

# CAMEL



# TRACKS

Year 2009

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Mar./Apr.

**The Museum  
Welcomes our  
New Members**

Andy & Vera Siri

**Supporting**  
David Palik

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*

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**Lorraine Patten**

*Museum Educator*

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*Concert Coordinator*

**Fred Paine**

*Computer Consultant*

## Confederate or Union?

No matter what your druthers if you are a Civil War history buff you had a full menu from which to choose this past weekend when scholars and history buffs gathered at the Museum and the high school for their serving of Civil War sustenance presented by the Museum and the National Civil War Association .



Activities started on Friday evening with registration and a dinner for the first one hundred registrants, presenters and officials. Venticellos provided a delicious dinner which was followed by John Martini's presentation of the history of Alcatraz Island and its significance in the fortification of San Francisco Bay and the California coast. His lecture was replete with wonderful historical pictures. Staff was kept busy with registrations and welcoming the many participants.

It was up and tending to business early on Saturday and Sunday mornings as people assembled in Stone Hall for registration, coffee and finalizing course choices. Vendors had set up their tables and were active in showing their wares to those who meandered around looking at everything from silk fabrics, books, wash tubs, ladies' stockings

and many other facets of Civil War life and times. There was discussion and exchanging of ideas among everyone. Often there were facts brought to light that awed and astonished both new and seasoned students of the war. Of course, there was much discussion of the many famous generals and military personnel who made this area their base.

The choices of learning were many. Our own Dan Dempsey and Dr. Jim Lessenger presented histories of Benicia and the Arsenal. Dr. Lessenger has a well constructed power point presentation on the Arsenal and its history: and ultimate conversion from military to the Industrial Park that we experience today. Dr. Lessenger has done much in-depth research since his joining the museum board and staff. His presentation includes a far reaching tour of significant points of history here in the Arsenal. Dodging the rain has become an art since it has decided to rain both last year and this year during his tour. Another local presenter was Elizabeth Pidgeon-Ontis who is accomplished as an historical architect. She dealt with the architecture of Benicia as well as doing a presentation on the cooking of the 19th century.

The subjects dealt with were on every aspect of 19th century life, whether cooking, sewing, being stylish, being good or bad boys and girls as well as the war and the people who waged the wars. Did you want to know about the flags of California during the war? Or how about dance music, minstrel as well as military music? Of course, our friend, John Nevins, who brings us the H. L. Hunley display, presented its history. Interested in genealogy? Photography? Military drills? It was all here for the asking. You would be wise to plan for next year's Winter Quarters -- we have always held it in February, be on notice and decide now that you will attend next year.



## From the Director



The second edition of the Camel Tracks for a new year that just started! How can that be? But here we are with the cycle going almost faster than we can maintain.

We, here at the museum, are intent on continuing, not just maintaining, our forward movement. We realize that it is of utmost importance to continue to provide educational and recreational activities as economically feasible as possible. To that end, our Programs Committee is constantly planning activities in which you can participate. There are a myriad of things in which people of any talent can take part.

We are expecting to have a flea market in June. Details have not been worked out as yet. It will not be a junk sale but rather one of surplus, usable good items which we hope you will help us amass.

We are expecting to form a group to staff the gift shop in the museum as our analysis tells us that it is not something that should be combined with docent duties.

There is a training program for docents in which one can learn about Benicia and the surrounding areas and their place in the history of the state and country. Every day, we who are "in the know" learn more and more about this fascinating city. Much of it is due to Dr. Jim Lessenger's research which is ongoing. We are working on a lecture series by which you can increase your knowledge. On the entertainment level, we will have a garden series of music beginning in June and, of course, we continue our concerts in the hall. We will be having more Singles Nights at the museum and we are still hopeful about having the Jazz groups that used to perform at the Shoreline become a part of our museum offerings. We are exploring other activities that we believe will be of interest to the community. We welcome ideas from you for feasible ventures.

We are determined to keep moving forward even in these difficult economic times. We welcome your participation in your museum in programs, as a volunteer, docent, tour guide or visitor. Let us know what you would like to do, we need you.

