

Figure 1: The Fort Stanton, New Mexico, U.S. Mail carrier complete with guardian pooch, circa 1920. The rig is a Dodge Brothers 6-cylinder Tourer, probably U.S. Army surplus, left over from World War I. Just imagine if you had a flat tire with this load! Lynda Sánchez collection.

“Rain or Shine, Sleet or Snow, the Mail Must Go Through!”

By Lynda A. Sánchez

The traditional saying was, “Rain or shine, sleet or snow, the mail must go through!” Many of us still remember rural U.S. Postal Service letter carriers and their gutsy style, who lived and breathed this motto. The American mail service was the creation of one brilliant man, Benjamin Franklin. From 1753 to 1774 he oversaw what was then

Britain's mail service in colonial America. We sure need someone like that today. Franklin improved an amateurish courier system connecting the original 13 colonies on the Eastern Seaboard. He converted a catch-as-catch-can process into a more efficient, dedicated mail service that allowed deliveries between

(Continued on Page 3)

The Branding Iron

Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners

Published Quarterly

Winter – Spring – Summer – Fall

2025 TRAIL BOSSES

JIM OLDS	<i>Sheriff</i>
JOSEPH CAVALLO	<i>Deputy Sheriff</i>
MICHELE CLARK	<i>Registrar of Marks & Brands</i>
DENNY THOMPSON	<i>Keeper of the Chips</i>
JOHN DILLON	<i>Publications Editor</i>
MARK MUTZ	<i>Past Sheriff, 2024</i>
JOHN SHEA	<i>Past Sheriff, 2023</i>

2025 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>
ALAN GRIFFIN	
PATRICK MULVEY	<i>Daguerreotype Wrangler Web 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. 66</i>
PATRICK MULVEY	<i>John Robinson Fellow</i>
AARON TATE	<i>Gary Turner Fellow</i>
JOHN DILLON	<i>Jerry Selmer Fellow</i>
DENNIS BERMÚDEZ	<i>Francis J. Weber Fellow</i>
AMANDA MARTINEZ	<i>DeeDee Ruhlow Fellow</i>
JOVANNY GOCHEZ	<i>William Warren Fellow</i>
ALAN GRIFFIN	<i>Paul McClure Fellow</i>
ARKAZ VARDANYAN	<i>Abraham Hoffman Fellow</i>
DARRAN DAVIS	<i>Pete Fries Fellow</i>
BRIAN D. DILLON	<i>Westerners International Rep.</i>

For subscription information: Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners, P. O. Box 1891, San Gabriel, CA 91778
www.lawesterners.org

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.
 © 2025 Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners

See our web site for past *Branding Iron* issues, photos, Corral meetings and so much more!

www.lawesterners.org

Editor's Corner . . .

The new year of 2025 dramatically heated up with the worst wildfires in Los Angeles' history, but thankfully our Corral emerged mostly unscathed. Is flood and famine next? Regardless, *The Branding Iron* will always be delivered, and so too shall the U.S. Postal Service, the topic of our lead article, courtesy of Lynda Sánchez.

Next, Dillon brothers Brian, David, and Ross share stories of their well-spent youth practicing the vanishing art of magnet fishing in San Francisco Bay. Abraham Hoffman recounts a 1960s California history textbook-selection controversy, proving there is noth-

ing new under the sun. Brian Dillon reflects upon the recent wildfires, and lastly Tracy Johnston turns stomachs with some food-safety history.

For summaries of recent Roundups that you may have missed, Darran Davis and this editor, yours truly, have you covered. See also book reviews of recommended titles by Abraham Hoffman and Brian Dillon.

Many thanks to all of our great contributors! Please reach out if you wish to submit to *The Branding Iron*.

John Dillon
John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com

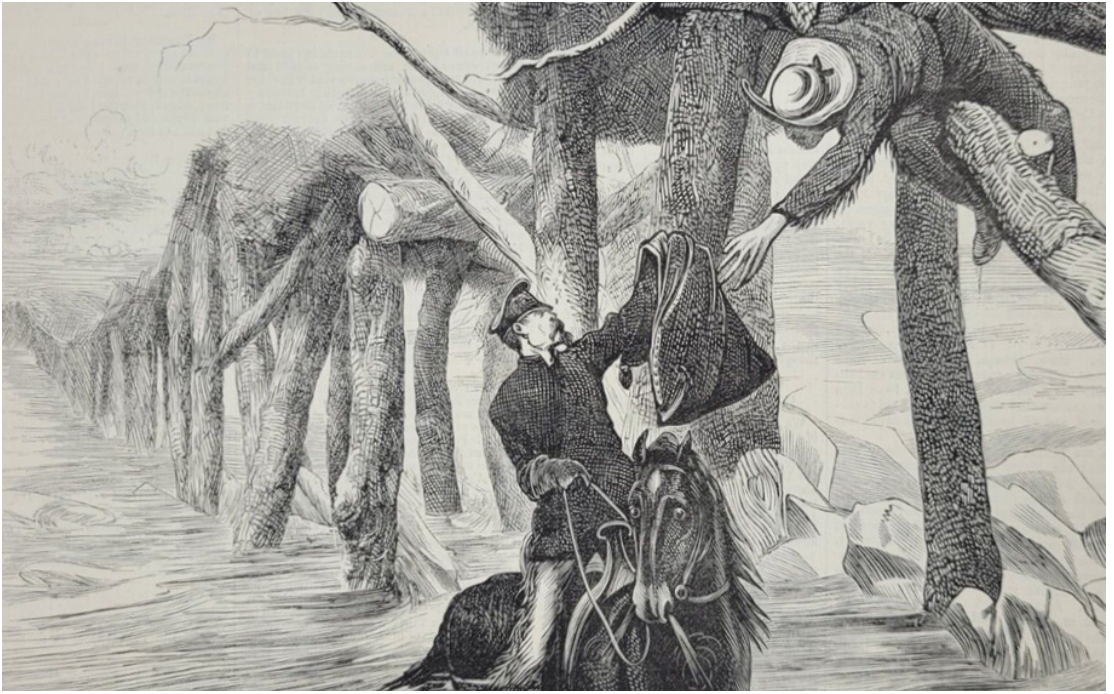


Figure 2: A somewhat apocryphal Eastern artist's interpretation of mail delivery in the American West from *Harper's Weekly*, Volume 15, No. 765, August 26, 1871: 796. Original caption: *In the Far West-Carrying the Mail.*

Philadelphia and New York City to arrive after a mere 33 hours on the road.

After independence, post riders, the earliest carriers in American history, rode along a system of roads that the Constitution authorized the federal government to create. These roads connected small post offices where people would wait in long lines to collect their mail. Lots of people depended upon these post riders to bring in their letters especially around Christmas time. Many of these folks lived in isolation and the roads the mounted post riders had to travel were sometimes little more than deeply rutted trails. But the mail had to get through.

Mail was usually "sacked up" in canvas bags (Figure 2) and rural delivery riders typically strapped these bags to their saddle in-between delivery destinations. When a large quantity of mail had to be moved between small towns, farmsteads, or ranches, multiple bags would be piled up inside roofed, weatherproofed, delivery wagons, often only one horsepower (Figure 3). The use of autos (both electric and gas-powered) increased after 1913 when postal carriers began deliver-

ing packages as well as letters. By 1933 less than 3 percent of urban postal vehicles were still horse-drawn.¹

One heroic rural delivery mailman of my acquaintance was AmerIndian, an Apache, who recently retired. A carrier in Otero County, New Mexico, he saw his obligation through year after year in the rugged Sacramento Mountains.² Another friend's father did the same in Texas.³ For forty years he drove those rough, rocky and sometimes muddy Texas roads much like the mail carrier in the historic Figure 1 photograph taken at Fort Stanton, New Mexico almost exactly a hundred years ago. Sometimes his car would get stuck and he would have to get out and walk miles just to deliver the country folks' mail. That kind of dedication is rare today.

The heroic efforts of mail carriers from bygone days were seldom recognized or appreciated. It could be a long, lonely journey on horseback (Figure 4), or later, in an open car (Figure 1). A traveling companion like the charming canine awaiting his master's return at Fort Stanton, New Mexico, must have greatly comforted the mail carriers as they



Figure 3: A “one-horsepower” U.S. Mail delivery wagon for rural routes. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Postal Service.

drove through rain, sleet, and snow, ensuring that the U.S. Mail did indeed, *go through*.

End notes:

1. U.S. Postal Service website.
2. Mary Serna, personal communication to L. Sánchez, 2020.
3. Kurt Haus, personal communication to L. Sánchez, 2024.

About the Author

Lynda A. Sánchez is a retired educator, historian and author living in historic Lincoln, New Mexico. She has written over 400 articles and six books about her beloved Southwest. The Figure 1 image of the rural mail carrier inspired her to write this short piece on the brave and dedicated men and women who carried the U.S. mail over rugged lands for decades.



Figure 4: “Here ye go ma’am”. One of the very last American horseback mail carriers delivering correspondence in Leslie County, Kentucky, in 1961. Courtesy of LIFE Magazine.



Figure 5: The Sausalito waterfront, with Bridgeway Avenue (1), previously Water Street, at bottom center. The Sausalito Public Fishing Pier (2) was just past the last building on Bridgeway. That two-story structure (3), formerly the San Francisco Yacht Club (1898-1927), became the Trident Restaurant in 1960. At upper left, halfway to Fort Baker was Junk Beach (4), Sausalito's saltwater dump. At top center the flat-topped peak (5), to the right of the North Tower of the Golden Gate Bridge (6), hosted Battery Spencer, where our grandfather was the gun captain from 1910 through 1914. Photo by Bob Campbell, taken from U.S. Navy blimp K-107 on November 24, 1947, courtesy of the San Francisco Chronicle photographic archive. Additions by B. Dillon 2025.

Childhood Way Out West: Magnet Fishing

By Brian Dervin Dillon, David Erin Dillon, and Ross Richard Dillon

Introduction

Long ago, and far away, and not in this jurisdiction, as kids we used to go magnet fishing in San Francisco Bay. At first, this pastime only alleviated the boredom of regular fishing at our usual haunts, the Sausalito, Fort Baker, Elephant Rock, and San Quentin piers in southern Marin County, California, but it later grew into an obsession. Nobody our own age had a closer connection with the Marin County shoreline of San Francisco Bay than we three wild Irish Dillon brothers. As early as 1869 our great-grandmother rowed

out to whaling ships moored off Old Town Sausalito to provision them with fresh water from wooden barrels. A generation later, in the 1890s, our grandmother played her violin at dances sponsored by William Randolph Hearst at the San Francisco Yacht Club (Figure 6) on Water Street, Sausalito.¹

Between 1902 and 1905 our grandfather helped build Fort Baker, commuting across the Bay every day on the work barge from the San Francisco Presidio. Top Sergeant Dillon, nicknamed “King Bill” by the four companies of enlisted men he bossed at the fort, jacked up an abandoned duck hunter’s

shack near the beach and pulled it on rollers up the shallow, crescent-shaped valley with a team of artillery mules to a pad he had leveled. He later turned his workshop shack into the Honeymoon Suite for our grandmother. Our grandparents lived at Fort Baker after their 1910 marriage in what was the only free-standing, single-family dwelling besides the one occupied by the base commander (Figure 7:1). Grandpa Dillon was the gun captain at Battery Spencer (Figure 5:5), the highest-elevation gun emplacement in the United States, and the boss of the most accurate Coast Artillery unit in the U.S. Army every year from 1910 through 1914. After World War I, and his combat service in his fourth war on his fourth continent, former Top Sergeant Dillon, by then a U.S. Army mustang artillery Captain, became the Fort Baker "caretaker commander" once the base was mothballed.²

Shortly afterwards, in 1924 our father had the unique distinction of being born on a table-top on Johnson Street, in New Town, Sausalito.³ So the southern Marin County coastline of San Francisco Bay had been our family's stomping grounds for almost a hundred years *before* we three Dillon brothers dropped our magnet into the Bay the very first time sixty-four years ago.

Salt-Water Baptism

Oldest brother Brian (b. 1953) began magnet fishing around the same time (1961) that he built his first small boat in his side yard. This was an 8-foot folding kayak, from plans ordered from *Boy's Life Magazine*. In his nimble little watercraft Brian carried his magnet far beyond the pedestrian-accessible shoreline and plumbed the salty depths near islands in San Francisco Bay, around the hulls of pre-Hippie houseboats moored off Sausalito, and half-submerged, abandoned hulks, from windjammers to old ferry boats, rotting just offshore.

