John C. Frémont was ordered to survey the headwaters of the Arkansas River. Ignoring orders, Frémont chose instead to visit California in December 1845, possibly to discover the easiest route to the Pacific and earn personal glory. After a confrontation with Mexican troops and Frémont’s forced exit from Monterey, Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie of the U.S. Marines carried letters to Frémont who had retreated to Oregon. These letters were from Senator Thomas Hart Benton, Frémont’s father-in-law. Benton was a strong proponent of westward expansion and these letters may have suggested Frémont go to California and prepare for a potential conflict with Mexico, or even a British intervention. The underlying goal was to gain California for the United States and bring credit to the Frémont/Benton family. Benton was a powerful and outspoken political force and Frémont likely believed that riding on his coattails gave him a free hand

to explore the west, protecting him from disobeying orders and most importantly, furthering his ambitions. Shortly after reading these letters, Frémont returned to California.

At first examination, Stockton also seemed to exhibit clear and serious disobedience. However, the following order from the Secretary of Navy George Bancroft makes this accusation a little hazy. Robert F. Stockton was an apparent glory seeker and refused to give Kearny command of the land battles. Kearny acquiesced to Stockton for the sake of winning the war but was very angry in doing so. Furthermore, Stockton and his sailors helped rescue a wounded Kearny and his diminished force after their defeat by Californios at San Pascual, after Kearny marched into California from Arizona. Perhaps gratitude played a role in Kearny's deference. Stockton did not remain long after the Californios were defeated, but returned to the naval blockade of the Mexican coast. Frémont continued to operate as governor until Kearny strongly convinced him otherwise. A shootout between Kearny's and Frémont's forces almost transpired near San Gabriel Mission. The Californios would have been amazed had this occurred.

Perhaps Stockton thought himself in command of the entire California campaign because of his rank and first arrival. Accordingly, he appointed himself Governor and military commander of California shortly after landing. Frémont, for his part, may have believed that Stockton's orders superseded Kearny's due to the former's superior rank and self-appointed office. Before leaving, Stockton appointed Frémont Governor of California. Secretary Bancroft's order was not clear as to who was in command on land. Unquestionably, Secretary of War William L. Marcy should have issued these orders since three services (Navy, Army, Marines) were engaged in California.

During the initial phase of the Mexican War, Secretary of the Navy Bancroft was replaced on September 10, 1846 by John Y. Mason, who sent a letter to Stockton making it clear that Kearny or the U.S. Army was to prosecute the land war. Stockton likely received these letters at least two months after

they were sent. Late receipt was not the only reason for Kearny's inability to immediately receive control from Stockton. Could the change in Navy secretaries have added to the confusion? Mason's letter is much more detailed than Bancroft's. Part of Mason's letter might be construed as a warning to Stockton. Were Stockton's proclivities to seek the lime-light known to Mason?

Here is Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft's order:

August 13, 1846

United States Navy Department

To: Commodore James Biddle or
Commodore R. F. Stockton or
The Senior Officer in command of
the United States Naval Forces in
the Pacific ocean

From: George Bancroft, Secretary of
Navy

(6th paragraph)

By article 6 of the "General Regulations for the Army," edition of 1825, which is held by the War Department to be still in force, and of which I enclose you a copy, your commission [that is the commission of Commodore Biddle] places you in point of precedence, on occasions of ceremony or upon meetings for consultation, in the class of major-general, but no officer of the army or navy, whatever may be his rank, can assume any direct command, independent of consent, over an officer of the other service, excepting only when land forces are specially embarked in vessels of war to do the duty of marines.

Here is Secretary of the Navy J. Y. Mason's much longer letter to Stockton:

[CONFIDENTIAL.]

UNITED STATES NAVY DEPARTMENT,
Washington, November 5, 1846.

COMMODORE: Commodore Sloat has arrived in this city, and delivered your letter of the 28th July ult., with the copy of your address to the people of California, which accompanied it. The department

is gratified that you joined the squadron before the state of the commodore's health rendered it necessary for him to relinquish his important command.

The difficulties and embarrassments of the command, without a knowledge of the proceedings of Congress on the subject of the war with Mexico, and in the absence of the instructions of the department, which followed these proceedings, are justly appreciated; and it is highly gratifying that so much has been done in anticipation of the orders which have been transmitted.

You will, without doubt, have received the despatches of the 15th of May last, addressed to Commodore Sloat; and I now send you, for your guidance, a copy of instructions to Commodore Shubrick of the 17th of August. He sailed early in September, in the razeed Independence, with orders to join the squadron with the least possible delay. On his assuming the command, you may hoist a red pennant. If you prefer, you may hoist your pennant on the Savannah, and return home with her and the Warren.

The existing war with Mexico has been commenced by her. Every disposition was felt and manifested by the United States government to procure redress for the injuries of which we complained, and to settle all complaints on her part, in the spirit of peace and of justice which has ever characterized our intercourse with foreign nations. That disposition still exists; and whenever the authorities of Mexico shall manifest a willingness to adjust unsettled points of controversy between the two republics, and to restore an honourable peace, they will be met in a corresponding spirit.

This consummation is not to be expected, nor is our national honour to be maintained, without a vigorous prosecution of the war on our part. Without being animated by any ambitious spirit of conquest, our naval and military forces must hold the ports and territory of the enemy, of which possession has been obtained by their arms. You will, there-

fore, under no circumstances, voluntarily lower the flag of the United States, or relinquish the actual possession of Upper California. Of other points of the Mexican territory, which the forces under your command may occupy, you will maintain the possession or withdraw, as in your judgment may be most advantageous in the prosecution of the war.

In regard to your intercourse with the inhabitants of the country, your views are judicious and you will conform to the instructions heretofore given. You will exercise the rights of a belligerent; and if you find that the liberal policy of our government, in purchasing and paying for required supplies, is misunderstood, and its exercise is injurious to the public interest, you are at liberty to take them from the enemy without compensation, or pay such prices as may be deemed just and reasonable. The best policy in this respect depends on a knowledge of circumstances in which you are placed, and is left to your discretion.

