

CAPITOLA SUNSET

March 2008, Volume 2, Issue 1

Girl Scout Invasion



Capitola Museum Director Carolyn Swift got to relive her past as a Girl Scout when the museum was visited in February by Troop 1075. The Scouts made a whirlwind tour of the current exhibit, "Welcome to the Hotel Capitola," and were captivated by the story of Martha Jane "Patty" Reed, the child survivor of the Donner Party tragedy of 1847. Patty was the little girl who kept a doll beside her as comfort during the wagon train's perilous journey and the ordeal of starvation. Many years later, as Mrs. Frank Reed, Patty came to Capitola and was concierge of the Hotel Capitola and then proprietor of the Capitola Park Hotel (also known as the Lewis House).

President's Corner

By Linda Smith

A new exhibit, fundraising, oral histories, volunteer enrichment, historical publications, improved storage, and the preservation of the museum's collection in an electronic database—these are targeted ambitions chosen by the museum board of trustees for the coming year. Board members

have agreed to a lead role in achieving these goals, and are inviting everyone to participate in the collection, preservation, interpretation, and sharing of Capitola's rich history.

Plans are now underway for a summer garden party that will allow board members to celebrate and spend time with the museum's dynamic volunteer crew. Trustees are once again inviting volunteers to come and be appreciated, enjoy a meal, socialize, and have fun. Volunteer Coordinator Niels Kisling is finalizing details, and promises to keep everyone informed of the plans.

Greeting visitors in all months of the year, our volunteers are what give the museum its personality as well as a welcoming face and smile. This year, we hope to continue to offer extended hours on special occasions so as many guests as possible can stop by and see the exhibits. Days we hope to be open with additional hours include the Capitola Car Show in June and the Wharf-to-Wharf race in July. The museum will also be active during the Capitola Begonia Festival and the Art and Wine Festival in September. We're looking for volunteers who are willing to lend a hand, so if you're interested, please let us know.

Launched a year ago, the Capitola Sunset quarterly newsletter is becoming popular. Readership has jumped, support from the community is growing, and an appreciation for Capitola history is touching corners far from home. The community donations we receive allow progress on such projects as the washhouse restoration, the enrichment of Capitola archives, and completion of "The Grand Hotel Capitola," our first book. A photo CD of images included in the book is also planned for release this summer. Work is further underway on two oral histories for the Capitola History Series, shown on Community TV.

The current exhibit, "Welcome to the Grand Hotel," will continue through the summer months and will close after the Art and Wine Festival in September. In the meantime, details will be hammered out for a fall exhibit to highlight the 1950s. The show will be a complement to the City of Capitola's observation of its 60th birthday in 2008-2009. Tentative plans are also in the works for a souvenir booklet that will highlight the city incorporation effort and the early years of city life. Long-range publication plans include providing assistance to the Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association on a Soquel history book, and preliminary plans for a Rispin era publication.

Capitola Museum's collection has grown with on-going additions of photographs, artifacts, artwork, and exhibit props. "Past Perfect," a museum management software program used by institutions throughout the country, has been obtained and is now used to help catalog our holdings electronically. We're now able to tie the historical detail of each item with photo documentation for easy access and retrieval. The museum hopes to increase and improve storage space that will further provide safekeeping for Capitola's works of art.



During an inventory artifact session, a visitor named Tiny stopped by and was "cat-alogued" before he went on his way.

The most ambitious undertaking of three Capitola Museum trustees was the decision to enroll in Sandy Lydon's Santa Cruz County History course, offered for the first time in eight years. The board

members, as well as some of their classmates, are contributing volunteer hours to help complete some projects. Regular volunteers may see some new names on the calendar in March and April. We're hoping that these students will enjoy their time with us, and will become not only Capitola history fans, but permanent museum volunteers!

Finding the John



After three days of toil on restorations to the washhouse, Nels Westman decided the historic structure would be incomplete without a real toilet to go with the showerhead and sink.

Those two items are to be re-installed in the near future to help the washhouse regain its 1930s facade. There had once been a toilet, naturally, but for sanitary reasons it was left behind when the building was moved from San Jose Avenue to the museum.

A longtime Capitola resident and former director of the Capitola Begonia Festival, Nels volunteered in January to help Steve Swift reinforce the washhouse exterior and interior walls. While working, he decided it was a shame the old structure would be fixed up without anything to flush.

Nels is on the board at the Aptos History Museum. When he mentioned the Capitola washhouse to Aptos Museum Director John Hibble, John suggested they ask another board member, Karl Mertz, to help arrange a special museum-to-museum donation.

So, thanks to the generosity of our neighbors, Capitola now has a replacement commode. And it's not just any toilet, but a "*John*," a real John Douglas, and it comes from the historic Mangles Ranch in Aptos.