Brian bought his 9-pound U.S. Navy "horseshoe" magnet at a military surplus store when he was eight years old. Back then such emporiums sold Army and Navy uniforms, tools, equipment, even rifle stocks and

pistol holsters. It cost more (4 dollars) than he paid for his first bicycle (\$2.50). Brian's cash came from his very first part-time job: laying bricks around the Dillon house for ten cents an hour, considered a proper wage by his father/employer/paymaster.

"Army" magnets were flat, rectangular slabs with rounded corners and perforations at their base for attaching cords, baskets, or small canvas bags. There were designed for use inside tanks, when the temporary attachment of tools, small spare parts, etc., especially within the very cramped space of the turret, was necessary. When not in use, they could be stacked in some out-of-the-way place where they would not interfere with the activities of the tank crew.

"Navy" horseshoe magnets were completely different, in size, shape, and strength. They were many times larger and stronger than Army magnets. They were extremely useful inside the hulls and on the outer decks of the Navy's all-steel ships, when the temporary attachment of steel plates and braces to each other prior to riveting, bolting or welding was required. They really came into their own in the WWII submarine service, where welding was *never* an option underwater, and the "temporary" joining of two metal elements sometimes became semi-permanent.

We don't know what the history of Brian's heavy-duty Navy magnet was, nor if it was a combat veteran of WWII or Korea, but it may have seen service in an American submarine before it was sold on the civilian market. The magnet was about six inches tall by about four inches wide in a very thick, broad, inverted "U" shape, tapering down slightly through its twin arms to its two lowest flat rectangular gripping surfaces spaced about 2.5 inches apart. It was painted black all over except for its two "business" ends. The remnants of two perforated flanges projecting from one arm were broken off. These were so that the magnet could be bolted to a workbench or to a pulling plate at a steel cable's end with both "business ends" exposed. Doubtless this workplace damage was what had rendered it "surplus."

Brian's "Black Beauty" magnet was so strong that metallic objects greatly in excess



Figure 6: The San Francisco Yacht Club's magnificent clubhouse circa 1900 on Water Street (later re-named "Bridgeway," with the coming of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937) in Sausalito, California. The original building burned in 1897: this is the second clubhouse built at the same location. Dances and concerts were held in the ball-room on the ground floor, where our grandmother often provided musical accompaniment on her violin. The small building at left with the circular tank on its roof provided the Sausalito Fire Department with water for fighting waterfront fires. It was demolished in the 1930s, making way for the municipal fishing pier that we Dillon brothers magnet fished from more than 60 years ago. Commercial postcard in the public domain.

of 100lbs could be lifted with it. Even more remarkably, if set atop a flat surface a foot away from an iron or steel girder, galvanized fence-pole, engine block, or re-bar rod projecting from concrete, without any human assistance it would slide towards the metallic *object of its desire* until it was firmly attached to it. These were the truest cases of *magnetic attraction* any of us Dillon boys ever saw.

Because even at age eight Brian was intimately familiar with the ravages of salt water, he didn't use hemp rope as the line for his old Navy magnet, but instead bought some bright yellow rot-resistant nylon cord about 1/2 inch in diameter. He tied the end of his 50-foot lanyard tightly around the top of the inverted "horseshoe" and always secured the other end to the guard rail of the pier when magnet fishing, as insurance against accidentally losing his rig.

The first time Brian went magnet fishing off the Sausalito Public Fishing Pier (Figure 5:2), he pulled up knives in various stages of disintegration, and even an entire fishing pole, complete with reel and several hundred

feet of monofilament line. As would be expected, a small crowd of fishermen gathered to see the show, and urged him on to greater feats of recovery.

Brian went magnet fishing on a fairly regular basis for the next four years, until age twelve, all over the shoreline of San Francisco Bay, Richardson Bay, and even sometimes up and down the exposed coastline of southern Marin County. His favorite spot, however, remained the Sausalito Public Fishing Pier, because of the richness and variety of the "take" there. For many years this had been the most convenient saltwater dumping ground for things that people didn't want mom, the wife, or the cops to know about. Also, owing to its popularity as a fishing spot for butter-fingered neophytes, the waters surrounding it were constantly replenished with knives, tackle boxes, and rods and reels, even brand new ones lost "over the side" on their very first outing.

Brian became selective in keeping what his magnet brought up from the bottom of the Bay. As his knife collection grew he sold



Figure 7: Fort Baker, Marin County, California, an air shot taken on February 12, 1925. At the time the closest military base to San Francisco on the opposite side of the Golden Gate was “in mothballs” (decommissioned) as part of the nationwide demilitarization trend following the “War to end all Wars.” Its caretaker commander was our grandfather, U.S. Army Artillery Captain William T. Dillon, who had helped build the fort twenty years earlier in 1902-05. Five years later, in 1910, Top Sergeant Dillon installed his new bride, our grandmother, in the small house (1) he converted from an abandoned shack. It was the only other single-family dwelling at Fort Baker apart from the base commander’s. In the 1920s and ‘30s, Captain Dillon taught all four of his Army brat sons to shoot his .45 Auto Pistol off the Fort Baker Pier (2), beginning on each kid’s 12th birthday. He chummed Great White Sharks with San Francisco Presidio mess hall garbage, and encouraged our father and all three of our uncles to try for head shots when the big man-eaters surfaced to eat the bloody beef bones and other offal tied to floats. Forty years after this photo was taken, all three of Captain Dillon’s grandsons went magnet fishing off the same Fort Baker Pier their father, at age 12, had shot sharks from. U.S. Army Signal Corps Photo.

duplicates of things he already had for a few bucks to his fellow grammar school kids, or, occasionally, to fishermen immediately after their rescue from their watery grave. Brian made back the 4 dollars spent on his magnet and the 3 dollars his nylon line cost within the first few months of magnet-fishing. Every so often a fisherman watching him would blurt out “Hey, that’s my knife!” but when this happened Brian demanded that the claimant prove it by producing the leather sheath the blade was supposedly missing from. If it was not forthcoming, then the other fishermen present would upbraid the fraudster for trying to bilk a small kid out of what was rightfully his through the ancient rights of maritime salvage.

One day Brian brought up a pistol, an old, top-break, Iver Johnson .32 caliber double-action revolver, still loaded, its cartridges

rustled in place within its cylinder. His Dad thought it too dangerous for a small kid to keep, since it could not be safely unloaded, so he threw it as far out into the Bay as he could, beyond the reach of any 8-year-old’s magnet. Brian later brought up other pistols, which his father let him keep, but only those already unloaded, and too rusted to ever be loaded or fired again.

The strangest thing Brian ever brought up was also the heaviest, by far. He could barely budge whatever the magnet was attached to, so three adult fishermen took over the “haul up” effort, and slowly but surely got whatever metal treasure the magnet was clinging to off the bottom. Brian was hoping for an iron strongbox full of golden doubloons, or at least a blacksmith’s anvil, but when the mystery metal item finally broke the surface it proved to be a 55 gallon oil drum, stuffed

full of cinderblocks. This was, of course, consigned to watery oblivion again, but only after Brian's fishermen friends confirmed that no murder victim was at the bottom of the drum, as would have been the case had the event been dreamed up by Hollywood hack scriptwriters.

And, almost every time that the magnet made its appearance on any pier reaching out into San Francisco Bay, long before it made its first descent through the murky saltwater, as Brian was uncoiling its leader, some fisherman would come up to him and ask "Hey, kid, what are you going to do with that thing?" which triggered the inevitable response of "Well, what do you think? I'm going after *steelhead*!"

Magnet Fishing on the Sly

After each use, Brian rinsed his magnet and nylon rope with fresh water in his Mill Valley, California, back yard, coiled up the rope in proper nautical fashion, then parked both atop the wooden workbench running along the back wall of the family's carport—a roofed-over shelter for the Dillon cars with three open sides. From this temporary storage location middle brother David (b. 1955) would periodically, and *surreptitiously*, remove Brian's magnet for his own purposes, always when the oldest of the three wild Irish Dillon brothers was otherwise occupied. Brian built his second small boat, an 8-foot El Toro dinghy, in his 7th grade Sausalito Junior High School wood shop class when he was 12. Now, as more time was spent out on the water in his new boat, less time was spent ashore with his magnet, and younger brother Dave and even youngest brother Ross picked up the slack.

Every last thing that oldest brother Brian recovered with his Navy magnet has disappeared into the mists of time, but middle brother David still has some of the treasures he liberated from *Davy Jones' Locker*. Paramount amongst these are a few remnants from one of the full tackle boxes both brothers brought up. Too many neophyte fishermen, after having spent *buku* bucks filling brand-new tackle boxes with hooks, lures,

lead weights, spools of fishing line, knives, pliers, and so forth and so on, placed them, unopened, atop the flat, chest-high, railing of the pier while leaning their equally virginal rods and reels against that same railing. Then, upon picking up their rod for the first time and fiddling with the release catch on their reel, managed to bump their tackle box with their elbow, knocking it into the Bay.

The Dillon brothers watched this happen many times at the Sausalito Public Fishing Pier, the Fort Baker Pier, and at Elephant Rock in Tiburon. They were always careful not to start magnet fishing for lost tackle boxes until their distraught owners had beaten a retreat towards the nearest bar to drown their sorrows. When the Dillon boys hit tackle boxes with their magnet (their outer skin was non-magnetic aluminum, but their hinges and internal arms supporting the nesting trays were steel, as were their rivets) such valued prizes were often in pristine condition, containing treasures still in their plastic packages with price stickers attached.

Other loot that Dave kept for years were a fully-functional fishing pole, and even a "multi-tool," the fisherman's equivalent of the Swiss Army knife, featuring pliers, an adjustable wrench head, screwdrivers and knife blades. And, like Brian's oil drum, younger brother Dave also pulled up a half-sized galvanized garbage can whose bottom had been filled with cement. Both probably served as home-made boat anchors, or anchors for crab pots. Another memorable "find" of Dave Dillon's was an artificial Christmas tree, metal with a thin green plastic coating, still with ropy tinsel attached to most of its branches, and algae growing on that tinsel.

Dave also went magnet fishing south of, and around the bluff from, Sausalito Old Town, halfway to Fort Baker. This was where the late 19th and early 20th-century Sausalito dump was located. Buckboard trash wagons were backed up to the edge of the 20 foot cliff, and garbage was simply pushed out over their floorboards to fall into San Francisco Bay. At low tide the "iron shore" here was exposed. Partially submerged bedrock in some areas was covered with a half-century's worth of iron junk welded together by rust.



Figure 8: The Elephant Rock Fishing Pier (1) off Tiburon, Marin County, California, connected to the mainland by a narrow walkway. Raccoon Strait and Angel Island (2) in the left background, San Francisco in the distance at top center (3). Intended as a “kids only” fishing spot when built 60+ years ago, now adults have come to outnumber youngsters. Internet image in the public domain, courtesy of the Destination Tiburon web page.

Decades after dumping ceased at what everybody called “Junk Beach” the Sausalito Sewage Treatment Plant was built nearby. Its big iron outflow pipe overhung the northernmost end of “junk beach.” One day young Dave Dillon, trying to cast Brian’s magnet beyond the snag-rich iron shore, accidentally threw it onto the sewer pipe, where it stuck fast. He had an almost impossibly difficult time getting it un-stuck, and was afraid that the nylon rope would break before the magnet “let go.” Dave walked back and forth along the cliff edge, yanking and tugging from every possible angle before he loosened the magnet’s grip on the sewer pipe, and finally reclaimed it.

Youngest Dillon brother Ross (b. 1959), six years younger than Brian, and four years junior to David, also got into magnet fishing as a solo virtuoso, or in company with his own age-mates, always under the watchful eye of their father. Ross remembers dropping Brian’s magnet into the briny deep from Elephant Rock (Figure 8:1), the favored southernmost fishing spot offshore from Tiburon, Marin County, California. Elephant

Rock was a small seamount or pyramidal-shaped rock outcrop projecting a dozen feet above the high tide line, about 75 feet into the Bay from the shoreline. A narrow wooden walkway was built out to it, and a circular platform completely surrounded the outcrop, with a waist-high railing, enabling fishermen to access the water surrounding the rock.

When the walkway and doughnut-shaped pier was built in the early 1960s, fishing access was limited to children under the age of 15, accompanied, of course, by non-fishing adults. Ross Dillon and his grammar-school buddies, aged five in 1964, fit this bill perfectly. Ross brought up kid-sized fishing poles with attached reels at Elephant Rock, but, like his older brother Dave, also got Brian’s magnet stuck on a large iron pipe running across Raccoon Strait towards Angel Island (Figure 8:2). Like Dave, lots of tugging and pulling from many different directions, with the additional muscle-power of his Dad, finally freed it.