## Curator's Corner Women's History Month

The public celebration of women's history in this country began in 1978 as "Women's History Week" in Sonoma County, California. Later in 1981, a joint congressional resolution proclaimed a national Women's History Week. In 1987, Congress expanded the resolution to Women's History Month.



For this celebration we would like to feature our city's namesake Francisca Maria Felipa Benicia Carrillo de Vallejo. She was born in San Diego on August 23, 1815. Her father, Joaquin Carrillo was a soldier at the Presidio in San Diego and her mother was Maria Ignacio Lopez. The Carrillos were among the first families to come to California and lived just outside the Presidio in an adobe house surrounded by an orchard of pears, pomegranates and olive trees. It was here that Mariano Vallejo first met his future wife.

In order for the two young people to marry, Vallejo had to obtain permission from the Mexican officials. Permission came seventeen months later and they wed on March 6, 1832. They were married in the Chapel of the Presidio where Francisca's parents had been married 23 years earlier. Vallejo remained in San Diego for several weeks before rejoining his company at the Presidio in San Francisco. Francisca joined him later with the help of Vallejo's 20-yr. old brother and 20 troopers by way of the El Camino Real. It was an arduous trip for the 17-year old who was expecting her first child.

The San Francisco Presidio was a dilapidated military post. Francisca made a simple home of an adobe house where their first child, Andronico Antonio was born on March 14, 1833. He was 10 months old when he died and is buried at Mission Delores. This was the first of 16 children for the Vallejos and unfortunately only 10 lived to adulthood.

Francisca remained in San Francisco while Mariano was kept busy in the North Bay with the secularization of Mission San Francisco Solano. By 1835, the couple and their second born son went to live in Sonoma where Mariano was ordered to lay out a pueblo. The Sonoma Mission had been abandoned at this time and was home for them until

they built Casa Grande on the plaza. Eleven of their children were born there.

Senora Vallejo was busy bearing a child every year or two and managed the household and served as hostess to the visitors who came to Casa Grande. She was her husband's confidante but she was sometimes displeased with his constant attention to business and politics.

When he was taken prisoner after the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846, they had eight children. She would write to him saying, "I and the children are well. Don't worry about the family. Your papers are well cared for, I am sending you a little money, a bit of cereal and bread".

After he was released many changes were happening in the plaza. They decided to build another home, Lachryma Montis, which was a prefab matching the Captain Walsh home in Benicia. It was in this home that the last two children were born.

Dona Francisca had limited education due to the custom of former times. She held modern ideas and according to her son Platon: "She was indeed a faithful wife, a devoted mother and true friend; she believed in women's rights. She was... a level headed woman".

Always in the shadow of her distinguished husband, the Senora took pardonable pride in having the city on the Carquinez Strait named "Benicia" in her honor. She began to sign all documents "Benicia F. de Vallejo".

One of the highlights of her life is when her son-in-law John Frisbee took her with him by train back to New York. She described the water in abundance, the mountains, and the sight of the Mississippi River.

As years went by the fortunes of the Vallejos were fast slipping away caused by the poor investments made by John Frisbee. Senora Vallejo was used to servants and personal attendants and now she had to cook, clean the pots and pans, wash clothes and sweep and clean the house.

By 1889 the General's health began to fall rapidly and he died on January 18, 1890. The grieving widow suffered a stroke soon after his death and her health declined. She died on January 30, 1891. They are both buried in the Mountain Cemetery overlooking Sonoma Valley.

Her death was the end of an era in California history. There were no more pioneer women crossing the plains in covered wagons. They now arrived by train or ship.

## Putting It All Together

Putting together a program as varied and detailed as The National Civil War Association Winter Quarters conference which the Benicia Historical Museum partnered with them is a formidable task. This year's organizers Jennifer Roger and Sharyle Leidy did an outstanding job of making this conference a success. Their organizational chart (which was outstanding) shows them as facilitator with the caption "The Buck Stops Here". The final statement on the chart is "Communication is key". It is because of these two elements that they proved so successful this year. Their part of the partnership was far more extensive than the Museum's.

Looking at the choices on the program, you see that just securing speakers, their subjects, and the needed props is an almost impossible task. But they tackled it with their staff so that a well thought out program was presented. Arrangements for transportation from the east coast for their nationally known faculty, their housing arrangements, every detail had to be attended to. They did a superb job and presented the best program of their four year history with us.

