

CAMEL



TRACKS

Year 2012

Phone (707)745-5435 email: info@beniciahistoricalmuseum.org website: beniciahistoricalmuseum.org

Jan. / Mar.

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The mission of the Benicia Historical Museum is to engage the community in the evolving history of Benicia and the Arsenal and their influence in the development of our country.

The Museum complex is the center where history is seen, enjoyed and preserved. Through exhibits, events and educational programs we enlighten the public about the history of this unique city.

Revised and adopted 2006

Black Irish in Concert

Saturday, February 18, 2012

Stone Hall @ 8:00 pm



The Black Irish Band, also known as the Hooligans of Jamestown, have a musical style that is as timeless as the rugged landscape of the west, a tribute to the people whose lives were spent building the world we now take for granted. The band has a large compliment of traditional maritime and railroad music, as well as ethnic tunes in their repertoire. They commonly play Irish, Italian, and American folk music with an assortment of original songs and traditional western ballads. The band's musical style captures the spirit of the immigrants of this land, the men and women who tamed the Wild West

Tickets sold at:

- Benicia Historical Museum Office (2060 Camel Rd.)
- Bookshop Benicia (Southampton Shopping Center)
- On line at www.beniciahistoricalmuseum.org

Museum Docents

♦
Louis Alfeld

♦
Tania Borostyan

♦
Karen Burns

♦
Robert Cates

♦
Cathy Christo

♦
Sonny Flores

♦
David Galligan

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♦
Bob Rozett

♦
Eric Sargeson

♦
Carol Scott

♦
Bill Scott

♦
Susan Sullivan

♦
Sharon Toner

♦
Bill Venturelli

We are always looking for new docents. Please contact the Museum to learn about the docent training schedule and the benefits accrued to docent members and nonmembers.

We are always excited to work with high school and college students to help build their applications for institutions of higher learning and future employment.

Start building your application and resume now!

Director's Corner

In the last issue of Camel Tracks, I opined that coming into a new organization was a bit like buying a new house...similar thinking, similar process. And, as with a new house, we have been up to some figurative and literal house cleaning, maintenance, and renovations. Amongst many other analyses and reviews, we are implementing recommendations from docents for an improved "quality of experience" to attract and retain volunteers. We have taken steps to further ensure the safety of the building, exhibits, computer data and systems, and volunteers/personnel. Through committees and subcommittees, we have determined the way forward to improve our exhibits and signage and archival storage and procedures. For example, our Museum Curator, Beverly Phelan, is now filling out a "billing" form, similar to the sort of thing attorneys have, so that we can keep a record of who calls or comes to the Museum, what subjects or individuals they are enquiring about, and how much time Beverly spends doing research on each item, etc., going back into the files to enter and update past enquiries in the same way. This allows us to better qualify and quantify our very important role as a community resource as research and archives center and to better determine and meet the expectations of our "clients". Recently, a resident of Benicia took advantage of our current exhibit "On a Clear Day", which features aerial photographs of Benicia from 1948 through 1996, to amplify a presentation on topographical and other features of the local physical landscape. A group of a dozen or so gathered to discuss the exhibit materials and ask



questions that were beautifully illustrated by the display. I was "chuffed" (British for "proud and pleased") that we could provide such a useful, timely and interesting installation for the benefit and edification of all. As frequently happens, this exhibit generated interest from many different quarters: cartographers, photographers, and citizens who wished to view their house "from the air" – representing a variety of cultures, subcultures and viewpoints. The Guest Curator for this exhibit is Roberta Garrett: kudos to her and more about her and her husband Jim, both Museum volunteers of longstanding, in a later issue. Beverly Phelan, our Curator and Bob Kvasnicka, our in-house photography "go to" volunteer, were also involved in a major way, as they are with this or any other exhibit. When I see people enjoying and appreciating what we have here, I am thankful for the opportunity to work in such a wonderful environment. In addition, we held our annual BHM Board Retreat on January 21, and were able to accomplish a great deal. Dr. Robert Fisher, an expert in leadership and strategy development, conducted an active discussion in the morning session, setting the stage for the afternoon, during which we determined which action items we wished to bring forward to the next board meeting. This "leapfrog" board meeting discussion set the agenda, not just for the next meeting, but also as the agenda for the next several years, serving as the largest portion of our goals and objectives for the BHM operational plan. In partnership with the City as our landlord and single largest donor, and as a standing member of the Economic Development Board Tourism Committee, the BHM is contributing to Benicia's – and the Museum's – heritage/tourism efforts, which is obviously of vital importance to everyone. Meetings with City officials indicate an extremely positive and proactive collaborative effort that will have a cascading effect throughout the entire organization and lead to better results for all. Our Christmas Tree Lot fundraiser, another collaborative effort with Genesis which went from the day after Thanksgiving through