On another occasion middle Dillon brother Dave took the magnet to the Corinthian

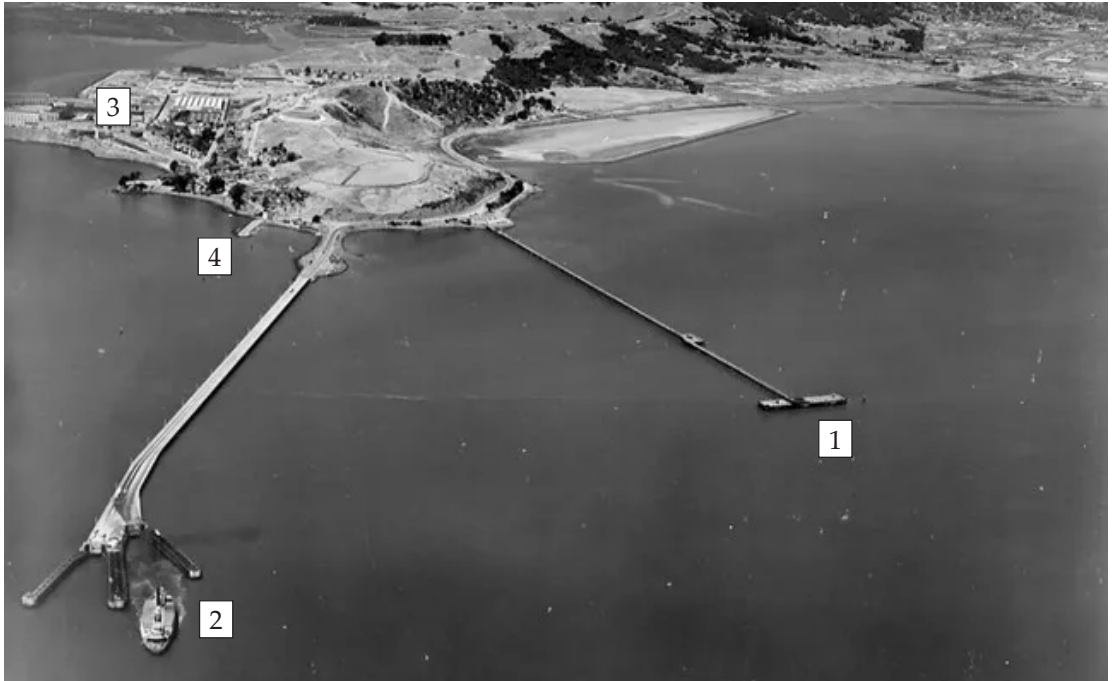


Figure 9: What Brian called the “Longest Pier in the World.” The Marin Rod and Gun Club Pier (1) jutted 2,300 feet into San Francisco Bay from Point San Quentin north of the eventual alignment of the Richmond Bay Bridge, not yet built in the early 1950s photo above. The old Ferry Terminal Pier (2) angling off towards the lower left was active until completion of the Richmond Bay Bridge in 1956 rendered it obsolete. San Quentin Prison (3) is at upper left. Access to the Marin Rod and Gun Club Pier was “members only” but Brian managed to get onto it a few times in the early 1960s when he was invited by the sons of members. There was no restricted access to the old, now vanished, much smaller San Quentin Village Pier (4) around the point to the south. Internet image in the public domain, courtesy of the Marin History Museum and the Marin Independent Journal Newspaper Photo Archives.

Yacht Club, also in Tiburon, where a friend’s father had his boat moored. The two kids were dropping the magnet over the side of the dock when an adult Corinthian yachtsman saw what they were doing, and hurried over. He had lost a very expensive watch over the side of his own vessel, and offered the kids ten dollars if they would come to his boat and try to find his missing timepiece with Brian’s magnet. Dave and his friend spent an hour trying to recover the watch, but with no success. They finally asked the very well-heeled fellow what kind of watch he had lost and were told: “a Platinum Rolex Oyster.” The timepiece was so expensive it cost many times the price of a brand-new car. Both pre-teenage magnet fishermen knew that platinum was *not magnetic*, but were a little hesitant to share this information with the missing-watch millionaire. As Dave later

confided to his magnet-fishing buddy, “You sure don’t have to be *smart* to be *rich*!”

Most of Brian and Dave Dillon’s favorite magnet-fishing locations went the way of the Dodo many years ago. One of these was the old San Quentin Village Pier (Figure 9:4), almost within rock-throwing distance south of the Marin County end of the Richmond Bay Bridge, and just beyond rock-throwing distance southeast of the walls of San Quentin Prison (Figure 9:3). One time when Dave was magnet fishing off this now-vanished pier he got Brian’s magnet stuck on the old cross-bay cable, which ran parallel to the Richmond Bay Bridge. Since it no longer connected telegraph keys on opposite sides of San Francisco Bay, jerking and yanking the magnet free from it did not interrupt any urgent telegraphic messages.

Around the point, to the north of the

Richmond Bay Bridge, was what Brian called “the longest pier in the world,” the remarkable 2,300-foot-long pier built by the C&H Sugar Company in the 1920s, then bought by the Marin Rod and Gun Club in the mid-1930s (Figure 9:1). This was a “rich man’s private fishing pier” with access by non-members strictly prohibited. There was no way to sneak onto it, as you had to pass through the guard building on its landwards end and produce your valid fishing license and membership card before being admitted to the long planked walkway.

Catering primarily to adults, the pier was decidedly “kid-unfriendly” in the early 1960s. Most adult members treated it as a kind of refuge from their own children and grandchildren, and begrudged the appearance of small fry. Nevertheless, Brian got onto this pier a few times in the early 1960s as the guest of members and their sons on fishing outings. He managed, just once, to drop his magnet into the water from it while ostensibly going after striped bass with his fishing pole. Unfortunately, grumpy geriatric anglers blurted out that anything pulled from the Bay *not* actually a fish had to be the lost property of dues-paying members, and should *not* be taken home by any guest, *especially not* by some upstart kid present only through sufferance. Brian “got the message” and never returned. Doubtless, the same old grumps at their next steering committee meeting voted to ban all magnets and magnet fishing from their exclusive preserve.

So, in the proper Irish spirit of retaliation, every time Brian drove over the Richmond Bay Bridge a dozen years later while commuting to U.C. Berkeley, and caught sight of the Marin Rod and Gun Club Pier, he repeated a silent prayer that the wrinkly old grumps so protective of their bailiwick might only successfully catch *colds*, not *fish*.⁴

Conclusion

Our very last day of magnet fishing took place in 1965, exactly 60 years ago. The two younger Dillon brothers, Dave (ten) and Ross (six) under the watchful eye of our father, were jiggling their baited hooks off the shal-

low end of the Sausalito Public Fishing Pier, trying to avoid bullheads and catch perch or smelt. Twelve-year-old Brian was working away with his magnet at the far end of the pier, where the water was deepest.

Latching on to something fairly heavy more than 30 feet below the surface, he pulled up a live 5-inch artillery shell. It had probably been dumped over the side of a naval vessel many years before the pier was built, possibly even by one of the ships of the Great White Fleet when dozens of them were anchored off Sausalito in 1908.⁵ The brass casing was greenish-black with verdigris, but the conical iron projectile was intact under its thick coat of protective paint. The primer at the center of the base was slightly dimpled, indicating that it had mis-fired in the cannon’s chamber. The shell had been deep-sixed in the Bay as too dangerous to be left on shipboard or moved to dry land, since it was still fully charged with propellant and explosive.

Our Dad, no stranger to artillery rounds both outgoing and incoming (he had been W.I.A. twenty-one years earlier by a German mortar shell during WWII)⁶ rushed over and told us three sons and all of the fishermen who had crowded around Brian’s latest find to evacuate the pier. We all moved away from the magnet, still attached to the 5-inch shell atop the wet wooden planking. Dad then went next door to the Trident Restaurant to call the Sausalito City cops on the nearest telephone to see if they had a “bomb squad” that could safely dispose of the live artillery round, and, if not, to pass the urgent request on to the San Francisco Presidio (then still an active military base) for bomb disposal experts. Dad then loaded all four of us into our Canary Yellow 1949 Jeepster convertible, and drove us the seven miles home to Mill Valley. Brian’s trusty magnet’s lanyard was still tied to the railing of the Sausalito Public Fishing Pier, and none of us ever saw it again. Even sadder, the old Sausalito pier is no more. It barely survived into the new millennium, falling prey after decades of neglect and decrepitude to a severe winter storm twenty-four years ago in 2001.

But long before the old pier was demol-

ished, Dave Dillon decided that it was time to renew his childhood passion for magnet fishing. In the late 1990s he began looking around for a replacement, but the old Navy surplus magnets were absolutely unavailable. He accidentally ran across one in a muffler shop, in even better shape than Brian's old reliable black beauty, since it had both attachment flanges still pristine, not broken off. Dave immediately asked the muffler man if he would sell it. "Hell, no" was the answer, "That's my third hand! I couldn't run this shop without it!" So no sale, unfortunately.

In a scientific equipment catalog, however, Dave found a brand-new item advertised as "The World's Strongest Magnet," and bought one. Severely disappointed, Dave found that it wasn't anywhere near as strong as Brian's old Navy surplus monster. The new purchase was simply stacks of small, flat, rectangular magnets clustered inside a plastic-coated metal frame. It could never function the way the old reliable one did in the murky, salty, depths of San Francisco Bay back when JFK and then LBJ were in the White House.

Today, most eight-year olds have not only never *been* magnet fishing, but have never *heard* of it, nor can they even *imagine* doing it. This is probably a result of the claustrophobic urbanization and electronic media bombardment that has rendered three successive generations of American kids little better than couch potatoes, mere adjuncts to cell phones, iPads, and video games. This 21st-century malaise was unfortunately omnipresent six decades ago, for even then the *idiot box* dominated the lives of the grandparents of today's young video-game addicts. Repetitive, mind-numbing *tinseltonian* distractions prevented far too many young Americans from venturing outside, and from obtaining any familiarity with salt water, much less with those treasures still lurking in it, and under it.

Sixty years ago the three wild Irish Dillon boys were yanking up fishing rods, pistols, knives, and even artillery shells out of their nearest body of saltwater. Oldest brother Brian studied the tide tables in the newspaper long before the sun came up, then care-

fully placed his heavy magnet atop the very thin (1/4 inch marine plywood) floorboard of the small kayak he built himself before paddling off in search of saltwater loot.

Unfortunately, most of the Dillon brothers' more timid age-mates stayed indoors, watching game shows or sit-coms on the TV. And, since magnet fishing never appeared in any of the television shows pandering to young people way back then, nor in those mesmerizing their second-generation TV-baby offspring, nor has it ever appeared in the video games that the grandchildren of those lethargic, first-generation TV-babies all now seem addicted to, there is little doubt that magnet fishing will remain unknown to all of them. Fortunately, magnet fishing memories are lovingly retained by all three Dillon brothers, to whom salt-water rope burns and the thrill of submarine discovery were very real parts of their active, outdoor, childhood.

About the Authors

All three Dillon brothers are 5th-generation Marin County boys, descended from an 1850 California Gold Miner. All three are members of the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners International, and constitute its only triple-brother membership. Oldest brother Brian currently lives in exile in L.A. (Latin America), middle brother Dave still lives in Marin County (aka Hot-Tubistan), while youngest brother Ross lives in the Free World (Southern Arizona).

End Notes

1. **Sausalito:** The nearest town to San Francisco on the opposite side of the Golden Gate was *Saucelito*, Spanish for "Little Willow Tree." The Spanish name was garbled and misspelled by Gringos during the Gold Rush, and the place has been known as Sausalito ever since. For a brief history of Sausalito, see Dillon and Dillon, 2018.
2. **Grandpa Dillon's Big Irons:** Were 12-inch disappearing guns. Our grandfather achieved "perfect scores" with them as early as 1902 at the San Francisco Presidio. From 1910

through 1914 his gun crew at Battery Spencer was the top-ranked artillery accuracy champions for the entire U.S. Army. They shot at moving targets (towed offshore) at up to six miles distance. For more on Fort Baker and the 61st Coast Artillery Company, see B. Dillon, 2016.

