

Volume 22

February 1982

Number 1



**Santa Clara Home-Museum
Memorial to George Washington**

▼ ▼ ▼ WHALE BLAZERS ▼ ▼ ▼

SAN JOSE 1885: - The Common Council recommended the use of planks two inches thick, four feet wide and sixteen feet long for sidewalks which could be laid for \$2.80 each.

SAN JOSE, December 1896: - The police department was in full bloom as its force was increased from 20 to 23. Two of the new men had been assigned as horse-mounted officers.

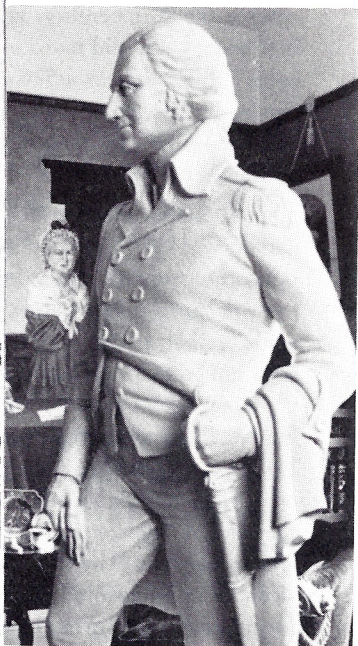
SAN JOSE, 1905: - The new law permitting automobiles on mountain roads was far from popular when an auto drew first blood on the Mt. Hamilton Road, seriously injuring a man and a valuable horse. The *Daily Mercury* wrote: "The auto is a great convenience in transportation and somehow it must be made available without being a public nuisance and danger." The Mt. Hamilton Stage Co. owner stated if autos continued to use the road, he would remove his line from the road due to the risk to his passengers and teams.

SAN JOSE, October 1909: - The old Swiss Hotel on North Market Street, the birthplace of Amadeo Peter Giannini, founder of the Bank of America, was condemned by the police and fire commissioners upon the recommendation of the city building inspector.

SANTA CLARA 1914: - Rumors of buried gold under the century old adobe owned by the Santa Clara Woman's Club caused club members to post guards on the premises to prevent destruction of the quaint old structure by "gold diggers."

COYOTE, CALIFORNIA, 1917: - A complaint was filed against a highly respected resident of Coyote charging him with cruelty to a number of Coyote's coyotes. Reports said he captured the criters and jailed them in crates.

... H. C.



Where There's a Wall... There's a Washington... By JOE JENKINS

If you were to pass by the Field House in Santa Clara one of these February days, you would doubtless hear—or perhaps even catch a glimpse of—the frantic activity taking place there. The Field House, an historically designated Victorian Home at 1051 Harrison Street, is not only undergoing massive restoration but is also being readied for a gigantic birthday party. Who's the party for? Why, it is for the Father of our Country! February 22, 1981 is George Washington's 250th birthday and it is being observed in no small way at this vintage home.

Field House is a handsome Stick/Eastlake Victorian built in 1891 by Zibeon O. Field. Mr. Field came across our land from Maine in the last quarter of the century past. Along the way he stayed very busy exploring, hunting buffalo and finding himself a wife. After trying his hand at several trades, he finally settled for carpentry . . . certainly a fortuitous decision since turn-of-the century Santa Clara Valley was blooming all over the place . . . and not just in its spectacular orchards.

Mr. Field built the home at 1051 Harrison when he was 32 years old. This early effort proved to be a veritable launching pad for young Zibeon who went on as a builder making major contributions to the skyline of San José and environs as we entered the 20th century. His own success probably dimmed the memory of his first home as he did move on to bigger and better things. However, his “starter home” still stands as a fine example of its period. It is occupied today as a residence; but its purpose is even more noble. The Field House is Santa Clara’s home-museum dedicated to the memory of George Washington ... certainly a builder in his own right.

Joe Jenkins and Lee R. Schwan bought 1051 Harrison Street in 1974 and the hammering hasn’t stopped since. The home was in good shape but had suffered some unfortunate remodelling (“The Old House Journal”—a trade newspaper for those engaged in restoration projects—would call it “remuddling”). The partners made up their minds to give their all to this project. Part of “their all” was to carefully integrate Mr. Jenkins’ collection of Washington memorabilia gathered over the last 25 years into the overall scheme. They knew that the Victorians enjoyed making their homes their castles and that the advent of the Industrial Revolution had made it possible for them to cram their homes with goodies that had previously been affordable only by the rich. Quite often they would relish doing what they called “theme rooms;” that is, a room would be totally decorated to represent a theme such as “The Oriental Room,” “The Red Room,” “The Jungle Room” and so on as far as the mind might conjure. Today many of us would call them “clutter rooms” and throw up our hands in despair at the sight; but, for every man there is a room, and for Jenkins (an inveterate collector and a bit of a Victorian himself) the nine rooms at Field House provided the perfect site for his own theme: a *tour de force* of Washingtonia that he wished to house and then share with the community.