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Curator's Corner

The museum has been receiving donations on a regular basis. We have received the following items in the last two months:

1. A Benicia Arsenal munitions storage box from Bob Surratt
2. A 100th anniversary book of Girl Scouts of America from Ruth Workman
3. A green wool blanket with U. S. on it from Bill Scott
4. Photos and memorabilia from the Mc Clain Estate from Harry Wassmann
5. Sweetheart pillow covers from WWII from Elaine Seput
6. A soda bottle from the Benicia Soda Works donated by Frank Webb
7. WW I era army uniforms, belts, boots from Catherine Bocax



Judy Furlong, former director of the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum has been the connection for us for St. Paul's Church in Benicia. She will bring items to us for the Keep the Faith exhibit. She has offered to help with the installation of the exhibit as an Installation Assistant. It will be wonderful to have her and her

expertise on exhibit installation.

Bob Kvasnicka has finished documenting the O'Grady Estate. It has taken him at least a year to finish the photos and lots of other items in the collection. It does take dedication and many hours to accomplish what he has done.

Bob's wife Leslie has been working on replacing the old tissue in the textile collection. This requires stuffing the sleeves and making sure there are no creases in the fabrics and lining the textile boxes with new tissue. She still has a job to go to everyday, but she comes whenever she has the time including some Saturdays. Bob takes pictures of each item before they are returned to the box. The process is time consuming, but it will get done by the hard work and determination that Leslie and Bob have for this project.

Roberta and I are looking at how we can better store boxes in our collection space. We plan on putting a smaller table in the room and bringing in a file cabinet from the hallway. We will be able to put shelving on top of the file cabinet. Our collection room is the best place we have for storing photos, documents and other paper items. We do not have a controlled environment in Building # 7 so we have to do the best we can by having these items in a room that holds temperature better than anywhere else.

I continue to receive research questions that help me learn more about Benicia's history. Recently, there have been requests for information on Route 40, Benicia Arsenal maps and information on author Elsie Robinson.

Message From the President of the Board



Recently, an author sent to me an historical article for peer review. Over and above the poor grammar, sentence structure, and organization, I was appalled at the poor research. The author repeated many of the old legends that had been floating around Benicia for decades. I was blunt—even brutal—on the author. Having been the subject (victim?) of peer review myself, I was irritated that the author couldn't have done even a modicum of research.

History is ephemeral. Some have said that history is written by the winners. It is certainly written by people who have a passion to research and write and those writers make value decisions on what is important and what isn't. But, all good history starts with research.

It is not enough to rely on previous historical descriptions of an event or upon local legends. To write a useful historical narrative, it is important to drill down into the archives and libraries for base information. Often that means spending hours thumbing through dusty archives.

I have done a number of articles for various publications, and I know from experience that there can be major differences between fact and myth, the things that "everybody knows" and what has actually been documented, including reference to previous news articles; letters to the editor; courthouse microfiche materials; and local, state, and, sometimes, federal administration records.

The pursuit of history must be taken with a jaundiced eye. It must be pursued with an eye for disinformation, for personal agendas, for poor research, for lazy inventions. It takes hard work, time, patience, and energy to sort fact from fiction, and more of the same to write the truth.

Which brings me to our exhibit on church archives that is scheduled to open Feb 5. Two years ago, I took the collection of documents in cardboard boxes at the Congregational Church and formed it into a formal archive. As part of the project, I took an online course on archiving and was introduced to a lot of technology involved in preserving the past. The exhibit will feature storyboards and exhibits on why we keep archives and how to create archives. In short, how do we take a collection of papers and make it into a useful archive? We have invited religious institutions in Benicia to loan various materials from their collections.

I hope you will attend this exhibit, so that you may learn more about Benicia's past and the role religious institutions have played and continue to play in contributing to the city's heritage, and so that you may also better acquaint yourself with the "nuts and bolts" of the archival process - which speaks to the heart of what we do here at the Benicia Historical Museum every day, for those who came before us, for this generation, and for posterity.