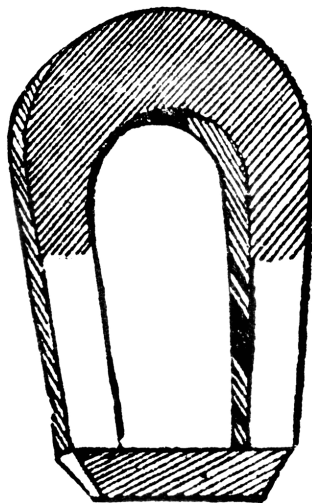
3. ***Born on a Table-Top in Sausalito:*** Our father, Richard H. Dillon (1924-2016) the youngest of four Army brats, was born at home instead of at the San Francisco Presidio hospital like his two oldest brothers. This was because the birth of the second Dillon boy coincided with the tragic 1915 fire at the Presidio that killed the wife and all but one of the children of General Pershing, the base commander. The sole surviving Pershing son was put in the same recovery room ("reserved for civilians") as our grandmother and her newborn baby John A. Dillon (1915-2001). Uncle Jack was, in fact, named after his father's commanding officer John J. Pershing. Grandma Dillon swore off military hospitals from then on, and gave birth to her two youngest sons at home. For more on Dick Dillon and his unique contribution to Western American history, see B. Dillon, 2020.
4. ***About-Face by the Marin Rod and Gun Club:*** We are happy to report that what Brian used to call the Marin "Rotten Gum" Club is no longer dominated by wrinkly grumps. Within the past few decades a complete 180-degree reversal of its old attitude towards youngsters took place. Today the organization is "kid-friendly" and sponsors many youth-oriented fishing events. It also has an outreach program to provide underprivileged kids, who have never gone fishing, with their own fishing poles and other gear. We are proud to note that some of the fishing poles and tackle brought up by Dave Dillon with his brother Brian's magnet have been donated to this outreach program, and are now in the hands of youngsters that might never have gone fishing otherwise.
5. ***The Great White Fleet:*** Forty-two American naval vessels anchored in San Francisco Bay, after steaming in a circle two miles in diameter inside the Golden Gate. Some of them dropped anchor just offshore from Sausalito. President Teddy Roosevelt's hand-picked

commander of the greatest collection of warships ever assembled in the Western Hemisphere was Admiral Robley D. Evans, a distant relative of the authors through their grandmother. For more on both the Great White Fleet and Evans, see B. Dillon 2013.

6. ***No Stranger to Artillery Rounds:*** Dick Dillon was badly wounded in 1944, and after months in Army hospitals, was sent back into the line, to fight again until VE Day in 1945. After the war he was adjudged 25% permanently disabled from his war wounds. He celebrated two "birthdays" for the rest of his life: the day he was born in 1924, and also his "unbirthday," the day he cheated death in 1944. For more on our father's WWII experiences, see B. Dillon, 2020.

References Cited

- Dillon, Brian Dervin
- 2013 Fightin' Bob Steams In. *California Territorial Quarterly*, No. 96, Winter: 6-32.
 - 2016 Grandpa Dillon's Big Irons, 1902-1914. *Blue Press*, No. 289: 78-81.
 - 2020 Aloha, Amigos! *The Richard H. Dillon Memorial Volume*. Brand Book 24, Westerners International, Los Angeles Corral.
- Dillon, William Tarleton and Brian Dervin Dillon
- 2018 Sausalito: Geneva of America. *California Territorial Quarterly*, No. 114, Summer: 6-20.



Adopting a State-Approved Textbook: The *Land of the Free* Controversy

By Abraham Hoffman

The current controversies of what should go into, or stay out of, history textbooks are nothing new where politicians are concerned. While the Los Angeles City School District (later designated the Los Angeles *Unified* School District) became embroiled over allegations of segregation in the city's schools in the 1960s, the State Board of Education experienced an extended debate over the adoption of a new U.S. History textbook for the 8th grade. Publishers of middle-grade U.S. History textbooks competed for state adoption, and California, with its millions of students in its public schools, could mean huge profits—or losses from textbook adoptions. The state could adopt one or more textbooks for school districts to choose from, but first choice meant big bucks for the publisher.

For some years one of the standard U.S. History textbooks for junior high schools was Gertrude Hartman's *America, Land of Freedom* but had become outdated with its minimal treatment of minorities and women, and would be replaced by more up-do-date textbooks. Between 1963 and 1967, *Story of the American Nation*, by Mabel B. Casner and Ralph Gabriel, was California's middle grades history textbook, but it still fell short of the criteria called for by the state's Curriculum Commission on U.S. History textbooks.

This commission created "Guidelines for Reference to Ethnic and Cultural Minorities in Textbooks," as called for by the State Senate's Concurrent Resolution in 1962. It read in part, "pupils must have an opportunity to develop a sense of perspective and judgment regarding both our progress and our failures. Therefore, textbooks for older children must treat with particular accuracy and frankness those situations in our history in which people have not supported our enduring ideals"¹

This reform had been anticipated by John W. Caughey, history professor at UCLA, who was already working on a middle school U.S. History textbook that would be consistent

with the state's Social Studies Framework. Caughey was the author of a major college-level history of California. He was also involved in the litigation over segregation in the Los Angeles schools and had written several pamphlets describing how *de facto* segregation had impacted the city's schools.²

Caughey had two co-authors working with him on the book that would be titled *Land of the Free: A History of the United States*. Ernest R. May earned his doctorate at UCLA, his advisor being Caughey, who also was May's father-in-law. After military service in the Korean War, May was a history professor at Harvard University, and the author of numerous books on American foreign policy.

John Hope Franklin completed the trio of authors who created the new textbook. Franklin had overcome racism to become an award-winning historian, the author of *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (the subtitle later revised to *African Americans*), first published in 1947 and update through nine editions. At the time he joined Caughey and May, he was a history professor at the University of Chicago. Both Franklin and Caughey had served as presidents of the Organization of American Historians.

The California Department of Education received textbooks from numerous publishers hoping for adoption. With a large number of school districts and hundreds of thousands of children attending public schools, the state established commissions to rule on acceptance or rejection of textbooks in fields ranging from math to history. Unlike universities where professors could select any textbooks useful for their college courses, California school districts had to accept the state-approved ones. And, if a large state such as California mandated acceptance, other states with smaller populations were likely to adopt the same books.

However, states with smaller, often rural, school district populations, were sometimes reluctant to accept books that covered con-

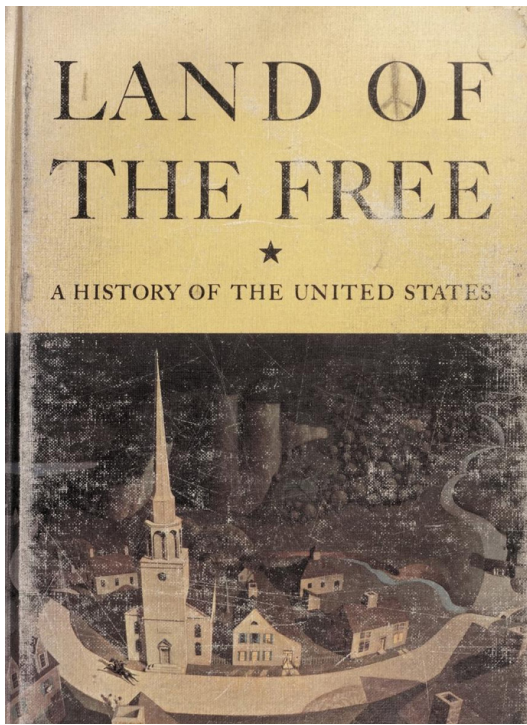


Figure 10: An original 1967 edition of *Land of the Free*. Note the peace sign penciled inside the "O." Fair use image from Archive.org.

troversial issues. For example, *Our Country's Story* by Harold H. Eibling, Fred M. King, and James Harlow, titled the chapter on the Civil War "The War Between the States," appeasing Southern school boards who liked the latter title. The publisher, Laidlaw Brothers, intended this book for students reading below grade level.³

In 1965 Caughey and his co-authors submitted *Land of the Free* to the California Board of Education for approval as a state-accepted textbook for junior high history courses. If accepted, *Land of the Free* would replace Casner and Gabriel's *Story of the American Nation* as the state's first choice for middle-grade students, effective 1967.⁴

For the next two years commission members put *Land of the Free* through a strenuous examination, utilizing a panel of prominent historians to determine accuracy and point out any factual errors. This panel included Pulitzer Prize historian Allen Nevins, Glenn Dumke (at the time serving as Chancellor of the California State College system), and

Charles Sellers, a specialist in Southern and pre-Civil War history. In addition, Max Rafferty, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, also reviewed the book.

It should be noted that the 1965 version of *Land of the Free* was not the same book as that was published in 1967. It was printed in a limited edition for the panel of consultants and for public criticism. One early complaint was that review copies were available for public inspection only in remote places such as the City of Commerce. In fact, the book was exhibited in sixteen libraries in population centers, and the City of Commerce, located in Los Angeles County, was far from remote. Such criticism was a harbinger of negative remarks from people who had either not read the book at all or were complaining about issues that the book's defenders easily refuted.

Foremost among the book's critics was Hubert L. Richardson, a member of the ultra-conservative John Birch Society, and publisher of Publius Associates. He produced a pamphlet and filmstrip attacking the book with specious and inaccurate claims. Dr. Henry V. Witty was a Pasadena dentist who wrote a column for an obscure newspaper. Ford Sammis claimed to be a professor of marketing at Claremont College but had to retract this lie when exposed by the Claremont president. Edmund J. Murray was a professor at Notre Dame University who specialized in Irish and European history, but had no background in American history. Max Rafferty was an early critic but changed his mind when he read the revised revision of the book.⁵

In response to the unwarranted criticisms and distortion of factual statements, the California Teachers Association published in 1967 *Land of the Free and Its Critics*, with seventeen participants, most with Master's degrees. This 58-page report had a print run of 7,500 copies and was endorsed by the Executive Board of the California Council for the Social Studies. It provided some background on California textbook adoptions, but the heart of the pamphlet was devoted to ten questions on the accuracy of *Land of the Free*. Each question dealt with an issue; for example, question 1 asked, "Is the role of the

Negro overemphasized?" The response began with a summary of the issue, a criticism that, "Negroes appear in every chapter of the book, from the first page to the last, including the chapters on discovery of America, immigration, and Western pioneers." This statement is followed by research that disproves the criticism: "The Negro does not appear in every chapter. For example, even one of the three chapters cited, Chapter 13, 'Moving West,' does not mention the Negro at all. The last page of narrative, page 619, does not mention the Negro. The final page, page 24, has a booklist of 28 books, only 3 of which relate to Negroes."⁶

The first question contained ten criticisms, each of which was followed by an equal number of research responses debunking the inaccuracies of the criticisms. Some questions had fewer criticisms and responses, but every one provided clear documentation that demolished the obvious political agenda of the critics. Even Max Rafferty, a conservative Republican, noted that "one great and shining virtue of LAND OF THE FREE was its treatment of the role of minority races. The need for portraying things as they are and were marks a landmark, a real and solid gain for all of us."⁷

In the conclusion of the 1967 report, the chief critics of the book were shown to have come from just two or three sources, Henry Vitti and Ford Sammis, with Hubert Richardson responsible for the publications of Publius Associates and the notoriously biased and inaccurate filmstrip. The report strongly defended the book and had this to say about the critics: "They also display little knowledge of how history is written, which is the science and art of historiography. They seem to think that there is a single official American history completely written once and for all." The report labeled the criticisms "unwarranted assumptions."

The evidence debunking the critics proved overwhelming. In 1967 the textbook, after correction of some minor errors, was approved for use in California junior high schools. The publisher then printed the revised edition and ultimately more than 200 school districts across the nation adopted it.

Although the events described in this article occurred some sixty years ago, a modern version of the same controversy reminds us that while history allegedly repeats itself, it can do so in sinister ways. Amid the wild conspiracies being spread in the 21st century, education has become a political football to be kicked around by politicians and parents who suspect school districts and teachers of indoctrinating children with "woke" information, whatever that means. Respect for other people's opinions has become lost, and with that loss, debate has sometimes degenerated into violence. If a lesson from the *Land of the Free* controversy is to be learned, it may well be that ignorance is not only a lack of factual knowledge, but objectivity.