Capitola Museum's Board of Trustees blushes at the honor of receiving a vintage toilet, particularly one from an historic site, and it is a further privilege to enjoy a cooperative relationship with a neighboring museum. But it's the fact that this is a "John" that really puts it over the edge.

Without going too far into bathroom history, it's worthwhile to note that pioneering companies of water closets were more like artists than engineers. Toilet craftsmen proudly put their names where they could best be seen, inside the bowl or around the rim. An English company, the Thomas Crapper, left more of a mark in the mind of the public than it wished. The American market, it is believed, took a similar turn when it coined the phrase "going to the John" in reference to the John Douglas Company of Cincinnati.

Once it's installed, will ours become a working John? The answer is no, and neither will it be accessible. Thanks to our volunteers, though, the washhouse is going to be somewhat authentic in appearance if not practicality.

Nels and Steve finished up on the walls and then installed sheer panels on the roof. Another volunteer crew led by Will Patterson is working on the doors. Target date for completion on the whole project is late spring.

Acknowledgments

Funds received in response to the December newsletter will be used to complete work on the washhouse, which to date has been done without

City funding, and begin restoration of other historically significant artifacts in the museum collection. Many thanks to the following generous people:

- Richard and Teresa Crocker
- Emil Edgren
- Marvin Jensen
- Jed and Helen Myall
- Ron Olmstead in memory of Edith (Lester) Olmstead, his mother
- Barbara Palmer
- Jim and Barbara Reding
- Linda Sanders
- Ettamae Shaffer
- John Smith

HELP US PRESERVE CAPITOLA'S HISTORY: The Capitola Historical Museum is actively looking for your old Capitola photos, artwork, other artifacts, and stories. Help us expand our collection and preserve Capitola's history. Contact Carolyn Swift, museum director, at 464-0322.

New Acquisitions

Howard Walter Smith of Pipe Creek, Texas, contacted us in February and asked if we knew anything about his grandparents, Walter and Viola Greather Smith, who lived here ninety years ago.

Howard said his grandfather traveled throughout the United States drilling oil wells, and came to Capitola in 1918. The couple lived here until about 1922.

Along with his request, Howard sent a dozen snapshots, including some rare views of Capitola Village. On the next page is an example, developed as a postcard. It shows the aftermath of a storm and high tide along the beach in front of the Hotel Capitola. The museum appreciates the generous gift of this winter scene.



Other recent donations to the museum archives include: a long black military-style c1909 pleated skirt, given by Leslie Couvillion; a c1925 home movie projector from Mark Wheeler; an 1874 Concord model coach, donated by Tom and Maryls Rausch; a quintuplet baby dish from the 1930s, from volunteer Dorothy Whitmore; and a DVD of early Wharf-to-Wharf races in the 1970s, from Jim Reding.

CALL FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS: The Capitola Historical Museum is seeking volunteers interested in serving as museum docents and greeting visitors in two hour shifts on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoons. Training is provided. Contact Niels Kisling at nkisling@pacbell.net or Carolyn Swift at 464-0322.

Volunteer Spotlight: Paul Parsons



Born and raised in Santa Cruz, Paul was right out of high school when Shadowbrook restaurant hired him as a dishwasher.

This was before the famous “cable to your table” hillevator was added in 1958.

To get food and supplies down to the restaurant and haul garbage up it took a car, a wooden ramp, a rope, and a sled. The sled, tied with rope to the

back of the car, slid up and down on the ramp as the car moved forward and back.

Paul got together with his lifelong friend Frank Hill and came up with the idea for the museum’s “Painted Lady” a few years ago. She’s the one who peers into our restored cottage next to the museum. Frank Hill also created all of the signs and tikis for the The Saba and Carribean Ballroom (known as “The Saba”) in the 1950s.

As for why he got involved with the museum, Paul mentioned that he likes to become involved with worthwhile volunteer projects in the Santa Cruz area, including First Night, the Cabrillo Music Festival, and the Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association where he and his wife Judy actively work to preserve the history of the town that once included all of Capitola.

Two favorite activities are hanging out with his 9-month-old great grandson Ethan Paul and rooting for the Oakland A’s with his wife Judy. A trip to Chicago next month adds to the growing list of cities they have visited to watch the A’s, including New York, San Francisco, Boston, San Diego, Seattle, Anaheim, Arlington, Texas and spring training in Phoenix.

Paul is one of those Capitola Museum volunteers who reaches out to people on the street, luring in visitors by striking up a conversation with them as they pass by on their way to the beach. As a docent, he’s a natural. Many thanks to Paul for his service to the museum and the community.

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Museum Hours: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 12 to 4 p.m.

Museum Director: Carolyn Swift

Board of Trustees: Linda Smith (President), Darcy Horton (Vice President), Tom McGranahan (Treasurer), Topsy Smalley (Secretary), Gordon van Zuiden, Bob Anderson, and Niels Kisling