

First Issue 2021 ~ January-March
Next Issue April 2021

THE MAIL CART

Newsletter of the Simi Valley Historical Society and Museum



President's Message

Greetings to all,

As 2020 drew to an end, I was reminded of a favorite book from a high school literature class that began, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us ..."



2020 has been a year of challenges and transformation both in our personal and professional lives. I am grateful for my family and friends who have helped me deal with the adversities and hardships of the year. I am also thankful for my Strathearn family for giving me hope and inspiring me to continue good works that benefit the public and preserve the history of Simi Valley.

As the new year approaches, many of us are cautious in our optimism that life will return to something resembling normal. Even though we cannot count on school children coming back in the Spring semester for our annual School Tours, we do have Civil War Days and Dia de los Muertos on the calendar and hope to move forward with these events. Our Mechanical Restoration team has several projects poised to begin in the new year that include a truck restoration and refurbishing cement floors in metal auto sheds. Twilight Tours and a Tea Party are also on the radar for summer and fall of 2021. Our volunteers and docents are the lifeblood of Strathearn Historical Park and Museum, and I personally look forward to seeing all of you once again in 2021. The reopening committee met in October and developed procedures that will be implemented once we move into a safer environment to host the public with docent led tours at Strathearn Park.

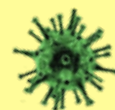
In closing, I want to express my appreciation to individuals and families that have sent in their annual membership dues. Your continued support is vital in maintaining a thriving Historical Society.

Warmest regards,

Linda Bosley

President, Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum

"Human history in essence is the history of ideas."
~H. G. Wells



Pioneer Perspective

A Pioneer speaks by R.E. Harrington, from
Enterprise – Sun & News, Wednesday, May 15, 1968

R.E. Harrington was a pioneer who came to Simi Valley in 1907 and lived here the remainder of his life. He wrote one of the early history books about Simi Valley; Early Days in Simi Valley. He also wrote a column in the Enterprise Sun & News in the 1960s into 1970 called 'A Pioneer Speaks' that touched on many topics of interest regarding early Simi history.

This article is about subdivisions taking place in the 1920s. Specifically it is about an attempted subdivision in 1928 by Howard Marr. Many current Simi residents recognize the name Marr because of the Marr Ranch, or Marr Ranch open space near Las Lajas Canyon. In 1928 Marr, who came from Texas, purchased 410 acres from the Crinklaw family, including the Santa Susana townsite, and had plans to develop Santa Susana. He laid out lots, built cement sidewalks, and installed light poles on the southside of LA Ave at Tapo St. in anticipation of this new subdivision. Unfortunately, due to the Great Depression, and possibly due to some difficulties stemming from his Marrland properties north across the valley, this subdivision never came to fruition. It is said that the concrete light poles which were installed on Los Angeles Avenue were never illuminated. A couple of these light poles were salvaged, and can now be seen at Strathearn Historical Park in the Santa Susana Corner exhibit.



Concrete light standard and sidewalk, built 1928

A couple of these can be seen at Strathearn Historical Park & Museum

1920 Subdividers Had Financial Troubles Too

Following the Marrland subdivision in the Las Lajas canyon by about a year was the Santa Susana subdivision.

All of the land on both sides of Los Angeles Avenue, which formerly had belonged to Mr. Crinklaw, now in 1928 belonged to Howard Marr and like the land which he owned in the Las Lajas Canyon he offered it for subdivision.

The land on the north side of the S. P. tracks was offered for \$900 per acre in acre parcels, but on the south side of L. A. Avenue, it was divided into house lots. Cement sidewalks and tall cement lamp stands were built by Marr at that time and the cement sidewalk and one lone lamp stand still remain.

When Crinklaw owned the property, one of the first buildings he put up was a little house on the corner of L. A. Avenue and Tapo Street. He and his family lived in this little house while he was building the store and the larger house to live in.

The larger house is the one where Dr. Lai has his office (*note: 4346 Los Angeles Ave.*) and the little house, first mentioned, on the corner of Tapo and L. A. Ave. was located where the Shell gas station now stands.

The little house built by Crinklaw was used as a real estate Office by Marr during the year that he was endeavoring to sell lots in Santa Susana, but after the crash of 1929 it was moved to Simi and is still in use for a home by a Mexican family down there.

For a long time you could see the Marrland subdivision sign painted on the front of the house after it was moved, but now it has been painted over.

Most of Marr's property was for sale on time payments and of course after the big depression came on, no further payments were made. In an attempt to sell, he started to build a Mexican Casino over on the banks of the Arroyo Simi.



Remaining ruins of the Mexican Casino

The cornerstone of this partial building can be seen at Strathearn Historical Park & Museum in the Santa Susana Corner

This building was built of concrete blocks which were made on the lot by Buck Ortega out of gravel brought from Grimes Grade. Later Mr. Alvarez bought most of these blocks to build his house in Community Center. The house has now been wrecked. (note: Mr. Alvarez owned the store which is now Green Acres. This house which is mentioned was next door on the east side.)