End Notes

1. California Teachers Association, *Land of the Free and Its Critics*. Burlingame: California Teachers Association, 1967: 6.
2. *School Segregation on Our Doorstep: The Los Angeles Story* Los Angeles: Quail Books, 1961, and *Segregation Blights Our Schools*. Los Angeles: Quail Books, 1967.
3. Harold H. Eibling, Fred M. King, and James Harlow, *Our Country's Story*. River Forest, IL: Laidlaw Brothers, 1961. Eibling was a superintendent of schools in Columbus, Ohio; King was a director of schools in Rochester, Minnesota; and Harlow was a junior high school teacher in Oakland, California. They co-authored several elementary and junior high books for Laidlaw. Harlow was not related to Ralph Volney Harlow, history professor at Yale and Syracuse Universities and was the author of *Story of America*, a high school U.S. history textbook.
4. Dave Neumann, "Textbooks in the Balance: An Insider's Review of the Textbook Adoption Policies in California." *History Teacher*, No. 54, August 2019: 653-676.
5. *Land of the Free and Its Critics*: 16.
6. Ibid: 18-19.
7. Ibid.



Figure 11: The Palisades fire, as seen from downtown Los Angeles, on Jan 7, 2025. Public domain internet photo.

The Los Angeles Firestorms

By Brian Dervin Dillon

Our Los Angeles Corral was all set to go with our first speaker of the New Year, scheduled for Wednesday, January 8, when all hell broke loose. On Tuesday night, January 7th, the wind was howling like a Banshee and my side-yard storage shed roofs banged like gongs, keeping me awake. The local winds were sustained at around 75 mph, but were gusting to both north and south at over 100 mph. Humidity was single-digit. No rain had fallen for almost a year so on every hillside was tinder-dry brush. I turned on the TV at 2 a.m. to find my worst fears realized: two different wind-driven fires were burning out of control, one to the south, the other to the east. Multiple TV channels were covering the fire news non-stop, and all normal programming was interrupted. As soon as it got light around 6 a.m., I began wetting down my roof, plugging up the rain gutter drains and filling the gutters full, and also flooding my back yard. I woke up my next-door neighbors at the very late hour (for me) of 9:30 a.m. to tell them to start flooding their own back yard, and was surprised to learn that they knew nothing about the fires.

Over the next several days our power went off, then came back on. Our internet died, then came back on, then died again. For days at a time half of our TV channels were

dead, including the one with the most accurate fire reporting. The channel that came in strongest of those remaining was the one where geographically-challenged reporters located active fires in the *wrong places*. They also mixed up the names of the places most likely to burn next, substituting *Woodland Hills* for *West Hills*, and *Palos Verdes* for the *Palisades Fire*. The first two are ten miles apart, at opposite ends of the San Fernando Valley (where we live) while the second are 30 miles apart on the L.A. County Coast. You couldn't *plan* to cause more anxiety if you tried than having brain-dead TV reporters getting the place-names wrong, and mixing up un-burned areas with those afire. . .

On Wednesday morning, January 8th, within the first several hours of the firestorms both the L.A. County Sheriff and the LAPD Chief of Police issued a "stay off the roads/streets" warning. So we canceled that night's Los Angeles Corral Westerner's monthly meeting with only 7 hours advance notice. Getting in touch with everybody who had signed up for it was quite a chore, but done successfully. Later that first day the TV news showed dozens of panicked people in the Pacific Palisades trying to evacuate down their main 4-lane, two-way road stopped by one doofus at the bottom, who stalled his

car. Later evacuees went 4-abreast then everybody in all four lanes were trapped because nobody shoved the lowermost abandoned car out of the way. So, like lemmings to the sea, more than a hundred people just left their cars blocking that one access road and walked away from them. The L.A. Fire Department had to bring in a Caterpillar tractor to shove abandoned BMWs and Mercedes SUVs out of the way, clearing one lane out of four, so that Fire Trucks could get up that road to fight the fire. If one (1) LAPD traffic cop had been on duty with one (1) tow truck at the bottom of the road, where it hit the main evacuation route, Sunset Boulevard, such Darwinian selection—mass hysteria caused by bad judgement and lack of intelligence—never would have happened.

New, wind-driven fires started every 12 hours or so. So just because we dodged one fiery bullet, didn't mean we could relax. New fiery bullets were shot by Ma Nature, day after day. On the second day, Thursday January 9, in the middle of a phone call from my youngest brother in southern Arizona, both my wife and my daughter shoved cell phones up into my face with *evacuation warnings*. So I cut the call short, and began tossing computer thumb-drives, last will and testament, etc. into one (1) suitcase preparatory to *vamoosing* to the nearest large open space with no overhanging trees. I selected one (1) pistol out of dozens, and one (1) long gun out of ditto, and got plenty of ammo for both, just in case the fires triggered armageddon. I yanked both my laptop and my big computer from their normal nesting places, and piled everything up by the door, ready for loading into our cars.

We agreed upon our family evacuation plan: all four of us to leave in four different cars, and rendezvous at a hotel next to the Burbank Airport, a reasonably central point farthest from all of the fires then burning. This way if the airport or hotel went up, or both did, we could still hopefully avoid the flames by standing out on the runway. I had invaded far too many small Central American countries over the past 50 years not to be able to plan an evacuation like this: this time, however, not for students nor em-

ployees, but for my own wife and kids. Then, a short time later, we received a "Never mind, we made a boo-boo" email correction. Apparently, some idiot in the Los Angeles Emergency HQ pushed the wrong button and sent out the *emergency warning* notice to all 10 million people in L.A. County *by mistake*. Heads should really roll on this one. To prevent future re-occurrences they should persuade some 13-year-old kid with his cell phone glued to his ear to step off his skateboard to run that whole Department.

On Day 3, I got the word that my old local Boy Scout Camp, *Camp Josepho* in Rustic Canyon where I taught hundreds of Scouts to shoot .22 rifles, and where I also taught a UCLA archaeological field class more than twenty years ago, burned up in one of the seven fires raging in Los Angeles County. Josepho was a Russian immigrant who made good in the U.S.A. and thought so much of his adopted country that he gave his property to the Boy Scouts ninety years ago. The irony is that it is right next to the old Murphy Ranch, which was the home base of the American Nazi Party in Los Angeles during the late '30s and early '40s, up to December 8th, 1941, when it was raided by the FBI. All of the Nazi bunkers built in anticipation of the "race war" the Nazi goons were actively inciting, are still there. This point-counterpoint of good vs evil in that one small canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains is a cautionary tale still valid today.

The conflagration we were most worried about, the *Hurst Fire* in and near Sylmar, went from 50 to 850 acres in a matter of hours. For several days the news media said it was 70% contained but never specified in *which direction*. We hoped that this "containment" was on its southern front, in our own direction. The gun range that I used to run a dozen years ago was a short distance away from this Hurst Fire, and was evacuated on the very first day, Wednesday the 8th, but didn't burn down. Although this fire was 6 miles away, embers can blow from palm tree to palm tree over many miles and have done so many times before with disastrous results. And that fire was to our *north*, with 100 mph gusts blowing over it towards the *south*, in

the direction of my reclusive hermit next-door neighbor's place with the head-high dead weeds choking his back yard, and the four palm trees with tinder-dry dead fronds hanging down only 30 feet away from the north wall of my own house.

By the end of the firestorms the death toll, from only two of them, stood at 29, but the number of "missing" from day to day fluctuated between 24 and 40. The cadaver dogs were put to work even before the fires were out, and it will be weeks before we know how many of the MIA folks are already amongst the *unidentified* dead. By the end of the first day the LAPD/Sheriff's Department had arrested 3 looters, and only a couple of days later those in handcuffs numbered more than 40. One looter was caught wearing a fireman's coat, and two others were caught with a fake fire truck they had parked in an evacuation zone. Those unfortunates who lost their homes or relatives to the fires said: "Just knock those criminals on the head, and toss them into the nearest spot-fire." By the end of the first week the California National Guard was mobilized, and guardsmen were on just about every street corner in the two worst fire areas, Pacific Palisades and Altadena. One of the seven fires burning at the firestorm's climax may have started as arson, and one suspected arsonist was in custody.

For my own part I am disappointed by the constant references by news reporters and government officials to the January 2025 L.A. Fires as the *worst-ever in California history*. These ignoramuses were sleeping in the back of the classroom during 3rd grade California History when the 1906 *San Francisco Earthquake and Fire* was the assignment. My paternal Grandmother drove her one-horse buckboard up to the top of Wolfback Ridge above her home town of Sausalito, California, and watched San Francisco burn for three days and nights in April 1906. The booming sound she heard a couple of miles away on the other side of the Golden Gate was the dynamite squads at work, blowing up hundreds of buildings in an attempt to stop the post-Earthquake fires. The same earthquake that had caused dozens of small fires to join together into the

worst fire in California history had also broken the water mains, leaving all but a very few fire hydrants dry. Some of the booms my grandmother heard were made by U.S. Army Artillery Sergeant Dillon, my grandfather, leading one of the dozen-plus dynamite squads.¹ She met him three years later, then married him the following year. In 1906 *tens of thousands of buildings in San Francisco* were lost, an estimated 90% of the city, and more than 3,000 people burned to death. Much more recently, the 2018 *Camp Fire* fire killed 85 people in *Paradise*, California, most of them trapped in their cars trying to get out of town, and destroyed more than 18,000 structures, 90% of all the buildings in that town.

So, without diminishing the recent tragedy of anyone who lost family members or their own homes, by comparison with the 1906 and 2018 disasters we got off lightly in the January 2025 Los Angeles firestorms. Or is it possible that some news reporters and politicians don't think that San Francisco and Paradise are part of California? Or that anything more than a hundred years old, or even only seven years old, doesn't count? Such bone-headedness is just proof of the old truism: *those who do not know their own history are doomed to repeat it*.

Meanwhile, back to January, 2025: an idiot was flying a drone over the *Palisades Fire*, and it hit one of the two super-duper-water-scoopers we rent from Quebec each year, so that water-dropping airplane had to be grounded. By the end of the firestorms there were forty more cases of idiots flying drones over fires, forcing water drops to abort until the cops could find the morons playing with their expensive airborne toys and persuade them to stop. Only in L.A., where make-believe trumps reality, every time. As I keep reminding people, I just *live* here...I am not from here.

Around 30% of all the hydrants on the biggest (23,450+ acres) fire went dry the first day, mostly because the 117 million-gallon Santa Ynez Reservoir built up the hill above them specifically for fire-fighting was intentionally drained last year for desultory upgrades to its "canopy," not for any repairs to its concrete structure.² The thinking was

that since Winter, 2024/2025 was not “fire season” it was O.K. to dump all of the water that only months later would be needed to fight the *Palisades Fire*. Boy, heads should really roll over this incredibly stupid move. Ain’t no “fire season” in California any more, and there hasn’t been for about the past 20 years. Fire season now goes from January 1 to December 31, as anybody that lives or works in the woods knows: this is only “news” to urban bureaucrats and politicians, the “chairborne” brigade.

The *Palisades Fire* eventually burned along 25+ miles of ridge-lines in the Santa Monica Mountains, where I taught UCLA field archaeology classes year after year more than 40 years ago. I also surveyed every inch of the Pacific Coast Highway (27+ miles worth) for Malibu 35 years ago just before it was incorporated as a city. The fires didn’t hurt any of the archaeological sites I recorded, but wiped out over 6,800 modern structures, including the dream homes of many Malibu millionaires. Some of these folks set their dogs on me way back when I was doing the archaeological survey of the Malibu strip: poetic justice took a long time to kick in, but it finally did.

The other really big fire (14,000+ acres) burning to the northeast around 18 miles away clobbered our 2025 Deputy Sheriff’s garage/office but spared his house. Fortunately, Joseph Cavallo and his wife got out in time, but unfortunately, half of his priceless book collection burned to ashes, as did his computer and all of his computer files. This one, the *Eaton Fire* in Altadena/Pasadena destroyed over 9,400 homes and businesses, many more than the *Palisades Fire*.

Hundred of fire engines with their trained crews came to L.A. from all over Northern California, Southern Arizona, and also Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Utah, and even New Mexico. Canada (British Columbia) sent engines and crews to help out, as did Mexico. By the end of the first week of the firestorms only about 50% of the fire-fighters were from LAFD or L.A. County Fire. CDF/CALFIRE, who I worked for on contract for 17 years, was running the air attack effort and doing an outstanding job. I never fought

a fire with CDF, but many times I was the very first guy on different forest fires, including arson fires, “after containment,” doing the post-fire archaeological assessments. I never did a human fire fatality recovery, but encountered plenty blown-up deer, coyotes, porcupines, etc., even mama and baby bears running through the hot ashes with singed and still-smoking fur. And, I am one of the very few guys neither fire-fighter nor forester to have had Phos-Chek dropped on me (not intentionally, I might add) from an air attack fixed-wing.

