



CAPITOLA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Summer 2011

NEWS, EVENTS & INFORMATION

## Capitola Museum Dodges Disaster

Many Capitola Historical Museum supporters have asked how the museum and its archive have fared since the devastating March 26 flood of Noble Creek.

That day in early spring was the date set for the opening reception of, "Capitola History—It's About Time." Instead of enjoying cake and cider, museum trustees watched with angst as floodwater surrounded the building on three sides and ran beneath it. Somehow, the interior escaped any damage.

We had a terrific cake from Gayle's Bakery that read, "You can have your cake and eat it, too," but, as it turned out, that wasn't exactly true. Our reception plans washed out to sea. To say that our spirits were dampened would have been a great cliché for the moment, but no one was in the mood for jokes.

The museum donated some of the cake to our loyal public works team working long, stressful hours that day.

In the following week we were compelled to abandon our storage units at Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park. Fortunately, Craig French and Redtree Properties had already assisted us with temporary but ample storage space at Bay Avenue. Since they were safe and dry the most valuable items in the museum collection faced no danger.

At Pacific Cove some props were damaged due to the flood but none were archival or directly related to local history. Three 1970s mannequins, several

dozen wood frames, and sections of display boards were lost. The rest of the items stored in the trailers have been moved to a single, large container. Once the new Redtree storage units on Bay Avenue are ready, the entire collection can be combined.

The museum's textiles, photographs, artwork, and exhibit props are being repackaged and organized in a way that will improve the archive's ongoing care. Capitola Historical Museum trustees are thankful to all the well-wishers who stopped in, telephoned, e-mailed, and offered help.



Thanks to founder Phil Walker's fortunate placement of the museum, it sat just high enough to keep water from rushing through it. Steve Swift's astute placement of three wooden planks in the parking lot diverted the torrent averting damage from the flood.



## Voter Registration Finds Henry Rispin

Since Capitola purchased the Rispin Mansion in 1986, historians have tried to discover the missing pieces to Henry (H. Allen) Rispin's mysterious past.

Occasionally, a new fragment pops up.

When Rispin and his wife, Annette, bought Camp Capitola in 1919 millionaire Robert Hays Smith was among the original stockholders. Smith was the financier who purchased Rispin's mansion and Capitola real estate at an auction in 1929. By the time Smith took possession of the estate in 1930, the Rispin family was rumored to be in financial trouble, and had disappeared.

No one in Capitola was aware of it, but H. Allen was back in San Francisco, working for Smith as a real estate salesman and oil investor. He stayed on the payroll until Smith lost his fortune and his property in 1936.

For the next decade, both H. Allen and his son, Alan, shifted from place to place to find work. In the younger man's case, the job opportunities were physically demanding and he struggled as a mechanic and laborer.



Annette—an oil industry heiress—passed away at the start of WWII. After that son and father scraped by, living together. Alan suffered from epileptic seizures and could only work intermittently.

The latest clue to how they spent their last years has been found in a 1944 voter registration list. H. Allen Rispin and Alan were both registered Republicans in Boulder Creek. They didn't stay there for long, however, for they were living at the Watsonville YMCA two years later. There Alan suffered the seizures that ended his life in 1946. Soon afterward, H. Allen had a stroke and was taken to Santa Cruz

County Hospital. He was transferred to San Francisco and died there in 1947.

## Generous Community Spirit

This spring, Capitola Historical Museum received a number of intriguing artifacts, and all of them coordinated perfectly with the current exhibit "Capitola History—It's About Time."

Ed da Roza saw the exhibit case telling the story of Donner Party survivor Martha Jane "Patty" Reed Lewis and her daughter Susie A. Lewis, an early Capitola photographer. He brought to the museum a collection of early mail "cover" envelopes related to the pioneer family after they settled here. We were able to copy ten of them, many addressed to early Santa Cruz County residents.



The recipient of this 1893 Reed letter was William M. Patterson, an associate of Frazier Reed Lewis of Camp Capitola. Lewis and Patterson leased and operated Capitola's Ice Cream Saloon. Frazier later gained fame as the inventor of the Victoria Crème, a nickel candy bar flavored with rum.

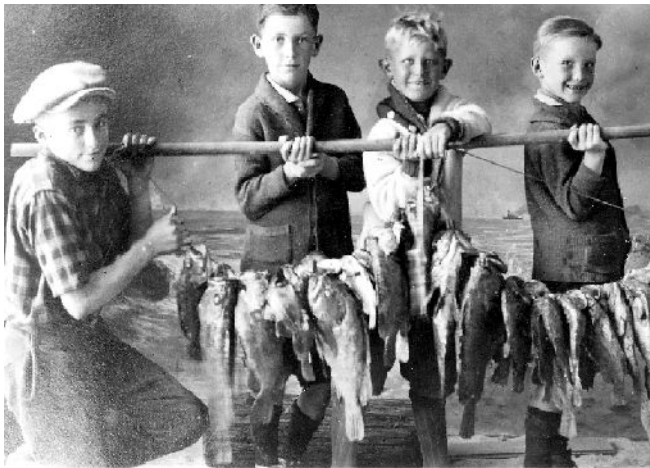
Then Barclay Brown stopped by one afternoon with a unique gift for the museum case displaying artifacts related to the Brown Bulb Ranch and Golden Guernsey Dairy. He presented the museum with a ceramic bottle labeled "Moo Cow Beverages, Capitola, Ca, Brown's Little Brown Jug, 10 oz., Ginger Beer." Brown had recovered it from the family's property as a child, and saved it as a piece of family history.