Marketing the conference was a challenge also. It involved the NCWA website along with the Benicia Historical Museum website. Ads were placed in the publication of the national and regional newsletters. On our end, we did posters and flyers and, of course, have been telling everyone about it in the Camel Tracks... The Benicia Herald and the Vallejo Times Herald did excellent articles in anticipation of the event. We appreciate their timely coverage. Our spokesperson, Mary Marino, sent news releases to all surrounding newspapers.

In hopes of continuing relationships with the participants of the conference and drawing them back, not just for next year's conference but for trips in between, we solicited merchants for discounts on purchases. We had a fairly good response and we thank the following for their generosity:

Issy's Restaurant  
Venticellos Ristorante  
Piccolo  
Lindsay Glass  
Double Rainbow  
Nourot Glass Studios  
Motel 6  
Pappas  
Benicia Grill  
First Street Café



We also thank the Benicia Unified School District for the use of the classrooms at the high school allowing us to conduct the seminars in a professional manner. And, of course, without our staff at the museum the conference would have been impossible. Tania, always good at tweaking and putting together ideas and producing documents and graphics and Chuck for his assistance with the set up, were essential to our program.

Louise Martin, Board members and Volunteer Coordinator, worked tirelessly not only in getting volunteers but in working wherever needed. Kasma Kelley and Board members Mary Marino, Kellie McCormick and Key Club members also helped Beverly Phelan



and Toni Haughey were indispensable in distributing literature. Thank you all for your great help. We look forward to an even greater experience next year.

Red Dragonfly Productions  
Presents

# The Volker Strifler Band

In a birthday concert for music producer  
**Rhonda Lucile Hicks**  
as a benefit for the

## THE SPENGER GARDEN MUSIC SERIES

Saturday,  
March 28,  
2009

**BENICIA HISTORICAL MUSEUM**  
EST. 1975

**Benicia Historical Museum**  
2024 Camel Road Benicia, CA 94510  
\$20 General Admission ~ No Host Bar ~ Birthday cake for all  
Call 707.745.5435 for information and tickets  
[www.BeniciaHistoricalMuseum.org](http://www.BeniciaHistoricalMuseum.org)

## COME CELEBRATE

There is a double treat in store for you on March 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Number one: Rhonda Lucile Hicks is having a birthday party.** She is inviting all of us to attend for an evening of fun. (She hasn't divulged her age so we can't even ask you to keep a secret.) Rhonda is a terrific supporter of the museum and is producing our garden concert series which will start in June. She loves our garden and is "hawking" tickets to her party to support the Spenger Garden Music Series. You surely will want to come and wish her a "Happy Birthday".

**Number two: to help her celebrate her birthday, she has engaged the Volker Strifler Band.** We received rave reviews when they played for the Spenger Garden Dedication. They made people so happy that they got up and danced in the aisles. This versatile band will lead you through jazz, blues, rock and even calypso. They are full of surprises and are without doubt great performers and great musicians. We are fortunate to have them! You can purchase tickets in advance from the Museum Office, Bookshop Benicia, Benicia Main Street or online at [www.beniciahistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.beniciahistoricalmuseum.org). Come, have a good time, celebrate Rhonda's birthday and benefit the Spenger Garden Series through your support. See you on the 28<sup>th</sup>!

## CALLING FORMER WORKERS AT BENICIA ARSENAL

Were you, or anyone you know, an employee of Benicia Arsenal? I am doing historical research on the Arsenal and I would like to speak with anyone who worked there in the 1940's, 1950's or 1960's. Please call me at the toll free number 1-877-204-9910 or email me at [LEVICL@aol.com](mailto:LEVICL@aol.com). Please include your telephone number and I will call you. I look forward to speaking with you.

Carl Levi Phone: 1-877-204-9910 Email: [LEVICL@aol.com](mailto:LEVICL@aol.com)

## Welcome!

The Board of Directors welcomes two new members

Cathy Forbes has been an active advocate of history and the preservation of Benicia's heritage. She is a graphic artist and has had experience in museum installation. We know that her skills will serve us well in her position on the board. Cathy has served on the Board of Directors of the Benicia Historical Society.