The final chapter in the January 2025 firestorm saga, at least from my own perspective, was when the *Palisades Fire* burned over the crest of the Santa Monica Mountains and started heading down towards the San Fernando Valley where I live. We were not terribly worried, since it would have to burn up about a million folks to our south before it got to my neighborhood, and the winds thankfully remained in our favor. A round-robin air attack by over a dozen water-dropping helicopters and 4 fixed-wing Phos-Chek dumpers, both prop planes and jets, stopped the advance from getting down on the valley floor, so we breathed a big sigh of relief. This air attack really saved our bacon.

Hats off to those pilots and to the ground crews that put their lives on the line, and never gave up, nor ever stopped. And my sympathy and prayers for all of the people who lost their lives, their homes, their businesses, and their hopes and dreams in the January 2025 Los Angeles Firestorms.

End Notes

1. Dillon, Brian Dervin, Richard H. Dillon, and John D. Dillon, “Sergeant Dillon with the Dynamite Squads: 1906, Parts 1 and 2,” *The California Territorial Quarterly*, No. 91 and 92, Fall and Winter 2012.
2. Hamilton, Matt and David Zahniser, “This reservoir was built to save Pacific Palisades. It was empty when the flames came,” *The Los Angeles Times*. Jan 22, 2025.



Places at the Table

Bits of Food History from California & the West

Embalmed Milk: Or, Why We are Grateful for the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906

By Tracy L. Johnston

In 1853, John Mullaly wrote in his book, *The Milk Trade in New York and Vicinity*:

It is now about fifteen years since the importance of this subject was first brought to the notice of the public...the use of impure and unhealthy milk, and its pernicious effects upon the general health.¹

Mullaly was referencing the distribution of “swill milk,” obtained from cows fed on distillery waste products. Swill was the fermented mash of rye, barley, and wheat.²

That diet, exclusively of swill, “made cows sick, led to ulcerated sores all over their bodies, and caused their tails to fall off.”³ Additionally, the milking process was unclean: cow udders were covered with excrement from dirty pens and often ulcerated, milker’s hands were rarely washed before milking, and dirt would fall into the milk to be removed by hand.⁴

This milk, besides containing dirt and pus from the cows’ ulcers, “was thin and had an unnatural bluish tint.” In order to sell it as “pure,” vendors mixed in “additives such as chalk, flour, eggs, and plaster-of-Paris,”⁵ which made it look like healthy milk.

But it wasn’t until 1858, when *The New York Times* published a letter from journalist Frank Leslie “to the Public” titled “Startling Exposure of the Milk Trade of New-York and Brooklyn,”⁶ did the general public become aware of the problem. Leslie cited Mullaly’s figures estimating that 7,000 children died each year from this “liquid poison.”

This was just a drop in the bucket, so to speak, of the tricks used to increase profits. Milk or cream was thinned with water then

thickened with a “milk powder” such as agar (made from sea algae), talc, corn starch, or a mixture of sugar and calcium oxide.⁷ Pureed calves’ brains were added to make milk look like it had a rich layer of cream. The adulteration was revealed when, unlike cream, the brains coagulated in hot coffee.⁸ Milk was also colored with ingredients such as annatto, caramel, turmeric, or coal tar, and sweetened with cane sugar.⁹ Sometimes the water used was also dirty; in one case, milk was “wiggling” because the dairyman had used stagnant water containing worms.¹⁰

Despite the New York state legislature passing milk regulations in 1862,¹¹ the problem of unhealthy, adulterated milk continued. This was especially true in American cities where pastureland was too far away to safely transport healthy milk to urbanites.

In 1899, *The Sanitarian*, a magazine “devoted to the preservation of health, mental, and physical culture”, reported the use of formaldehyde, aniline dye, and artificial butter fat mixed with skim milk and then sold as pure milk. It noted that formalin (the liquid version of formaldehyde) “will keep the milk fresh for weeks, and the fluid is actually embalmed as is a body treated with the same fluid.” The problem was that formalin inhibits digestion and is poisonous¹² and aniline dye impairs the delivery of oxygen to tissues and destroys red blood cells.¹³ (Figure 12.)

Preservatives were sold under the names “Preservaline”, “Iceline”, “Milk Sweet”, and “Freezine.” In 1903, an advertisement described Freezine as:

A liquid which will keep Milk and Cream in a fresh condition, for one week, without

the use of ice or cold storage...regardless of the climate or temperature of the room in which it is stored. ... FREEZINE prevents the disease germs breeding in milk. ... We guarantee FREEZINE to be entirely harmless to the human system.¹⁴

Freezine and Iceline were mostly formaldehyde, and Preservaline contained boracic acid or a combination of salicylic acid, sodium sulphite, benzoic acid, and formaldehyde (about 2 to 10 percent, depending on the brand). It was an inexpensive method of keeping milk from souring:

[S]ometimes the dairyman himself adds "Iceline," and the wholesale dealer, not knowing that fact, adds "Preservaline," while, later on, the retailer, guarding his own interest, adds to the same milk some "Milk Sweet" or "Freezine."¹⁵

The use of these preservatives was nationwide, but as people learned what was put into their foods, they began to push back. In 1903 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a man in Ocean Park who had sold milk containing formalin was fined \$250; the paper's opinion was that he should have been imprisoned for six months without the chance for a fine. Another man in Los Angeles was fined \$100 for selling "embalmed" milk and the paper praised the judge for it. It concluded,

[A]ll this is encouraging to those who are striving to protect people from the selfish greed of conscienceless men, who would sacrifice the health and life of people for the sake of a few dirty dollars. The man who will slowly poison innocent children is little better than a murderer, and worse than a burglar. No mercy should be shown these people.¹⁶

The word continued to spread. In 1905, *Conable's Path-Finder* noted that embalmed milk was very common in California, then described how it was made:

To twenty gallons of milk add twenty gallons of water. To this add chalk and a deadly poison for coloring purposes. Then

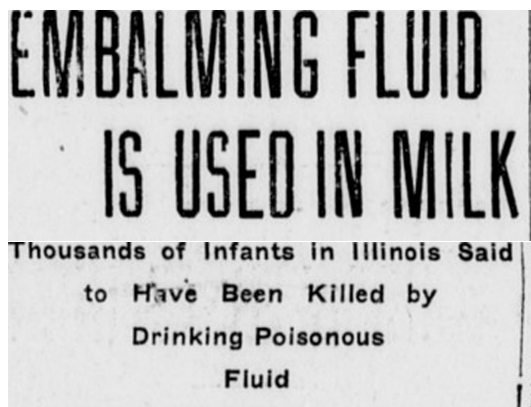


Figure 12: Headline in the *Los Angeles Herald*, 1907.¹⁷

add a few drops of embalming fluid to keep the milk from having a sour taste. This product is warranted to kill the healthiest babe at short range, and ruin the stomach of the healthiest adult on short notice. Just stay with the stuff a few months and watch results. But don't stop using dairy milk for anything.¹⁸

The public demanded legislation to address this:

In this way we may be able to do something to protect public health, pending the passage of a drastic and wide-reaching pure food law to cover many cases of food adulteration that cannot now be reached. Let an earnest campaign for such a law be started.¹⁹

The tipping point came with the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906).²⁰ Intended to arouse sympathy for exploited workers, readers were instead revolted by its exposure of food adulteration and unsanitary practices in the meat industry. Sinclair ruefully remarked, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

Four months later, Congress passed The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, which prevented the "manufacture, sale, or transportation of adulterated or misbranded or poisonous or deleterious foods, drugs, medicines, and liquors, and for regulating traffic therein, and for other purposes."²¹

This did not end the problems but did lay the foundation to create the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1927

and began to shift the way products were labeled and sold. Milk is no longer poisonous, adulterated, watered down, or dirty. Pasteurization makes it clean, and labeling tells us what it contains. Refrigeration keeps it from spoiling quickly.

If your stomach can take it, it is worth reading Leon Landone's 1906 publication, *Foods that are drugged*, to understand just how widespread food adulteration was in the American diet. There are sections on breads, canned goods, chocolate, coffee, confectionary, egg substitutes, extracts and fruit flavors, fish and oysters, health foods including infant foods, honey, jellies and jams, lard, maple syrup, all sorts of meat products, olive oil, spices, condiments, sugar, syrups, molasses, tea, and wheat. When I consider the products I regularly use in my kitchen, I realize how important the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 is to our lives and health.

For more historical details, read Deborah Blum's *The Poison Squad*, which chronicles the work of Harvey Washington Wiley that led to public awareness of food adulteration and legislation addressing it. It is also available as a movie on PBS's *American Experience*.

End Notes

1. Mullaly, 1853: 21.
2. Wikipedia, 2024.
3. Moss, 2017.
4. Mullaly, 1853: 46-47.
5. Moss, 2017.
6. *New York Times*, 1858: 8.
7. Landone, 1906: 40-41.
8. Blum.
9. Landone, 1906: 40-41.
10. Blum, 2018.
11. Moss, 2017.
12. *The Sanitarian*, 1899: 372.
13. ATSDR, 2014.
14. L.A. Watkins Merchandise Company, 1903: 74.
15. Spargo, 1908: 170-172.
16. *Los Angeles Times*, 1903: 6.
17. *Los Angeles Herald*, 1907: 1.
18. *Conable's Path-Finder*, 1905: 9.
19. *Los Angeles Times*, 1903: 6.
20. U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, 2024.
21. United States, 1906: 768.

Works Cited

- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
 2014 "Toxic Substances Portal: Medical Management Guidelines for Aniline". October 21. <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/TSP/MMG/MMGDetails.aspx?mmgid=448&toxid=79>
- Blum, Deborah
 2018 "Battling the Scourge of 'Embalmed Milk': How an obscure Indiana official pioneered the campaign against tainted dairy products at the turn of the 20th century". Undark. October 5. <https://undark.org/2018/10/05/battling-scurge-embalmed-milk-2/>
- Conable's Path-Finder*
 1905 "Short Paths". The Path-Finder Pub. Co. Los Angeles. July. https://archive.org/details/IAPSOP-path-finder_v4_n7_jul_1905/page/9/mode/1up
- L.A. Watkins Merchandise Company
 1903 Price list and descriptive catalogue: field, flower and garden seeds. Henry G. Gilbert Nursery and Seed Trade Catalog Collection. Denver, Colorado. <https://archive.org/details/CAT31286440/page/74/mode/1up>
- Landone, Leon Elbert
 1906 Foods that are drugged. Landone. Chicago. <https://archive.org/details/foodsthataredrug00land/page/40/mode/1up?view=theater>
- Los Angeles Herald*
 1907 "Embalming Fluid is Used in Milk". Volume 34, Number 139. Herald Publishing Company. Los Angeles. February 17. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19070217.2.10>
- Los Angeles Times*
 1903 "Adulterated Milk". The Times-Mirror Company. September 23. https://archive.org/details/sim_los-angeles-times_the-los-angeles-times_1903-09-23/page/n6/mode/1up

Moss, Tyler

- 2017 "The 19th-Century Swill Milk Scandal That Poisoned Infants with Whiskey Runoff". Atlas Obscura. November 27. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/swill-milk-scandal-new-york-city>

Mullaly, John

- 1853 The milk trade in New York and vicinity : giving an account of the sale of pure and adulterated milk -- the daily and yearly consumption -- the amount of property invested in the business -- the milk-dealers and dairymen of Orange and other counties -- injurious effects of impure milk on children -- advice to country dairymen. Fowlers and Wells. New York. <https://archive.org/details/101235518.nlm.nih.gov/page/n24/mode/1up>

New York Times

- 1858 "Frank Leslie to the Public: Startling Exposure of the Milk Trade of New-York and Brooklyn". May 7. <https://archive.org/details/NYTimes-Apr-Jun-1858/page/n259/mode/1up>

The Sanitarian

- 1899 "Editor's Table". A. N. Bell. New York. April. <https://archive.org/details/sanitarian43yorkgoog/page/372/mode/1up>

Spargo, John

- 1908 The Common Sense of the Milk Question. The MacMillan Company. New York. <https://archive.org/details/commonsensemilk00spargoog/page/n223/mode/2up>

U.S. Capitol Visitor Center

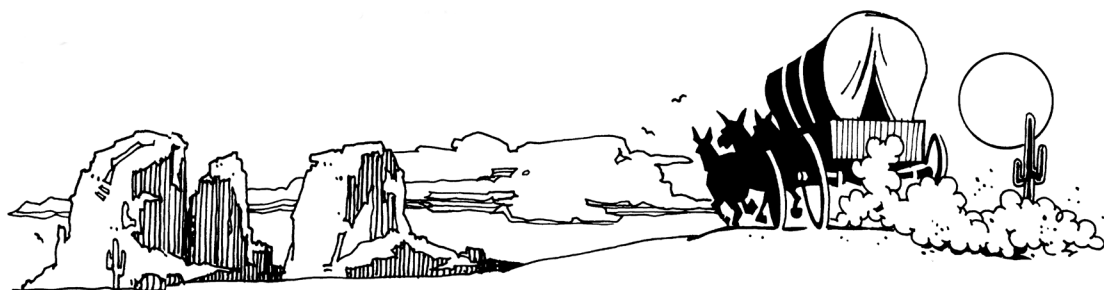
- 2024 "The Pure Food and Drug Act." <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/congress-and-progressive-era/pure-food-and-drug-act>

United States

- "Pure Food and Drug Act (1906)." United States Statutes at Large (59th Cong., Sess. I, Chp. 3915, p. 768-768; cited as 34 U.S. Stats.). 768. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-34/pdf/STATUTE-34-Pg768.pdf>

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

- 2024 "Swill milk scandal." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swill_milk_scandal



Next Special Issue: *Journeys to the West!*

Hitch your wagon, crank-start your Tin Lizzie, hold out your thumb, or just take a hike! In Summer 2025, the next special edition of *The Branding Iron* will go on an expedition through the history of travel to the West. Articles on historical journeys or personal travels are welcome!