Victorian homes are fantasies in themselves and the team wished to make their home classic in this respect. The Washington collection would prove, they felt, a cohesive blend of fact and fantasy. While woodwork was being stripped, wallpaper peeled, poor taste modern additions eliminated, their minds continually searched for ways to utilize those aged rooms to their best advantage. The walls were the first thing to be contemplated. Lovely smooth lathe and plaster walls ... a source of great pride to the builder ... a canvas in the making to our renovators. Jenkins viewed the walls as a special way to relate some of the events of Washington’s life. “Murals! Why shouldn’t we have murals??!”

And murals they got! With more than a little luck the partners found artists to start gilding the fantasy. The Field House now sports three major murals dealing with the life of George Washington. In the front parlour there’s a life-sized mural of George and Martha Washington at Valley Forge. The middle room, often called the “family room” (I had always thought the California ranch-style homes of the 1950’s had spawned the “family room”) is completely done in a forest motif which has as a central point of interest young Washington and a scout named Christopher Gist rafting their way down the Monogahela River in one of George’s first

adventures. Featured as you enter the main hall is a mural 8 feet long by 6½ feet high of “Washington Crossing the Delaware.” This mural, adapted from the famous painting of Emmanuel Leutze, was made very personal by painting in Jenkins, Schwan and Bruce Rodgers, their partners *sans* saw, as members of the crew!

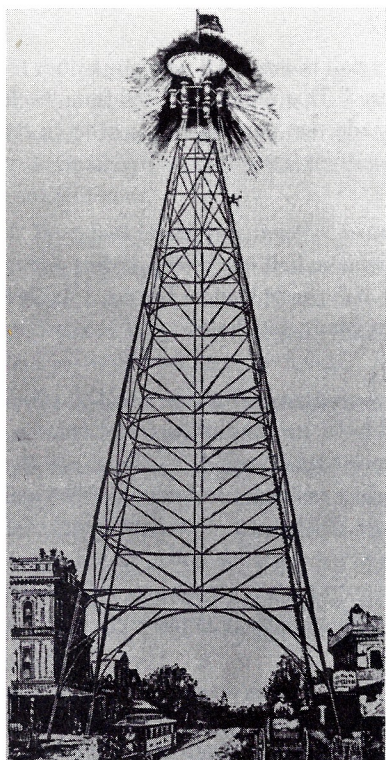
From the entry hall on, the Field House is open turf for showing off the Washington collection. The stairwell off the main hall reaches up 19 feet and the walls all the way up are lined with portraits of the great leader. The upper hallway continues the gallery and Washington also dominates the décor of Jenkin’s upstairs bedroom.

The main floor at the Field House features massively wide redwood woodwork which, save for the front parlour, has all been stripped of layers of paint and shines handsomely with the patina time alone lends to wood. The doors are all of beautifully matched burl redwood. Standing as master and marvel of the main floor is a life-sized statue of General George Washington commissioned by Jenkins in 1980. This work of art is literally surrounded by walls, tables, easels, shelves and display cases ... all dripping with plates, tapestries, dolls, coins, cards, books, vases, ribbons and more ... Washington in detail and artfully arranged to delight the eye.

Walk to the kitchen and find still more. This room is a warm and glowing one done entirely in wood. Look for no radar ranges or food processors in this room. The meals are done on a 1928 Montgomery Ward cookstove. The walls are, of course, living chronicle of events in the life of Jenkin’s hero. There is a circus wagon feeling about the room with its blend of dark woods and bright trim colors set off by art objects in patriotic hues. You can even tell Washington-time on the banjo clock featuring a hand painted scene of Mount Vernon.

The downstairs bathroom (it looks like a lavish railroad car) and “the gentlemen’s smoker” are still under construction; but you may be sure that George Washington will also be found alive and well in these rooms.

This has been just a short tour of the Field House. Before too long we’ll have the home open on Washington’s Birthday and on the 4th of July as annual events. We look forward to sharing the architectural and historical significance of the Field House and, of course, to many, many more birthday parties for George Washington!