The Secretary of War has ordered Col. R. B. Mason, 1st United States dragoons, to proceed to California, via Panama, who will command the troops and conduct the military operations in the Mexican territory bordering on the Pacific, in the absence of Brigadier-general Kearny. The commander of the naval forces will consult and cooperate with him in his command to the same extent as if he held a higher rank in the army. In all questions of relative rank, he is to be regarded as having only the rank of colonel.

The President has deemed it best for the public interests to invest the military officer commanding with the direction of the operations on land and with the administrative functions of government over the people and territory occupied by us. You will relinquish to Colonel Mason, or to General Kearny, if the latter shall arrive before you have done so, the entire control over these matters, and turn over to him all papers necessary to the performance of his duties. If officers

of the navy are employed in the performance of civil or military duties, you will withdraw or continue them, at your discretion, taking care to put them to their appropriate duty in the squadron, if the army officer commanding does not wish their services on land.

The establishment of port regulations is a subject over which it is deemed by the President most appropriate that the naval commander shall exercise jurisdiction.

You will establish these, and communicate them to the military commander, who will carry them into effect so far as his co-operation may be necessary, suggesting for your consideration modifications or alterations.

The regulation of the import trade is also confided to you. The conditions under which vessels of our own citizens and of neutrals may be admitted into ports of the enemy in your possession will be prescribed by you, subject to the instructions heretofore given. To aid you, copies of instructions to the collectors in the United States, from the Treasury Department, on the same subject, are enclosed. On cargoes of neutrals imported into such ports you may impose moderate duties, not greater in amount than those collected in the ports of the United States. The collection of these duties will be made by civil officers, to be appointed, and subject to the same rules as other persons charged with civil duties in the country. These appointments will be made by the military officers, on consultation with you.

The President directs me to impress most earnestly on the naval officers, as it is impressed on those of the army, the importance of harmony in the performance of their delicate duties while co-operating. They are arms of one body, and will, I doubt not, vie with each other in showing which can render the most efficient aid to the other in the execution of common orders, and in sustaining the national honour, which is confided to both.

You will make your communications to the department as frequent as possible.

The great distance at which your command is placed, and the impossibility of maintaining a frequent or regular communication with you, necessarily induce the department to leave much of the details of your operations to your discretion. The confident belief is entertained, that, with the general outline given in the instructions, you will pursue a course which will make the enemy sensible of our power to inflict on them the evils of war, while it will secure to the United States, if a definitive treaty of peace shall give us California, a population impressed with our justice, grateful for our clemency, and prepared to love our institutions and to honour our flag.

On your being relieved in the command of the squadron, you will hand your instructions to the officer relieving you.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Y. MASON.

Commodore R. F. STOCKTON

Commanding United States naval forces on the west coast of Mexico

Commodore Stockton named Frémont head of the newly-formed Navy Battalion of Mounted Riflemen upon their meeting in California—an unusual assignment for Frémont, as he was a lieutenant in the Army's Topographical Engineers. Stockton tidied up loose ends by unilaterally transferring Frémont into the Navy and astutely enlisting the others in this rough bunch under his command. For the time being, Frémont's group acted as marines. In fact, they were "embarked in vessels of war" on July 26, 1846 to occupy San Diego. Kit Carson remembered that all during this voyage, these "marines" made the "customary tribute to Neptune," as seasickness was described by one author. Carson vowed never to ride on the high seas again.

Brigadier General Kearny, badly defeated in the Battle of San Pascual on December 6,

1846, met Stockton in San Diego on December 12. We assume that Mason's letter had not yet reached Stockton, but Bancroft's probably had. Therefore, there existed a vacancy of designated leadership, which an ambitious and first arrived senior officer might easily exploit for personal gain and glory.

After reviewing much that has been written about this conflict, it is easy to hold Stockton and Frémont in low esteem. As to the latter, it is easily merited but Stockton's performance is more complex. He did appear to hunger for the glory and credit for defeating the Californios but possibly this was a natural consequence as there was a huge void of information, orders, and leadership for the first American commander to cope with. Actually, the first military commander at the beginning of the California conflict was Commodore Sloat but he was in ill health when relieved by Stockton and probably pleased to turn over his command to another officer. Stockton's ego allowed him to make many assumptions on his leadership role. Maybe he can be forgiven for this. This first leadership role that he created by necessity gathered so much momentum it might have been difficult to hand command over to a wounded, starving, bedraggled, and nearly naked Army officer who was junior to him. Commodore Stockton was not merely a senior captain in the Navy. By his date of rank, according to complex schedules then in effect, he outranked General Kearny by at least one grade, possibly two. The fact that there were no admirals in the U.S. Navy at the time also accentuated the rank of commodore's seniority.

Further, as Allan Nevins states in his book *Frémont: The World's Greatest Adventure*, and quoting Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, First Session, No. 33: "On July 22, 1846, Stockton was instructed to "Take and hold California. This will bring with it the necessity of a civil administration. Such a government should be established under your protection."

Stockton and his sailors and marines took California, held it, and formed a civil government that included Frémont as governor. Stockton and Frémont had succeeded in

conquering California for the United States and had bonded through combat. There are few bonds stronger than those between persons experiencing war together. As Stockton departed, his appointment of Frémont as succeeding governor was a reward to a comrade-in-arms. Stockton possibly exceeded his authority but understood that leaving another leadership vacuum could reverse the victory. Commodore Stockton was a *de jure* general officer, senior to all others in California and he would not risk ceding authority to the severely wounded and recently commissioned General Kearny. Although Stockton was certainly guilty of making some errors, his actions helped preserve U.S. victory in the California theater of war.

As to Frémont, his penultimate act of insubordination was to sign a treaty ending the war with the Californios after conferring with neither superior, Stockton nor Kearny. And then, in a completely separate matter, Frémont relinquished neither his command nor governorship upon demand by a senior officer.