Please submit Western travel-related articles by August 15th, 2025, to be considered for this special issue.

For submissions and inquiries, please contact *Branding Iron* editor John Dillon at John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com. Thank you, and Happy Trails!

Monthly Roundup . . .



December 11, 2024

Brian Dervin Dillon

The December 2024 Roundup presentation was delivered by one of the Los Angeles Corral's greats, Dr. Brian Dervin Dillon. Brian has presented to the Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners a staggering fourteen times. As an archaeologist with over fifty years of experience, Brian has worked in California and four different countries in Central America. Brian earned his Doctoral degree in Archaeology from the University of California, Berkeley in 1979 after doing contract archaeology in California and pro-bono field research in Guatemala. Brian became a professor at the prestigious University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), where he spearheaded field projects for the Army Corps of Engineers. Also in California, he continued doing contract archaeology.

Outside of the United States, Brian was the youngest archaeologist to receive a research permit by the Guatemalan government, within the country that is "ground zero" for Maya archaeology. Brian was determined to make his own discoveries so he did research at an empty spot on the map where no other archaeologist had ever been. One of Brian's most remarkable discoveries in Guatemala was a jade skull bead

now on display in the National Museum of Guatemala. Such human skull beads were shown in Maya art dating back to 200 B.C., but this was the first example of an actual bead ever found. Brian also discovered the largest pottery vessels ever made in the ancient New World, used continuously at the same site over a thousand years for salt storage. And elsewhere, he discovered the oldest dated (120 A.D.) Maya sculpture.

The second Central American country Brian did archaeological work in is Costa Rica. During his first season there he discovered and excavated the first-ever major prehistoric cemetery that had not been looted where he found many grave goods and undisturbed human burials. Costa Rica was an uphill battle for Brian because he had to fight off thieves and looters after the artifacts at his site, making it the most unpleasant country he ever worked in.

The third Latin American country Brian worked in is Honduras. Memorable for the worst roads in Central America, at one point he had a team of oxen rescue his truck from a stream bed.

Panama is the fourth and final Central American country Brian worked in. He spent one eventful season in a Cuna Indian village in the San Blas Islands. Sponsored by a Cuna family, they had to vouch for him to their council of elders to allow him to stay. Brian documented the unique lifestyle of these people, and how they expanded their communities onto artificial islands.

Back in the United States, Brian went from archaeology to researching family history in Hawaii of the Chinese side of his family by marriage. Four family ancestors were exiled to Kalaupapa, Molokai as suspected Hansen's Disease sufferers. Another part of Brian's Chinese family history work has just been published as a new book (page 31).

Brian finished his presentation by commenting that he is now a historian as much as an archaeologist, yet both approaches concern the story of us all from different directions.

— Darran Davis



February 12, 2025

Paul Spitzerri

The Westerners gathered for their first Roundup of 2025 in February, after the January meeting had regrettably been canceled due to the wildfires. But we made up for lost time with an exciting presentation by Paul Spitzerri about the eventful life of the silent movie star Josephine M. Workman, better known by her “Indian princess” stage name, Mona Darkfeather.

Josephine Workman was born in 1882 in Boyle Heights to the historic Workman-Temple family of early Los Angeles. Her mother was of partial Chilean descent, and her paternal grandmother baptised her children at the Indian pueblo church in Taos, New Mexico, so Workman may or may not have had some amount of indigenous heritage. She entered the world of entertainment as a stage whistler during her teenage years, and by 1908 was a theater actress. Towards the end of that decade, Workman answered an advertisement for an “ethnic-looking” film actress role. Whatever the truth of her ancestry, Workman fabricated a full-blooded native identity as Mona Darkfeather—later upgraded to *Princess* Mona Darkfeather. Even as late as the 1960s, it was unfortunately all too common for White movie stars to assume roles as Asian, Black, or Indian lead characters, with actual people of color only relegated to extras.

“Mona Darkfeather” entered the silver screen in 1910, and starred in numerous Westerns, such as *Cheyenne Love for a Sioux*, and *A Child of the Wild*. These were one-reel

movies of about 20 minutes length, which could be cranked out in just a few weeks. Thus, her claim that she starred in five hundred films is conceivable. However, these early short films were also quite *disposable*, and most have been lost.

As her fame grew, “Darkfeather’s” purported backstory became convoluted. The press contradictorily stated that she was fully Native American, or was of Spanish aristocratic extraction. To square that circle, a fanciful tale was concocted, whereby a dying Indian childhood friend bestowed her *spirit* to Josephine Workman, thus magically turning her into Mona Darkfeather. These tales eventually became an inconvenience, and Workman attempted to break out of the typecast role she had created for herself. In the 1915 film *Stanley and the Slave Traders*, she traded the Western American frontier for the Scramble for Africa, and played an English maiden who fought off a lion.

Workman reached the height of her success in 1914, but by 1917—the year of her last major movie—her movie stardom had burned out. She and her second husband, actor and director Frank Montgomery, moved to Spokane, Washington to start their own movie studio, but were unsuccessful. Out of financial options, she spent the next several years on publicity tours, milking her Princess Mona Darkfeather persona for all it was worth. In the ensuing decades, she was embroiled in lawsuits over Workman-Temple family property, including Alcatraz island, and narrowly lost out on a windfall payout due to a California Supreme Court reversal. She lived in obscurity until her death in 1977.

Most of Workman’s memorabilia was thought forever lost, but in 2021, Paul Spitzerri received a treasure trove of rediscovered photographs and even film reels from a Lincoln Heights woman’s basement. They are now part of the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum collection, and Paul is overseeing their restoration and digitization. This was a fascinating presentation, and the Westerners are grateful for Paul’s entertaining exposé of the life of the “reel” Indian Mona Darkfeather.

— John Dillon

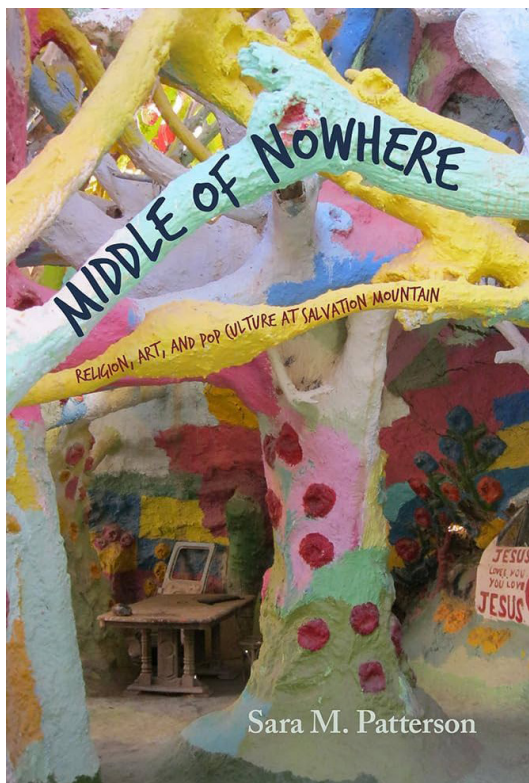
Down the Western Book Trail . . .

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE: Religion, Art, and Pop Culture at Salvation Mountain, by Sara M. Patterson. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016. 211 pp. Map, Illustrations, Notes, Index. Paper, \$24.95.

Full disclosure: I met Leonard Knight while on a camping trip with the Billy Holcomb Chapter, E Clampus Vitus, to the Salton Sea in 2007. Clampers donated some money, paint, and brushes. We walked around the grounds and read the biblical inscriptions on the side of Salvation Mountain and on the rusting motor vehicles scattered on the property. Knight was a very gentle man, clearly dedicated to his commitment in building and maintaining “the mountain,” talking (not preaching) about God’s love of all mankind. His death in 2014 made the news, leaving me with the question of what would happen to his “mountain.”

Sara Patterson deals with that, and many other questions, in her book about Knight, Salvation Mountain, nearby Slab City, and Knight’s religious faith. Leonard Knight was a Christian but not a churchgoer, a Protestant but not a member of any sect, though evangelical Christians liked to consider him one of their own. Patterson follows Knight through his early life to the moment he was inspired to go to the desert, not that of Palm Springs or the Las Vegas suburbs, but the *Middle of Nowhere*, not too far from the dying town of Niland and the smell and flies of the Salton Sea. This was in 1984. For almost three decades he built his mountain, using the cast-off materials of a consumer society — old tires, wrecked cars, discarded furniture, whatever he found useful. When the side of the mountain slid in a minor avalanche, Knight started over; Sisyphus would have envied his dedication.

Author Patterson is a professor of theological studies at Hanover College. An expert on the history of Christianity, in her book she devotes several chapters to Knight’s view on religion and how religious groups have interpreted — and misinterpreted — his beliefs.



Knight practiced an all-inclusive religious faith, welcoming all visitors whether they came to see Salvation Mountain out of curiosity or for inspiration. When Knight had to leave his mountain and entered a hospice in the last months of his life, he left the mountain to the care and maintenance of Kevin Eubank, a friend who lived with him and worked to keep the mountain safe from nature’s erosions. Unfortunately, Eubank died unexpectedly, leaving the fate of the mountain to volunteers and vandals.

Salvation Mountain is located on California public land, and at one point the state wanted to demolish it (shades of Watts Towers), claiming the paint Knight had used was toxic. Defenders got their own experts, and Salvation Mountain passed inspection. An organization, Salvation Mountain Inc., is trying to preserve it, but lacks funds and the personnel willing to live a hermit-like existence to make needed repairs. So, Salvation Mountain is slowly deteriorating.



Figure 13: Salvation Mountain. Public domain internet photo.

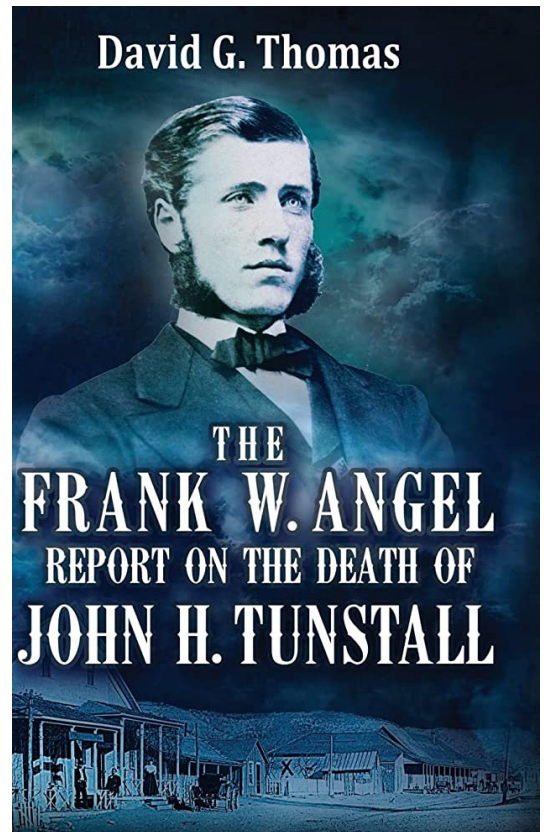
Patterson notes that some visitors have come to use Salvation Mountain for their own purpose. The musical duo Coldwater Jane had a hit song, “Bring on the Love,” that can be seen on Youtube, with Leonard Knight briefly appearing here and there as the duo dances and sings around the mountain. Salvation Mountain doesn’t lack for websites,

Google images, and Youtube videos. What it may lack is permanence. Patterson’s book does what it can to inform people about who Knight was, and how and why he committed himself to three decades of declaring his love for God and people through his unique construction.