The Light That Failed

By

Henry Calloway

Electric Light Tower 1881

It's been just a century since San José's memorable cloud piercing electric light tower first drenched the city with six arc lamps each dispersing 4000 candlepower on the celebrated and nippy evening of December 13, 1881. This concentration of 24,000 candlepower was hailed as the brightest in the United States and the world.

The spectacular venture was set in motion by the enthusiastic thirty-four year old founder of the San José Mercury Printing and Publishing Co., James Jerome Owen. "All eyes are now turned towards San José," wrote Owen's *Herald*, "in which the superiority of electricity over all other means of illumination is to be demonstrated."

The jubilant newsman beamed at the results that all began just six months before. Owen was granted permission by the city on June 11, 1881 "to erect an experimental electric tower at the four corners

of such streets to be determined for such a purpose.” The council considered the petition after the insertion of the words: “at his own expense” and “with said tower to be erected within sixty days.”

On August 11, 1881 ground was broken at Santa Clara and Market Streets for the rearing of “J. J.” Owen’s \$5,500 two hundred seven foot dazzling spire financed, in part, by public donations, theater benefits, and the sale of tower stock. The architect was John Gash and C. S. Hoffman of the Golden Gate Iron Works as the contractor.

It was Roe’s Brush Electric Light Co., San José’s first electric utility, who provided light for the tower. The power generated for the enterprise emerged from T. J. Gillespie’s humble planing mill on El Dorado Street (Post St.) where a steam engine supplied 60 pounds of pressure that propelled a generator wheel at 840 rpm, twenty more than necessary.

Unfortunately, from the beginning, the tower was off to a flickering existence. Charles Coleman in his *History of the P.G.&E.* states how the tower was labeled a white elephant from the moment the switch was pulled because of gas company opposition and the hundreds of dollars in building liens against it.

On February 25, 1882 after an attachment was served on the tower, Owen was compelled to sell to the Brush Electric for \$5000 to satisfy overwrought creditors.

In December 1885 light suppliers, plagued by low bids, declared they were not obliged to furnish tower light when the moon was supposed to be shining no matter how dark it was.

The insistent struggle for city lighting contracts continued with 1890 being the take-off of a decade teeming with hectic legal shifts and political dodges. Foes at the time being the Harry J. Edward’s Electric Improvement Co. and Charles Quilty’s San José Light and Power.

In early 1890 Edwards was permitted by the city, during the term of his contract, to rewire the tower and by February 25 the lights were turned on. Hostilities soon erupted as rivals in the dead of night were discovered cutting wires and removing arc lamps. Arrests were made followed by a maze of process servings and court injunctions. One non-contract official from the Light and Power Co. was seized for brandishing a revolver to drive off Edward’s tower crew. As discontent continued the tower found little opportunity to be lighted.

On February 20, 1900 the city council moved that the city clerk be directed to advertise for bids toward the tower’s disposal. The Light and Power Co. later offered \$600 for the structure but legal problems upped the cost and negotiations faltered. In 1909 an offer for the tower’s fifteen tons of “high quality” hollow wrought iron by a bay city firm came to a standstill.

The tower was again off to a cycle of dim nights as power people grumbled of constant repairs and high taxes.

On February 8, 1915 a reeling storm with winds up to 54 mph caused the tower to sway dizzily, the result being a very visible and damaging dent. Mayor F. R. Husted immediately declared the tower a menace to people's lives. This was countered by a nostalgic public who in haste contributed \$6,100 for the tower's rehabilitation.

The San José Outdoor Art League declared the tower had no practical or artistic value; moreover, the tower always blocked the wonderful view of our mountains. They insisted that San José was already known for attractions of far more interest than the electric tower. It was, also, the belief of many that post card producers had profited most from the tower.

On the bleak day of December 3, 1915 the most vicious storm of the new winter arrived. Too weak to withstand the onslaught, the harassed and disabled tower toppled crashing toward North Market Street at 11:55 a.m.—Owen's wonder of the 19th century perished. The restoration fund was then turned over to the San José Deep Water Port Association, a kin to the San José Real Estate Board.

By December 30, 1915 the crackling and crashing of timbers and warning calls of workers, the tower's remaining platform was pulled down at 12:55 a.m. Before dawn trolley wires were arranged in place and the city was back in order—an era ended!

Thanks to the perseverance of the San Jose Real Estate Board's Historical Tower Project, Inc. a \$65,000 one hundred twelve foot heart-stirring replica of San José's most memorable landmark now sheds light and history at the San José Historical Museum at Kelley Park. Drop by.