Commodore William B. Shubrick relieved Stockton in January 1847. Shubrick was senior to Stockton, and the latter departed for sea duty. Colonel R.B. Mason, the eventual successor to Kearny, arrived at the same time as Shubrick. Kearny met with Shubrick in Monterey but the question of command does not appear to have been settled until Commodore Biddle arrived in early March and established his seniority. Kearny and Biddle defined their areas of command according to Secretary Mason's letter. Kearny was placed in charge of the California government while naval officers were limited to customs enforcement and maritime affairs. After clarity in civilian and military command was established, Kearny sent word to Frémont in Los Angeles via Colonel Mason to muster out his battalion. Frémont chose to defy this order and challenged Mason to a duel. No doubt realizing his behavior was pointless and insubordinate, Frémont reluctantly obeyed Kearny's orders and reported to him in Monterey.

Thus ended a clash of temperaments amid desires for personal acclaim, conflict,

and a vacuum in leadership. Was Stockton a brilliant leader who engineered the California conquest by taking charge and using decisive military and political skill? Or was he a master manipulator using command confusion to further his career? Does his reputation warrant redemption? Was Frémont one of Stockton's pawns and the ultimate victim? We may never know.

Commodore Stockton retired from the Navy and served for a short period as a New Jersey U.S. Senator. His presidential ambitions went unfulfilled. His death in 1866 followed thirteen years as president of the Delaware & Raritan Canal Company.

General Kearny sought a military command in Mexico after Frémont's court martial. Shortly after his arrival, he was stricken with disease and returned to the U.S. to recover. Kearny lived only until 1848, dying of dysentery in St. Louis, Missouri.

Upon Frémont's return from California, he was convicted in Washington D.C. of mutiny, disobedience to the lawful command of a superior officer, and conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. President Polk overturned the mutiny conviction and cancelled the sentence on the other two charges for political expediency. Frémont, resuming his exploring activities in winter 1848-49, abandoned his comrades in a severe snowstorm in the Rocky Mountains, resulting in the death of twelve members. Redemption eluded Frémont again after he was commissioned a major general at the beginning of the Civil War. As a mathematician, surveyor, and engineer, Frémont was a brilliant officer. As a military leader and strategist, he was not. President Lincoln dismissed him. His one notable Civil War success was a personnel decision to give Ulysses S. Grant command of a vital operation, launching Grant's spectacular rise to General of the entire Union Army.

Fremont's character is difficult to describe. He was unfaithful to his wife, ran unsuccessfully as the Republican party's first presidential candidate in 1856, freed slaves in Missouri without authorization from President Lincoln who canceled this "premature" emancipation, and achieved legendary

status for his clumsy self-defeatism and lack of common sense in military, business, and political affairs. Nearly every critical decision he made seems to have been the wrong one. Perhaps he believed himself infallible, or that routine matters were unworthy of his attention. Historian Andrew Rolle wrote a psychological biography, *John Charles Fremont: Character as Destiny*, in which he explored Fremont's enigmatic and controversial behavior.

Frémont entered into two real estate transactions in California that were legal quagmires, losing both. He also purchased a large estate in New York and lost it due to business ineptitude. In 1878, he was appointed Territorial Governor of Arizona, but was absent much of the time pursuing investment opportunities. None of his commercial ventures were profitable and the Frémonts lived their last years in very modest circumstances. John C. Frémont, a curious mixture of brave explorer, scientist, politician, business failure, schemer, egotist, and insubordinate soldier died in 1890.

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Figure 1: Phil Brigandi and red-bellied E Clampus Vitus friends at the dedication of a plaque on June 20th, 2009, for the Railroad Pass Casino near Henderson, Nevada, the oldest continuously active casino in that state and holder of Nevada gaming license #4. Left to right: Abraham Hoffman, Glenn Thornhill, Phil Brigandi, Mark Hall-Patton, and Sid Blummer. Hall-Patton photo.

Phil Brigandi, 1959-2019: A Remembrance

In 1977, I met Phil Brigandi when we both became the new, young men on the board of the Orange Community Historical Society. Phil had begun his interest in, and research on, local Orange, California history in High School. He had just graduated, and I was just back from my first year of graduate school. Since both of us were native Californians and Orange Countians, interested in our local history, we bonded quickly.

As the years passed, we stayed close friends. I moved with my jobs, while Phil stayed centered in Orange County. Starting with *The Plaza*, Phil's second book, (his first was a history of the Lost Valley Scout Reservation he published in 1978) he

followed in the footsteps of a heritage of great Orange County historians, from Sam Armor and Terry Stephenson to Don Meadows and Jim Sleeper. Phil reached out while in High School to interview Don Meadows about his school, which Don had also attended. Don saw in Phil someone to be mentored, and did, becoming a friend as well, for the rest of his life. Jim Sleeper also became a close friend and mentor, seeing Phil's work as a worthy successor to his in the presentation of Orange County history.

And present it he did. Phil was a virtual machine when it came to writing. Books such as *Orange*, *The City Round the Plaza* (you never wanted to say the circle around Phil); *Old*

Orange County Courthouse; A Brief History of Orange, California; Orange County Chronicles; Orange County Place Names A to Z (the only time when he expanded on an earlier work, this one by his early mentor Don Meadows on the same subject); *A Place Called Home*, and more than a dozen others, including an edited volume of Jim Sleeper's local history talks, showed Phil's devotion to his home and its history. He brought back the Orange County Historical Society's *Orange Countiana* annual publication, serving as editor and keeping it going for years. He also embraced new forms of writing, reaching out through his web presence. He was a local historian, as he always said in no uncertain terms. He believed that to truly understand an area and write about it, you had to walk the land, know the people, and recognize any name mentioned in a letter or newspaper article. And that Phil did.