— Abraham Hoffman

THE FRANK W. ANGEL REPORT ON THE DEATH OF JOHN H. TUNSTALL, by David G. Thomas. Mesilla Valley History Series, Volume 9, Doc45 Publishing, Las Cruces, NM, 2022. 237 + 6 pages, illustrations, notes, appendices, index. Softcover: \$29.95, hardbound: \$34.95. Available through Amazon.com. Reviewed by Brian Dervin Dillon.

Everybody has heard of Billy the Kid, but few are familiar with Frank W. Angel. Angel was a well-educated, well-connected, Easterner. He was sent by nervous Washington D.C. politicians out to New Mexico, America’s least-populated and least-civilized Territory, to keep a *national embarrassment* from blowing up into an *international incident*. John H. Tunstall, a young, upper-crust British Citizen, only five years older than his most volatile and homicidal employee Billy the Kid, recklessly challenged a rough-and-tumble group of New Mexico Irish potato famine refugees, almost all of them former Union Army Civil War veterans, and in 1878 was murdered for his efforts.



Territorial officials, by virtue of their relative inaction, seemed to have taken the position that the spoiled young English upstart had *gotten what he deserved*. Hibernian ants had risen up, so to speak, and killed the *English anteater* that had taken up residence within their *Irish ant colony* in far-off New Mexico.

Tunstall's outraged English millionaire father, was now howling for blood. Tunstall Senior demanded satisfaction from the U.S. Government and rallied his fellow British businessmen to his side, threatening to make economic trouble for America. So Frank Angel was the investigator who was directed to determine what had happened to young Tunstall, enquire why justice had not been served, and, last but not least, decide whether or not a "coverup" had occurred. His most important, albeit unwritten, duty was to placate Tunstall Senior and diminish the possibility of any transatlantic economic war.

Special Agent Angel was equal to these manifold tasks, and put all of New Mexico "under the microscope." He discovered that some of the U.S. Army officers officers investigated were neutral, while others were blatantly partisan. He also proved that dishonesty and corruption went all the way up the food chain of civil authority from the municipal, to the county, to the territorial level. The New Mexico Territorial Governor lost his job directly as a result of Angel's report. So heads did roll, with Angel sending the victims to the chopping block.

Tunstall Senior, back in England, was satisfied that due diligence in getting to the truth of his son's murder, had indeed taken place. Angel was, in fact, so effective that his report was suppressed by those most at risk of exposure. This is why so few people interested in New Mexico history, and specifically the Lincoln County War, have been aware of it, until now. *Now* is, of course, ever since David G. Thomas did such an outstanding job of historical research and writing culminating in his *Frank W. Angel* book.

The Lincoln County War and Billy the Kid have provided plot elements for dozens of Hollywood *horse-operas* for more than a hundred years. Such *Old West Mythology* is taken as gospel by far too many Americans,

owing to the perceived lack of historical documentation proving it to be completely fictional, with only the most tenuous connection with chronological, geographical, and biographical facts. David G. Thomas debunks the *Tinseltonian* pseudo-history that has swirled around Billy the Kid and the Lincoln County War for far too long, and goes farther than any previous historian in setting the record straight.

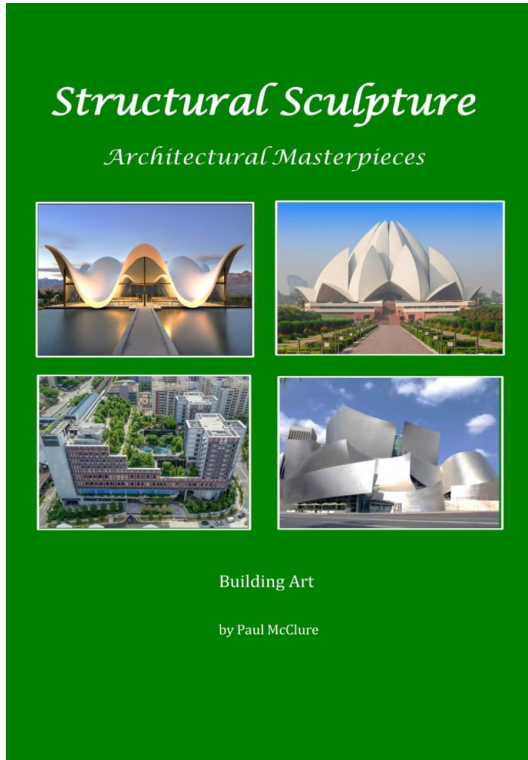
Every official document generated at U.S. Government request bearing upon the causes, the actions, and the after-effects of the bloody New Mexico conflict are reproduced in *The Frank W. Angel Report*. Thomas doggedly traced every historical thread bearing on the Lincoln County War back to its source, and offers thoughtful conclusions about the significance of each bit of evidence. Nobody knows the documentary sources relating to southern New Mexico history better than Thomas, and his *Frank W. Angel* book is the most recent of a great many equally-valuable publications exploring this fascinating Old West region. His 2022 *Frank W. Angel* book presently stands, and probably will stand far into the future, as the best and most up-to-date study of the Lincoln County War.

Myth-buster David G. Thomas has single-handedly demolished many of the falsehoods and fabrications swirling around the time and place that made Billy the Kid famous. For the very first time in 140 years all of the documentary evidence for this compelling episode of New Mexico history is presented between two covers, and the vivid testimony of all the participants still living when Frank W. Angel arrived *way out west* provides answers to most of the questions raised by past generations of historians about the Lincoln County War. Thomas has raised the bar for Western American historical writing. For serious scholars as much as old west aficionados interested in Billy the Kid and Southern New Mexico history, this book is the very best place to start reading. The remarkable *Frank W. Angel Report* merits a place of honor on every westerner's bookshelf. Highly recommended.

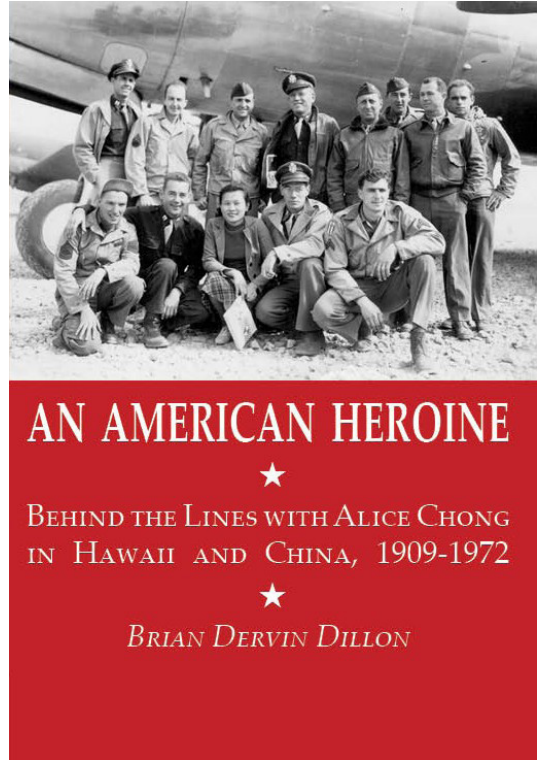
— Brian Dervin Dillon

Corral-Member Publication Showcase

In addition to contributing articles to *The Branding Iron*, or publishing *Keepsakes* or *Brand Books* for the Los Angeles Corral, several of our members have recently been hard at work writing and publishing books on other literary frontiers. Check out these newly-published titles by your talented Corral colleagues! Both are available for sale at Amazon.com.



STRUCTURAL SCULPTURE: Architectural Masterpieces is the last installment of a four-book series on architectural history by Paul McClure, a Renaissance man of the Los Angeles Corral, with experience as diverse as a physics department administrator at the RAND Corporation, a teacher at the Pomona Unified School District, and a U.S. Country-Western Dance Champion. His latest publication explores over 250 noteworthy buildings from around the world and throughout history, such as the Guggenheim Museum and the Sagrada Familia. Encompassing everything from airports and apartments, to churches and colleges, and libraries and lighthouses, McClure's book analyzes the elements of form and function that come together harmoniously to make buildings stand out as "structural sculptures."



Kauai-born Alice Chong was the most unique American woman of World War II. A talented linguist, Alice was one of only two American-born Chinese women teaching at Ginling College, the only American-born Chinese woman war correspondent publishing articles in Honolulu newspapers, and the only American-born Chinese woman working as an interpreter and intelligence expert for General Claire Chennault at his 14th U.S. Army Air Force base at Kunming.

Author Brian Dervin Dillon, an archaeologist with a Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley, married into Alice Chong's Hakka Chinese family and interviewed her relatives for 50 years. **AN AMERICAN HEROINE: Behind the Lines with Alice Chong in Hawaii and China, 1909-1972** is a richly illustrated, 468-page labor of love 15 years in the making!



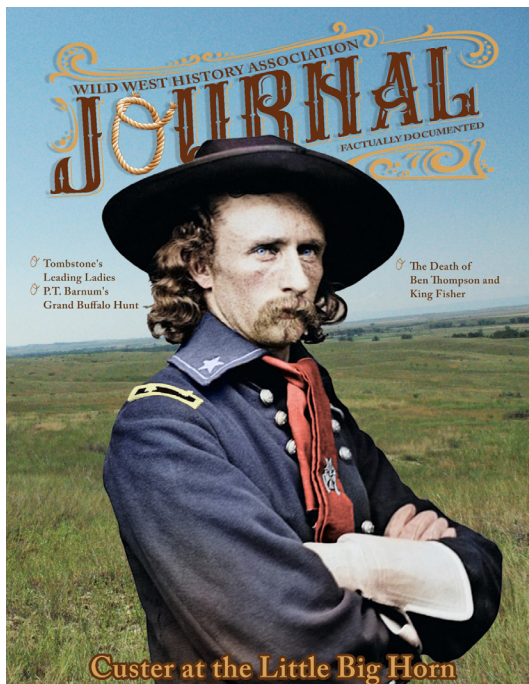
**INDIANS, LATINOS, AND CONFEDERATES,
A WESTERN FAMILY: 1598-1973**
Frank J. Brito

**Brand Book 26, Los Angeles Corral,
Westerners International**

Los Angeles Corral Brand Book 26, *Indians, Latinos, and Confederates, A Western Family: 1598-1973* has recently been published. By Frank J. Brito, it is the story of what must be the most remarkable and unique Western American family any present member of any of the 70+ Westerners International Corrals around the world is descended from. Brito's antecedents had roots in the Spanish Colonial borderlands; drew from Pueblo Indian, Apache, Spanish, Irish, Polish, and Dutch heritage; served in the Mexican and Confederate armies; and were on first-name bases with Teddy Roosevelt, Pat Garrett, and Pancho Villa!

Price: \$30.00 (includes tax and postage). Make your check out to: **Westerners, Los Angeles Corral**, and send your order, with your return address clearly printed to:

Southern California Orders: Brand Book 26, 16007 Lemarsh St., North Hills, CA 91343
Northern California Orders: F. Brito, BB 26, 142 Hazel Dr., Pleasant Hill, CA 94523-2916



Subscribe to the *Wild West History Association Journal*!

You'll receive, delivered to your mailbox, our quarterly magazine, featuring articles from Los Angeles Corral of Westerners contributors Brian Dervin Dillon and Matt Bernstein (editor of the WWHJ Journal).

Go to wildwesthistory.org to subscribe!

Then join us next summer in the BIGGEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD, *Reno, Nevada*, only twenty miles from *Virginia City*—where you can swap jokes with *Mark Twain*, hang around with *Charley Flinn*, drink bourbon with *George Hearst*, and, uh... get better acquainted with *Julia Bulette*!

WWHA 18th Annual Roundup
July 16-19, 2025



Circus Circus
407 N. Virginia St.
Reno, Nevada



Visit book.passkey.com/go/SRWWH5 to make your booking!