An anonymous donor also came by one weekend and left a one-quart package for Moo Cow Ice Cream. Both gifts will help the museum celebrate the future anniversaries of the Brown Ranch, founded 100 years ago by James and Rura Brown.

## Honoring Dick Lynn

When Richard (Dick) Pfister Lynn passed away on April 30 at the age of 95, his family encouraged those willing to donate in his memory to direct their gifts to the Capitola Historical Museum.

Daughters Carol Matson and her husband Dave, Diane Nelson and her husband Bill, along with Dick's grandson Greg Matson, and sister Janis French, felt that Dick would be pleased, particularly since the Pfister home in Capitola has been part of the family legacy for the past 127 years. Dick was a longtime supporter of regional history.



Dick Lynn and his brother Dave, wearing matching sweaters, posed with friends and a great fish catch at the Capitola Photo Studio, c1925.

The "Red House" on Cliff Avenue, where Dick and his siblings spent much of their childhood, was built in 1884 by their great-grandfather and former San Jose Mayor Adolph Pfister. It was one of the first houses constructed on what is today Depot Hill.

Born in San Jose in 1915, Dick was a lifelong resident of Santa Clara County. He attended San Jose State University, served in the Pacific theater during World War II, and married Shirley Johnson in 1950. The couple celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary a few years before her passing in 2003.

Dick enjoyed the telling of his Capitola memories that covered nearly a century, from before the Rispin era through the Roaring Twenties, Great Depression, City incorporation in 1949, and the counter-culture days of the 1960s.

Generous contributions were donated by the following people in memory of Richard Lynn:

Joseph and Jeanice Owens of San Jose  
Bill and Cookie Ness of Lincoln  
Diane L. Piland and family of Centennial, Co.  
James and Julia Breckenridge of Palo Alto  
Mark and Paula Johnson of Lake Almanor  
Bruce and Doreen Arthur of Capitola  
Barbara M. Johnson of Palo Alto  
Ron Garratt and Linda McIntyre of Palo Alto  
Joanne Matson of Fort Bragg  
Ray Picatoste of Sunnyvale

## Historical Soquel Walking Tour

For museum director Carolyn Swift 'a day at the office' often includes introducing history to future historians. Jan Roberts' second grade class from Soquel Elementary School was lucky enough to be the recipient of a historical walking tour of Soquel Village in early June.

Carolyn took the rambunctious, frolicking pack of children through time. One stop was the new walking bridge that spans Soquel Creek behind the school. About that, Jack Kisling says, "My favorite story was about the old bridge and how Carolyn looked for years before she found the old concrete footing. And, how the old bridge was destroyed when a horse cart loaded full of apples fell right through it."

Other highlights included; the Soquel Post Office featuring paintings by local artist Frank Hill, the Congregational Church of Soquel built by S.A. Hall in 1868, the Porter Memorial Library and the site of the O'Neill Paper Mill with its flume that carried waste through a tunnel toward China Beach (New Brighton Beach).



# Volunteer Spotlight: Topsy Smalley

By Niels Kisling

"The world of information is what's exciting to me," said Topsy Smalley. She joined the museum board in 1992—and serves as our secretary to this day. She keeps a binder filled with board minutes going back 22 years!

But Topsy is not just about taking minutes at board meetings. She has a lifelong passion for books and information. As the museum webmaster, she is an expert on how modern technology increases our access to information.

Topsy showed me my first Kindle. Recalling that, she slapped her knee and giggled infectiously, "Do you know how many books there are on Amazon??" Before I could reply, she said, "890,000!" still giggling, her face lit up. Topsy is all about the availability of information, period.

Retiring in June, she spent 23 years as an Instructional Librarian at Cabrillo College—a librarian's librarian, so to speak. Topsy taught students, staff and faculty how to use the library to research information. She says, "In today's world, there is no excuse for not finding information on any topic, no matter how obscure."

Topsy's grandmother, Lena Neher, moved to Capitola in 1944 from Gustine and settled in an adobe with a basement at the end of Hollister Avenue. Topsy rode the train by herself from her



home in Southern California from 1950, at the age of seven, until 1957 to spend her summers with her grandmother on Depot Hill. As a preteen she enjoyed the freedom of walking down the steps to the old Capitola Post Office located at the corner of Capitola and Monterey Avenues. At

home, Topsy's parents were strict and she was not allowed to watch movies. In Capitola her

grandmother's rules ruled. Here she was allowed to go to the new Capitola Theater, ride the carousel and play Skee ball in an era long before the village amusements and arcades were phased-out by fast food, restaurants and bars.

Museum Volunteer Topsy Smalley discovered her love of information back in the 1950s, and her spirit for informational adventure continues today.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following people for their generous donations:

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|----------------------|----------------------------------|
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| Karen Rutland        | Ettamae Shaffer                  |
| Stan & Carly Stevens | Donald & Dorothy Washam          |
| Susan & Nels Westman | Demian Sherinian & Yvonne Zannis |

Many thanks to our anonymous donors—members of our community and out-of-town visitors—who contribute by dropping money into our donation box—you know who you are!



The Pfister house at 122 Cliff Avenue, where Dick Lynn spent many of his summers, was one of the first homes built on Depot Hill c1884. It remains in the family to this day.

Capitola Historical Museum is looking for volunteer greeters to help keep the museum open and welcome guests. We are looking for people who love history, or have a few hours to spend every few weeks, during which they could read novels, pay bills, do puzzles, and chat with vacationers from around the world.

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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), Bob Anderson (vice president), Tom McGranahan (treasurer), Topsy Smalley (secretary), Gordon van Zuiden, David Shoaf, and Niels Kisling