But Phil did not stop at the Orange County border, as neither of his Orange County historian friends and forebears had. Phil, while a Boy Scout, went to camp at a place called Lost Valley. He fell in love with the camp and in typical fashion began to research the area. In doing so, he tracked down the last Cupeño Indian who remembered being relocated from the site in 1903, Roscinda Nolasquez. He found her home on the Pala Reservation, and went to visit her, to see if she would talk to him. This was also when he was in high school. Roscinda was kind enough to talk with Phil, who continued to interview her for the rest of her life. But as was typical of Phil, Roscinda became a friend, and Phil would go to see her, take her for trips back to the valley, get to know her family, and become part of her life. Through her, and his research, he found out about Helen Hunt Jackson and *Ramona*, and another area of interest was kindled.

In this, his local style of history was stretched to San Diego County, and all those areas which were touched by the *Ramona* story, its impact on California, and the attempts by its author Helen Hunt Jackson to address the injustices of how the Indians in California had been treated by the Federal Government. This led him eventually to two of his last

books, working with Valerie Scherer Mathis, *Reservations, Removal and Reform: The Mission Indian Agents of Southern California, 1878-1903*, and *A Call for Reform: The Southern California Indian Writings of Helen Hunt Jackson*. These were not only the culmination for Phil of many years of research, but were also still very local in the way he approached the subject. He knew the people he wrote about, the land they trod, and the people who they had interacted with.

But along the way, Phil had also become a renowned authority on not only the *Ramona* story, but also the *Ramona* Pageant, an outdoor play given each year in Hemet, California, where he lived and served as the pageant historian for a number of years, both paid and unpaid. He also was the San Jacinto, California, museum director for a few years, another town which plays a role in the *Ramona* story. Despite living there, so close to Temecula, which is also a part of the story and a town that he wrote books about (and edited the revived *High Country* magazine for years), it was not Orange County. He also became well-known for his expertise on the Butterfield Overland Route, and the Borrego Valley. He participated in the Pegleg Smith Liar's Contest for many years, eventually winning the contest in absentia, and being made Master of Ceremonies so others would have a chance.

Eventually, he had to come home, and he did when he became the Orange County Archivist in 2003, when the position was recreated. He served in that role for five years.

However, a short segue is in order here, because I have not noted Phil's interest in Death Valley. He became very interested in the newspapers of the region, as well as the mining history. Hiking the desert with his many friends, often, especially when younger, going into abandoned mines before they were closed for safety reasons, he started looking into that history as well. He wrote for the Death Valley '49ers, being invited to their authors' breakfasts. Focusing on the Death Valley Chuckwalla, he tracked down, as was his want, the son of one of the editors, and interviewed him about his father and his work. He also became very interested in Randall

Henderson and the Desert Magazine, and became friends with Randall's daughter, Evonne Riddell. Phil, in typical fashion as anyone who knew him would tell you, introduced me to Evonne when I took my current job in 1993 to create an aviation museum at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas. I told Phil that Randall Henderson was the first man to fly to Las Vegas in 1920, and he promptly gave me Henderson's daughter's phone number so I could contact her. Phil later wrote *Barnstorming the Desert*, a book about Henderson's aviation career, for my museum to publish.

Phil's latest "local" history efforts had been focused with his friend Eric Plunkett on the Portola Expedition and its impact on California, as well as beginning work on a new Indian Agents book with Valerie Mathis. He and I had brought out a couple of books this last year, including the latest Plaque Book from *E Clampus Vitus*, where Phil served as the cyberplaquero to my role as Grand Plaquero. He was updating his history of scouting in Orange County, and working on a few other projects as well. A fairly typical pace for Phil, who published over 30 books in his too short 60 years. He also served as *Branding Iron* editor for three years for the Los Angeles Corral.

Yes, Phil was a local historian. But local was both a place and a style, a way of understanding history. He always wanted to understand history as being about people. Whatever you might want to say about the grand sweep of history, it always came down to the individuals in Phil's world. And he cared about them, both in his writing and when he worked with them.

Phil also cared for other historians and those coming up. He never felt he "owned" the history he had researched. It was there for others to use as well. If you had a question, you could call him, and he would answer the phone and talk to you. My son, a PhD candidate in history, would call him to discuss obscure points in southwest history, and Phil never minded. Phil was in the cell phone rolodexes of most local reporters and historians. And if you wanted to know where to look for information, he was a walking

search engine (though he would have preferred encyclopedia, probably).

Phil will be missed greatly. While his written heritage will live on, and many of his works will continue to be the basic works on the subject, the loss of his knowledge will ripple outward through the many books and articles which will not be written, the talks and tours which will not be given, and the phone calls which will not be answered. He was a fine historian, and one that made a difference. The void is great, and will come up every time we think, *Oh wait, let me call Phil...*

— Mark Hall-Patton



Figure 2: Phil Brigandi at the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners's 70-year anniversary celebration, 2016. Paul Rippens photo.

Mark Your Calendar!

Less Than Two Years Until the

75th Anniversary Fiesta of the Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners

Held Jointly with the

4th Annual Westerners International Gather

Friday, October 8th, and Saturday, October 9th, 2021



Saddle Your Mule, Hitch up your Team, and Come Join us for

**Two Days of Fun, Food, Entertainment and History
Way Out West in Los Angeles, California!**

**Guided Tours of San Fernando Mission (1797)
and The Autry Museum of the American West
Historical Lectures, Cowboy Poetry, Book Auction
Hot Rod Night (Friday) at Bob's Big Boy Burgers
(Burgers, Shakes, and Dozens of SoCal Hot Rods, 1920s-1960s)
Saturday Night BBQ and Open Bar at the Hacienda Turner!
Drinkin', Dancin', Tomfoolery, and Live Mariachi Music!**

Monthly Roundup . . .