GOOD OLD DAYS—SAN JOSE BURSTS WITH HISTORY WANTING TO BE SHARED. Become a volunteer tour guide midst the early day setting of the San José Historical Museum. Brief fascinating weekly training sessions from hometown landmarks to curling irons and hairpins are starting now.

For old times' sake call Claudia Jurmain at 287-2290 or Dulcie Janzen at 998-4019.



President's Message

John W. Clark

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the California Pioneers and the staff of the San José Historical Museum at Kelley Park, I thank each and every one of you who contributed to the December collection for the Historical Museum and its program. It is a fine program that all of us can be proud of. Your board feels that this program is very outstanding and will do whatever it can to see the operations at the Museum in Kelley Park continue.

The quarterly lunches in 1982 will be held on the 1st Saturday of March, June, September and December. Arrangements have been worked out to hold these meetings at Lou's Village. Rising costs have been continuing and cost of lunches this year will have to rise a small amount. The price will be \$6.50 per person for each lunch and we have the assurance of the restaurant that this price will be in effect for all of the quarterly meetings in 1982.

Please check your membership card; perhaps you overlooked paying your dues. Do you realize that you could be dropped from membership and no longer be entitled to receive the *Trailblazer*? There are many unpaid dues and it would be a shame to have to drop anyone from the rolls just because of non-payment of dues.

ESSAYS SOUGHT FOR ANNUAL CONTEST

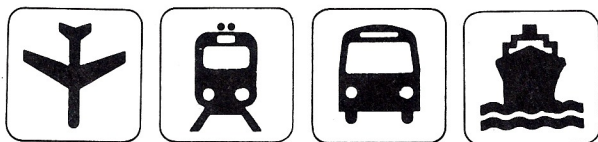
The Society of California Pioneers of Santa Clara County is offering cash awards for the best essays on any subject, person, or place concerning the history of our valley.

Categories are: Secondary (high school level) and General Public.

Prizes in each category are: First prize of \$200, Second prize of \$50, and Third prize of \$25.

Deadline for the essays is April 30, 1982.

For further information call Helen Arbuckle at 269-5324 or write 988 Franquette Avenue, San José 95125, or Henry Calloway at 294-1786.



Touring With The Californians

Reservations for the following trips will be accepted at the March 5th Luncheon and by phone to Ruth Gross at 294-9830 beginning March 8 between 9 a.m. and noon, Monday through Friday. Members of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County are given preference over guests with reservations taken on first-come, first-served basis. Reservations for MEMBERS ONLY will be accepted for the first week after each quarterly luncheon meeting; thereafter, non-members will be welcome. Subject to this rule, anyone may sign on a waiting list. The right is reserved to decline or accept any person as a member of any tour.

"The Californians", P.O. Box 2007, Los Gatos, CA 95031.

STATE CAPITOL—SACRAMENTO ... one day in early May. Here is an opportunity to marvel at the results of the seven year restoration/renovation effort to ever involve a single historic building.

MODOC COUNTY... Memorial weekend, May 29–June 1. Austen Warburton is our Indian authority on this special as we scan Surprise Valley where still stand some of the first cabins of white settlers built for defense against the Indians. View the locale of the Modoc Indian War of 1873 and the hide-away of Captain Jack. Visit a time-worn trading post and the Lava Bed National Monument. Come to Fandango Valley! Come to Modoc, a place history refused to ignore!

COLORADO via Yosemite's Tioga Pass, Nevada, Utah ... September 11–25. This unique combination of natural beauty lassos it all as we take in Bryce Canyon, Pikes Peak by cog-railway, Air Force Academy, Denver's Brown Palace Hotel, Durango, Silverton Train Ride, Vintage Theater and chuck wagon dinners, Lake Powell, Navajo country, Zion National Park, Las Vegas, Liberace Museum plus heaps more. Austen Warburton will narrate this gem.

Welcome New Members

Sarah Berryessa
Emerson Brooks
Helen Brooks
Barton Collins
Mary Collins
Faye Conrad
Mary Freitas
Elizabeth Gough
Dan Guasticci
Mary T. Guasticci
Robert Hawley
Ruth Hawley

Beverly Hesse
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Pasquale Russo
Pat Russo
Fred K. Saunders Jr.
Mary L. Steinhaver
Helen D. Winters
Betty Yakobovich
Ellsworth Zahn
Laura Zahn



Beyond the sunset

Laura B. Chivers
Mabel F. Farley
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Lysette F. Kayser
Viola E. Payton
Mae Owen Smothers

Ruth Snyder
Thelma Tanno
Fred F. Zamzow

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Luncheon

.....

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