Dr. Timothy Lynch, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of Maritime History at the California Maritime Academy, CSU in Vallejo. He has past experience in Museum and Maritime History organizations. He is presently a member of the National Maritime Historical Society Board of Directors and the S.F. Maritime National Historical Park Executive Board. He is working on a manuscript about California maritime history and heritage. He has done presentations at national conferences and published in journals.



Cathy fills the position vacated by Donna Worthington and Timothy assumes Bill Whitney's term. Both Donna and Bill found it necessary to resign as Board members because of business commitments. Cathy and Timothy will be eligible for two terms after their present terms.

## Zany or Sane?

Witches, Goblins, Tin Man, Dorothy and so many other characters were roaming and flying around the Clocktower on last Saturday evening. With a Wizard of Oz theme, the Benicia Library had to know they had a winner. The theme itself created a jovial, fun-filled evening of racking brains and moans and groans over failed knowledge.

It was the first time that the Benicia Historical Museum participated in the contests. With eighteen teams, you know there had to be a lot of brain power against which to compete. As our team of Beverly Phelan, Glenn Boatman and Dr. Jim Lessenger mulled over questions which they had 15 seconds to answer, we sat breathlessly anticipating whether or not they would score. We raised our voices in triumph each time they scored. We had to wonder what wizard at the library thought up those questions, most of about which we in the audience did not have a clue. We thought we had some of our brightest and sharpest minds up there on the stage. Actually, we were quite right. They lasted through the first round and came close to qualifying to go on after the second round. But that was not to be and they came back to our table with big smiles on their faces, knowing they had made us proud for not being eliminated in the first round.

We came away feeling good about the evening, having had a good meal, had fun being entertained, visiting with friends and helping the library Adult Literacy and ESL program in the process. We agreed we will be back next year.

## Mark your calendars and let us see you here.

Also April 19th will begin Volunteer week. We will be having a Volunteer Fair for our Docents and all volunteers. Put it on your calendar.

## Come to the Brick Party

You are invited to a Brick Party on Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. At this time we will celebrate the installation of the bricks around the fountain.

Last year, we sold the bricks around the fountain in the garden to raise money for the plantings. It had dawned on us that the budget for construction of the garden did not include the plantings. What would a garden be without plants? We were very happy that the idea of buying a brick was well received by members and friends and so our plan took off.

Unfortunately, we could not install the bricks until the last one had been sold and engraved. Last month, we reached our goal and the final brick was sold. Many people used a commemorative brick as a way to memorialize loved ones or just to tell others that they cared enough to honor them in this way. All bricks will be engraved, placed and be permanently cemented into place within the next week. It was because of safety issues that we could not install them piecemeal. We are sure you will be happy with the results.

## ON THE SINGLES SIDE:

We had a great "Singles Night at the Museum" last January. Thanks Lorraine Patten and Kimble Goodman for your help. Thanks Helen Logan for that great food dish. You sure know the way to a man's heart! Tentatively, plan to have Singles Nights at the Museum on 19 June, 17 July, 21 August, and 18 September. Look for exact dates in future issues of Camel Tracks. If you would like to volunteer to help this summer with the Singles Nights, please contact Larry Lauber at 707.745.5662 or e-mail at LLauber@sonic.net.

If you would like to meet some of us "Singles" before the summer, Larry Lauber has a monthly breakfast on the SECOND Wednesday of the month at Benicia Grill at 9:30 AM. Please let Larry know ahead of time that you are coming.

Larry Lauber

## Calendar of events

### VOLKER STRIFLER BAND IN CONCERT

Saturday, March 28, 2009  
Stone Hall @ 8:00pm

### THE ALHAMBRA VALLEY BAND IN CONCERT

Saturday, April 4, 2009  
Stone Hall @ 8:00pm

### MIRTH & MUSIC AT THE BARNES

comedian **Cathy Ladman**  
opening act singer/songwriter **Saul Kaye**  
Saturday, May 2, 2009  
Stone Hall @ 8:00pm

### MIRTH & MUSIC AT THE BARNES

comedian **Don Friesen**  
opening act **Raymond Victor Band**  
Saturday, June 6, 2009  
Stone Hall @ 8:00pm