December 2019

Brian D. Dillon

The Los Angeles Corral's very own Brian Dillon was the speaker for the December roundup. Brian regaled us with the truth, lies, and legends about Wyatt and Josie Earp. Wyatt Earp has been portrayed as a hero in various forms of media for many years. He is represented as a lawman who seeks justice first and foremost. This is mostly fiction though. Earp *was* a deputy sheriff and deputy marshal, but he was also a pimp, a gambler, and, when he was young, a horse thief. So how did Earp get his good reputation while hiding his negative side? Enter Ned Buntline, the pseudonym for a hack fiction writer named Edward Zane Carroll Judson.

Buntline never wrote about Wyatt Earp, but he did start the American obsession with the Wild West that inexorably led to Earp's stardom. His first creation was Buffalo Bill. The famous Wild West Show started on a stage in New York and expanded to the giant spectacle with which we are all familiar. From there the mythologizing moved onto the big and small screens. Earp worked as a consultant on some of these movies adding

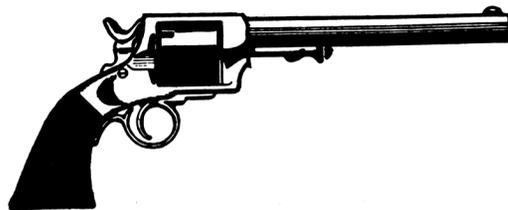
an air of legitimacy to the lies being fed to the public.

With all of the twin six shooter twirling cowboys running around on screen and in books, people started to actually believe what was being sold to them—even those feats that violated common sense or the laws of physics. Reenactments and theme parks perpetuate the fictitious version of the Old West. Ever present among the movies, books, and especially TV shows was Wyatt Earp, the steadfast lawman, keeping the west safe for women and children everywhere in nightly reruns of his shootout at the O.K. Corral.

Josie Earp was not immune to telling lies about her husband and his exploits. After Wyatt's death in 1929, she sold off various guns that she claimed belonged to him. She was also not safe from lies being spread about her. A photograph of a woman in a very sheer dress was said to be a photo of Josie taken in the 1880s. But the photo was originally taken in 1914 in New York when she was 53 years old and 2000 miles away. That didn't stop it from being used on the cover of an entirely fake biography of Josie.

Legends can be good as entertainment but that good goes away when they are presented as fact. A man who did a lot of bad things in his life portraying himself as an up-standing lawman isn't good. When it leads to various authors and filmmakers embellishing, not just that man's life, but also the world he lived in, that can be dangerous. A case in point being the downright stupid way most movie and television cowboys handle their guns, which they treat like stage props rather than deadly weapons. It can lead to unsafe behavior at the best and death at the worst. Pistol twirling cowboys are fun to watch but they aren't real. They should remain in the land of make believe and stay out of history books.

— Aaron Tate





January 2020

Mark Mutz

On *E Clampus Vitus* Night, fraternity members dressed in red to usher in the New Year at the first roundup of 2020. Clamper Mark Mutz took the floor to discuss the ins and outs of storytelling. Mutz uncovered the truth behind various legends about American history. He connected historical monuments of death and destruction with his experience as a curious young man in New England, an infantry sergeant from the Pacific Northwest to Kentucky, and as a resident in his current home in California. The tombstones he found throughout his life served as reminders of grim moments in the past often forgotten by the average American today—"A Soldier of the Revolution," the Russian orthodox cemetery near Fort Richardson, Alaska, and the Civil War graveyards near Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Each marker told a story, and

those stories contributed to Mutz's endeavor to report on those stories in his newspaper, *The Fence Post*.

America was built on legends and continues to be spoken of in the language of these legends. The myths surrounding the origin of Thanksgiving cracked under the pressure of Mutz's corrections, and that same pressure challenged other popular misconceptions; the conquered Californios who fought back against American conquest with skill and bravery, as opposed to letting our country have an easy victory. Most fallacious of all, in Mutz's eyes, would be the various paradoxes that make up America's historic foundation. The fight for U.S. independence missed a true sense of universal patriotism as a mess of loyalism, fence-sitting, and opportunism stood in the way of unified dissent against the British. "Liberty and justice for all" applied only to a select portion of the American population for many generations. The existence of slavery and the disenfranchisement of women are two of the clearest examples of how America's promise did not match up to reality.

How can a nation stand on so many contradictions? Mutz strives to take such contradictions apart. Their existence begs asking—does America stand *because* of a collective willingness to overlook errors in nationalist nostalgia? Many more factors put America in a good position to avoid discussing its checkered past, but a critical look at the historical record is necessary to stop the cycle of perpetuating a lack of awareness of our country.

— Arkaz Vardanyan





February 2020

Charles Randy King

The American frontier crawled with gunslingers. Each one picked up the firearm for a different reason, and each one aimed for the same result; gun violence and death was a constant threat in the Wild West, whether the victims were implicated in crime and scandal, or if they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. These circumstances made the firearm the be all and end all to both keeping the peace and disrupting order. The moral code of the time seems blurred to us, making judgment calls on four gunmen difficult—Pink Higgins, Luke Short, Jim Miller, and Bill Fossett. Charles King invited us to set aside our values to marvel at the spectacle that was the ruthlessness, the cunning, and the extraordinary careers of these four men.

Not every gunslinger can be called a *ruthless* killer, but they were killers nonetheless. Luke Short, a shrewd businessman and gambler, and Bill Fossett, a fearless lawman who climbed the ranks in a long career, both used force to overcome challenges. The American frontier pushed people to vice and violence in a way that left no room for polite diplomacy. Short escaped arrest after selling bootleg whiskey to Native Americans, and his business dealings landed him in one tricky situation after another. He made it big scoring ranch land, owning whiskey stocks, and running saloons, and with the help of his six shooter, he never let racketeers or corrupt capitalists get one over on him in his career.

Fossett's career involved a more traditionally noble path, killing or capturing outlaws and running with peacekeeping posses. Even his daughter took after him in shooting and maintaining order on the frontier. For every morally dubious or righteous gunman, however, there was also a morally corrupt one—or, at least, one whose career of gunslinging can be harder to swallow.