Jim Lessenger
Board President

Director

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Christmas Eve 2011, was a successful event both financially and otherwise – the Museum is always happy to work with other nonprofits as and when we can. Congratulations to Toni Haughey, our BHM Vice President and coordinator of this event, for making this a "second annual" that will be also on the diary for 2012. "Men of Worth" made for a fabulous evening on January 7 – a large, appreciative crowd listened, clapped, and even joined in the singing from time to time...the atmosphere was very much like a British pub...great fun, great fundraiser. Continuing on the Celtic theme, we have the "Black Irish" scheduled Saturday, February 18. Please get your tickets now or stand to be disappointed – this group has a large following and seats are going fast. Another collaborative event is the BHM-Benicia Poet Laureate Program, Sunday, 2 – 4 PM, which features the awards presentation and reading of the winning submissions to the Love Poetry Contest 2012. This event is open and free to the public, refreshments will be provided, and the Museum is providing a temporary exhibit in the Hall that presents information on the love affair of Concepcion Arguello and Nikolai Rezanov, the inspiration for the contest. Lastly, the public is cordially invited to attend the opening reception of the exhibit "Keep the Faith: Archiving and Chronicling Benicia's Religious Heritage", which will include artifacts and archives from local churches, and a presentation and demonstration on the archival process. Some 27 churches were contacted, and every effort was made to contact all Benicia religious institutions. It is important for everyone in the community to realize that the Museum mines its archives and collections for items to put into temporary exhibits in order to have a "critical mass" with which to work, but it is the participation and collaboration of Benicia's citizens in their temporary or permanent loans to the Museum that ensures that we can have a comprehensive and truly representative exhibit that speaks both to the interests of the local community and visitors.

Elizabeth d'Huart
Executive Director

Holiday Pot Luck



There was a wonderful turnout of members for our annual Holiday Pot Luck. It was good to see so many familiar faces. We had great food, musical entertainment and lots of conversation. Our raffle was fun as usual and the hall was decorated with the holiday spirit.

We must thank Bill and Carol Scott for all their work on the cooking of the entrees and making sure that all was happening in the kitchen. The Scotts convinced their son to tend the very busy bar and Jim Phelan assisted with emergency help from Gerry Patton. Vice president Toni Haughey and Curator Beverly Phelan decorated the hall for the occasion. The beautiful tree donated from our Christmas Tree Lot, a collaborative fundraiser with Genesis, all decorated with ornaments and lights, was the big raffle prize. One of our volunteers Leslie Kvasnicka won the tree! We must also thank Mary Marino, Louise Martin and Jim Phelan for making calls to remind members of the event.

In memory of: Patricia Joyce Paine



Fred Paine is a volunteer computer consultant for the museum. He and his wife Pat have been members of our museum for many years. Pat was diagnosed with ALS more than a year ago and after her brave struggle she passed away on December 31. Fred was at her side through this time and our sympathies go with him and his family. Pat was very active in Benicia serving on the Benicia Human Services Board, St. Vincent de

Paul, St. Dominic's RCIA, Friends of the Benicia Public Library Board and the Benicia Friendship Club Board. She will be missed by the Benicia Community.

In memory of: Louise Martin



Wonderful Louise...that's what everyone would say who knew her. Of course, we all know she was much more than that. She was a very sweet person and kind to all those around her. Her very presence emitted kindness and giving. Her well-known question around the museum was "Do you need any help?" She

joined the Board of Directors, chaired the volunteer committee, chaired the refreshments for our concerts, worked on fundraisers and was there wherever help was needed. Louise never complained about too much work or involvement. She never minded going the extra mile.

In 2006, Louise came to volunteer at the Benicia Historical Museum and wanted to help with the collection. Kellie McCormick, our then Collections Manager, Louise and I enjoyed the work of documenting and properly storing items in our collection. Louise would get excited whenever she found the right place to store an object. Louise was planning on working with the collection again and that, as we know, will not happen.

Louise will be missed by her fellow Vallejo concert-goers and dear friends Ann Hansen, Mary Marino, Kasma Kelly and Michelle Chavez. All of her friendships were very important to her and she was very important to her friends. The staff and volunteers at the Museum still feel the void created by her passing. She will be remembered as one of those people who come along in your life and will always be there.

A Memorial is scheduled for Sunday, February 19 at 2:00pm in the BHM Stone Hall. Please call the Museum office for more

The colorful Craft of Stained Glass



The colorful craft of stain glass work by Benicia artist Stephen Schumm is now in the Arts and Technology Case at the Museum.

The exhibit features the tools, plans and products of Schumm, who occupies a studio in the Benicia Arsenal that was formerly used by stained glass artist George McKeever and then by Michael Starbow.

The Arts and Technology exhibit focuses on the process of the skilled craftsman developing an idea from painting to finished product in glass.

Calendar of events

Keep the Faith - Archiving and Chronicling

Benicia's Religious Heritage

Exhibit Opening Day Reception and
Archival Demonstration
Sunday, February 5

BHM Museum/Stone Hall 2 to 4pm
Free event open to the public

The Love Poetry Contest 2012

Awards Ceremony and Reception
Sunday, February 12, 2012

BHM Stone Hall 2 to 4pm
Free event open to the public

Black Irish Band in Concert

Saturday, February 18, 2012
BHM Stone Hall 8 to 10 pm

Docent Training

Saturday, February 25, 2012
BHM, Stone Hall 9am to 12 noon
Free event open to the public