Some men killed ruthlessly, amassing astounding body counts and defying the law at every turn. Whether their intentions were noble or not, the end results reveal the capacity for death and violence in the Old West. Pink Higgins and Jim Miller had drastically different lives as gunmen, with Higgins leaning toward the far more "righteous" of the two. He took the cowboy profession seriously, and as a range detective for the Spur Ranch in Texas, Higgins lynched many cattle rustlers. Higgins also feuded with the Horrell Brother outlaws, kickstarting his reputation as a gunslinger. While he was ruthless, Higgins directed his brutality toward criminals; Miller's violence, on the other hand, is harder to reconcile by today's standards of morality. Miller advertised himself as an assassin, accruing great wealth taking assignments, even during his work with the Texas Rangers. Not only did the Texas Rangers apparently tolerate his lucrative side job, but he had already managed to serve as a lawman in Pecos. A man of no vices save for profitable murder, Miller set a comically conflicting example for men in the Wild West.

Morality changes over the ages, and America being so young makes the jump in standards between eras look steep. King proposed that the concoction of booze, guns, and unsavory personalities lended to the "wildness" of the west, leaving behind a memory of lawlessness in our minds. He saw both marvel and horror in the histories of America's famed killers. While he entertained the crowd with these stories, King also emphasized the importance in paying mind to the moral gap between the American frontier past and our present—not so far removed from our contemporary lives, and not a history we should honor without judgment.

— Arkaz Vardanyan

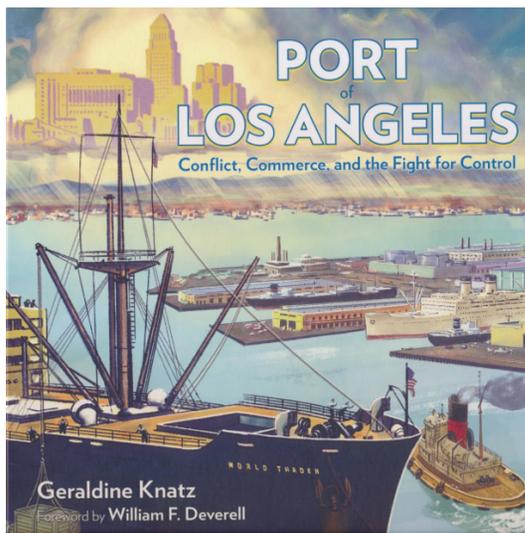
Down the Western Book Trail . . .

PORT OF LOS ANGELES: Conflict, Commerce, and the Fight for Control, by Geraldine Knatz, foreword by William F. Deverell. Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West, Angel City Press, Los Angeles, CA. Hardbound, 320 pages, 200+ illustrations, appendices, end notes, bibliography, index: \$45.00

Too many present-day residents of California think only in terrestrial terms when considering the history of their state. They often forget the rich maritime influences from all over the world that helped make first San Francisco, and then Los Angeles, the dominant cities of the American Pacific Coast. But, as those of us as much at home on salt water as we may be in the mountains, the forests, and the deserts of the American West like to say, history doesn't, and never has, stopped at the waterline. Dr. Geraldine Knatz became the Executive Director of the Port of Los Angeles in 2006 and ran it for many years. Nobody could be better qualified to write the definitive book about the most active American port on the Pacific Coast.

Port of Los Angeles: Conflict, Commerce, and the Fight for Control is many different books in one. It is written from an informed perspective treating geography, ecology, economics, and politics as of equal importance bearing upon the unique story of the port. Best of all, every major change in the port's history is related to the people involved: visionaries, politicians, movers and shakers, businessmen, sailors, longshoremen, activists, the good and the not-so-good, the far-seeing and the myopic.

Shining through page after page is Knatz's firm belief that *people* create their own history, for good or for ill, and are not simply swept along upon the tide of forces beyond their own control. Also unmistakable is her conviction that the form that the Port of Los Angeles took was *not* accidental, but the product of a great many decisions taken over a great many years. Some of these decisions were secret, others public; some were



popular, others were bitterly contested and have left a legacy of division.

Dr. Knatz' book is chronologically divided into three sections: 1891-1913, 1914-1945, and 1946-1977. It is lavishly illustrated with a wonderful selection of historic photographs, maps, air photos, contemporary promotional artwork, political cartoons, and artists' renderings. Of particular interest to this reviewer were the sections showing: how the military demands of both World Wars affected the Port of Los Angeles in unsuspected ways, and focused national attention upon it; the love-hate relationship between the port and local and national railroads, the two completely different functional entities often in competition with each other, but those in charge of both never able to afford to ignore each other; and last, but certainly not least, Knatz' masterful retelling of the now-forgotten influence the completion of the Panama Canal had on all American ports ("Canal Fever"), not just that of Los Angeles.

Dr. Knatz is a member of the Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners, as is her son. She has contributed scholarly studies on Southern California history as both corral and mainstream publications over the years. Her most recent (2019) offering, on the Port of Los Angeles, is destined to become a classic.

Anybody with an interest in maritime history, in the history of shipping and international commerce, in the relationship between coastal cities and the ports that serve them, and in California and Western American history in general will find this book of great interest. For years to come it will be recommended reading in university courses on

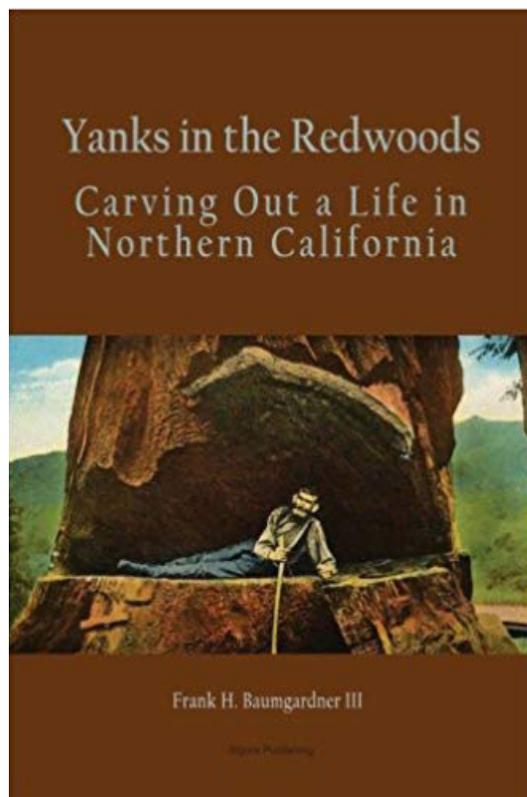
history, economics, and politics, and will be found in public libraries everywhere. It is a *must read* for anybody proud to live on the edge of the World's greatest ocean. This is a magnificent accomplishment, and I highly recommend it.

— Brian Dervin Dillon, Ph.D.

YANKS IN THE REDWOODS: *Carving Out a Life in Northern California*, by Frank H. Baumgardner III, New York: Algora Publishing, 2010. 237 pp. Appendices, Sources, Index. Paperback, \$21.95.

The average American tends to envision the early settlement of California through the eyes of the hardy frontiersman and his family, roughing it to the coast in search of a better life. What does not immediately come to mind are the aftermath of their arrival and the growth of the Northern Californian settlements that expanded beyond ordinary folk in wagon trains. Frank H. Baumgardner III's *Yanks in the Redwoods* focuses on the development of the Mendocino Coast, debunking glamorous misconceptions of white settler life to provide a more faithful image of the past. The book looks at accounts from successful lumber capitalists who laid the foundation of American civilization in a previously indigenous-dominated land. Struggling settlers and immigrants gravitated to these businesses for work and built towns together as the native population suffered the consequences of white encroachment.

Baumgardner does well to prove the lumber industry's importance to the settlement of the Mendocino Coast. He establishes the impact that entrepreneurship and the sometimes unethical methodology of these entrepreneurs had on the area. Job opportunities opening up in sawmills attracted immigrants and Americans from the East Coast. The search for able loggers to keep up with production enabled the ballooning growth of Northern California as an economically grounded focal point of community building and great cultural change. Ample attention was given to the contributions of other prom-



inent forces responsible for the development of the Mendocino Coast, such as incoming job seekers and their families that populated the new towns cropping up around the mills. These lumber prospects outshined the uncertainty of the gold craze, leading to direct consequences—good and bad—on the different communities of California. A domino effect outlines lumber capitalism as the key to rapid development on the West Coast. While Baumgardner's position is argued strongly, it weakens toward the end with a drastic change in pace.

The text overemphasizes some details, particularly settlers' experiences. It realisti-

cally recreates settler life, but continues long after already having made its point, especially in comparison to the underemphasized accounts of native struggles against pressures of white settlement in Northern California. The thirteenth chapter, "Etta & Wilder Pullen, Little River," runs for thirty pages compared to the average length of about twelve pages for every other chapter—more than twice the length of a usual chapter inserted at nearly the very end of the book, and discussing little more than mundane conflicts in the life of one ordinary family. This larger portion of the narrative reads as less of a satisfying resolution, and more of a labor for the reader to endure. This underlines the need for the author to pull back on inconsequential detail in other, more well-reported areas for the sake of a concise argument. What information was provided on the experiences of indigenous

peoples proved enlightening, but the ratio of information presented to illustrate the circumstances suggests an unfitting pace by the time the book's historical case is made clear.

Those interested in Northern California history should find Baumgardner's account of the growing western lumber industry suitable. Baumgardner's writing is approachable without being too simple for its subject matter. *Yanks in the Redwoods* fulfills a specific niche, although appreciators of western American history and its economic progression in the mid-to-late nineteenth century might find the greater portion of the book worthy of sitting on their shelf. The text solidly interprets business ventures through government corruption, local controversy, and interracial strife.

— Arkaz Vardanyan

SIDEWALKING: Coming to Terms with Los Angeles, by David L. Ulin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015. 132 pp. Hardbound, \$16.95.

Readers who think this book is a walking tour of Los Angeles will have to think again after reading it. This is not a work like John McKinney's *Walk Los Angeles: Adventures on the Urban Edge* (1992). In fact, David Ulin talks more than he walks; his view of Los Angeles is pretty much restricted to the Mid-Wilshire District, from Wilshire south to Pico, west to Fairfax, east to maybe Western Avenue. He's providing a meditation on Los Angeles as to time and place, with the book a series of essays rather than chapters, based on his previously published writings. Ulin defines "sidewalking" as "a bit of slang that refers to merchants standing outside their establishments, appealing to pedestrians to come and buy" (p. 60). As often as not, Ulin spends considerable amounts of his musings on New York City; transplanted to Los Angeles in 1992, with his children born locally, Ulin seems to straddle both coasts in making comparisons between the two cities.

Much of Ulin's writings concern architecture, both good and bad, and how he feels

about Los Angeles as having an "absence of history." I would argue that what historians need to do is to write a "history of absence," a perspective on urban renewal and gentrification in which the city replaces one history with another, eradicating earlier buildings through eminent domain and bulldozers. Ulin seems very ambivalent about the loss of old buildings, the old Pacific Electric Railway (not *Railroad*, as he states on p. 13), and the discordant architectural styles that often mystify pedestrians.

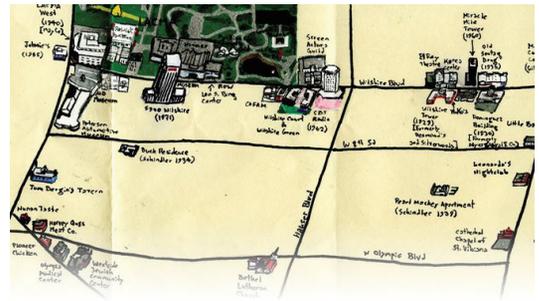
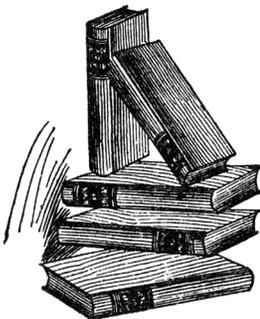
In focusing on his particular neighborhood, Ulin misses the opportunity to comment on what is happening elsewhere in Los Angeles. He either gives a bare mention or none at all to the San Fernando Valley, East Los Angeles, or South Los Angeles. I would have appreciated reading Ulin's views on Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's pledge to have a million trees planted in the city, or Mayor Eric Garcetti's promise to create housing for 44,000 or so homeless people at what may cost up to \$200 million.

For that matter, speaking of sidewalks, it was the city that decades ago planted trees with shallow roots that in their maturity are breaking up the sidewalks and making it dangerous for pedestrians to walk anywhere.

His essays don't include the controversy over sidewalk vendors, a debate with politicians, storefront store owners, and the vendors over whether unlicensed (or even licensed ones) should use public sidewalks to sell their wares. Given Ulin's definition of sidewalk walking, that's an issue meriting his attention.

Ulin quotes a number of critics, mainly journalists or literary figures rather than historians who have written critically on the city, such as Carey McWilliams and Joan Didion. He didn't do much homework in recalling Los Angeles history; maybe historians would have helped him in avoiding such errors as stating "hundreds (thousands, maybe) perished" in the St. Francis Dam failure (p. 22); or claiming Aimee Semple McPherson as "largely forgotten today" (p. 30). Not if one counts two TV documentaries, a film starring Faye Dunaway as Sister Aimee, or at least half a dozen biographies, the most recent one published in 2007.

Ulin quotes Norman Klein's claim of the intersection of Fulton and Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys (now Valley Glen) as "just ugly, retinal eye burn of an extreme form. On one corner was a place called Father and Me, which repaired cars" (p. 34). For the record, the auto repair store at the intersection where Los Angeles Valley College is located is Dad and Me, and the landscaping has dramatically changed there since Klein visited the area. At the northeast corner of the intersection is an entrance to the college, and at the northwest and southeast corners are Metro Orange Line stations, all landscaped with drought-resistant plants. Ulin doesn't say how long ago Klein visited the area, and he apparently hasn't bothered to visit that part of the city



SIDEWALKING

Coming to Terms with Los Angeles

DAVID L. ULIN



himself.

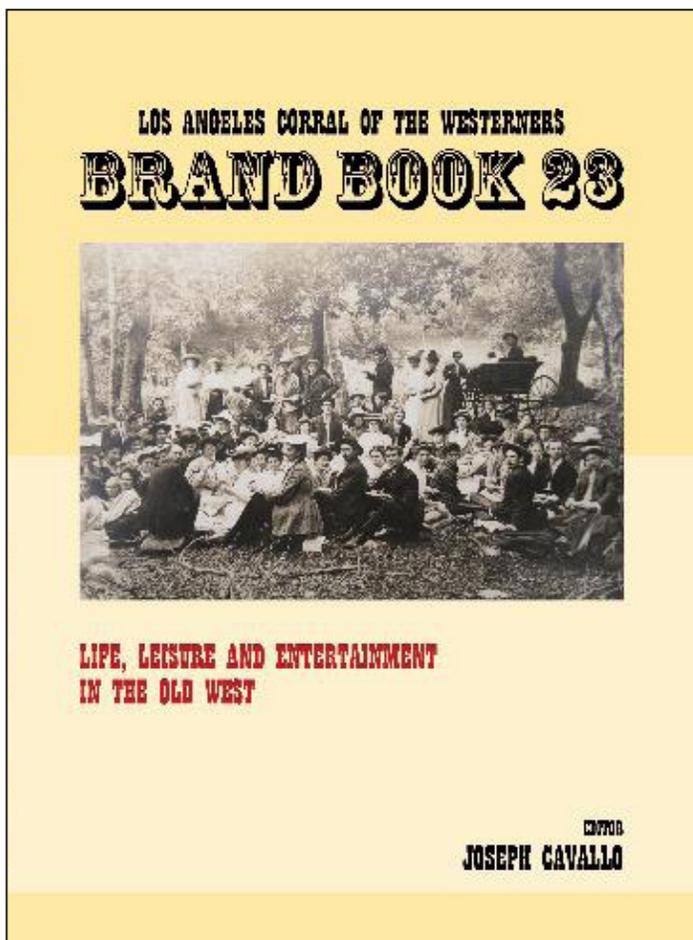
It's Andrés Pico, not his brother Pío Pico, who signed the Treaty of Cahuenga in January 1847, ending the fighting in California, not ending the war with Mexico (p. 53). Adam Gopnik, writer for *New Yorker*, gets his name misspelled twice (p. 53), a rather surprising error since Ulin himself is from New York.

Since Ulin spends so much time writing about Los Angeles's buildings, some photographs would have been helpful, assuming some purchasers of the book might not live in Los Angeles. Ulin frequently mentions "the County Museum," but he is referring to the County Museum of Art on Wilshire Blvd., not the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, often called the Los Angeles County Museum. I would like to have had a bibliography included for the writings he cites, but Ulin doesn't give us that—or maybe the University of California Press didn't want to bother with adding a few more pages to a book that's 132 pages in length.

— Abraham Hoffman

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Richard H. Dillon (1924-2016) was a world-famous western historian, librarian, teacher and public speaker. First published at age 10, he was the author of dozens of prize-winning full-length books, hundreds of articles, and thousands of book reviews. A 4th generation Californian and WWII WIA combat veteran, Dick Dillon was a member of the Los Angeles and the San Francisco Corrals. He presented scholarly lectures to every corral in California, Chicago, on the American East Coast, even in England. He also published articles and book reviews in Westerners International Brand Books and quarterly newsletters coast-to-coast. Richard H. Dillon (RHD) was made Westerners International Living Legend No. 46 in 2003.

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Contact BB 24 Editor Brian (briandervindillon@gmail.com) for more information.