The rarest picture of all and the one that I most desire to see printed is the picture taken in 1916 from the hill about a half mile east of Santa Susana.



It shows the land on the north of the tracks when first planted to walnuts by Crinklaw. This is the same tract of land which Marr owned in 1928 and which he offered for sale at \$900 per acre.

It was later bought by Robert Callahan and is the same land upon which a large part of Santa Susana's business houses are now located.

In the foreground the S. P. Tracks show and also a section of L. A. Ave. just after it crosses the railroad and curves back into a straight line again.

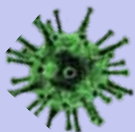
This section of L. A. Ave. is now covered with stores, restaurants and real estate offices. Ralston Ave. now runs north from L. A. Ave. along where the eucalyptus trees show on the right side of the picture. The little concrete bridge is also shown where L. A. Ave. crosses Las Lajas creek.

Please allow me to close this letter with an incident which Gerry Haigh has just reminded me of. Many moving pictures were made, both in Santa Susana and Simi in the early days, but one made by Harold Lloyd and his lady friend is worth repeating.

Lloyd was traveling through Santa Susana with his lady friend in an old model T Ford and ran out of gas. So he borrowed a farmer's cow and had it pull the car into Bob Barnes' Garage in Santa Susana for gas. Many of us early residents of the valley enjoyed these crazy antics of the movie actors.

Mark Your Calendars...Maybe?

October 24, 2021 - Dia de los Muertos Celebration



December 5, 2021 - Holiday Open House

Everyone is aware of the uncertainty surrounding events at this time. We hope to be able to safely host more events in the near future, as well as open up the inside of our museum and historical structures for tours.

Please follow us on facebook, or check our website **www.simihistory.com** for updates often!



Take an Audio Tour of Strathearn!



<http://youraudiotor.com/tours/763>

WHY?

Thoughts on History by Pat Havens

Why do I care? Why should anybody care? About History, that is.

For one thing, pride and respect. Two qualities that have to be nurtured to flourish.

Are you proud to live, or have lived, in Simí Valley? Maybe you don't know enough about it. Perhaps you think it has always been "this way." The way it was when you discovered it.

There is something respectful about "caring." In any sense of the word. Living has been so "fast" the past fifty or so years--let's say since WWII.

Do you stop once in a while, to think about the fact that we, collectively, stand on the shoulders of those who preceded us. Whether it be our country, back to its colonial beginnings, or just during this fateful year of 2020.

This Simí Valley, our current home, was home to thousands of others through the centuries. This very ground that we use the way we do in 2020. All the way back to the beginning. Some 35 million years ago, it was covered by ocean water!

The Chumash had a very deep culture for centuries, even though they were a stone-age people, with no exposure to metal till the Spanish conquerors came (yes, they were conquerors). All over South and North America, there existed centuries of culture, based on gold and silver and fantastic stone structures, that are just now coming to light. To the conquerors, with their firearms, it was all "free" for the taking. They had no doubt they were entitled to take it.

There always appears to be a pecking order, with innocents at the bottom of the heap with little recourse. We, "at the top," may just now be acknowledging our part in all this. Hopefully we will begin to recognize our roles and responsibility to make it better.

What does that have to do with Simí Valley? Here, as everywhere, the separation seems to have been based on property, the haves, and the workers, who were dependent. Well, let's take a look.

How soon did any of the Spanish explorers/conquerors know about Simí?

In the fall of 1769, when Portola led the first exploratory party north, from San Diego to the Bay area, to learn what was inland as well as along the coast, some of those soldiers came over the mountain to the Chumash village of Taapu (from which the word Tapo is derived). They were led by natives who were very familiar with this area. There is a Tapo Creek on both sides of the mountain.

Many geographical features and Chumash villages were mapped as they traveled. Shimíji was a Chumash village at the west end of Simí.

On the return journey, the group, with all their animals, came directly through Simí. Using what was later improved as the stage road, they clambered over the boulders into San Fernando Valley. This was mid-January, 1770. Two Hundred Fifty years ago.

El Rancho Simí (1795) was the earliest Spanish land grant or concession in Santa Barbara County. Later, in 1873, Ventura County became a separate entity.

After the U.S. War with Mexico, instigated as our right and entitlement to acquire all our southwestern states, California came into its own. It became a state in 1850. Eastern investors, following the Civil War, bought up large amounts of land; with few restraints, they could apply American law. Incoming buyers within a few decades developed farming into a science. Much labor was required, and soon the natives and Mexican immigrants supplied much of the labor.

The Simí Land and Water Company incorporated in the 1880s, to turn the old Rancho Simí into reasonable-sized ranches and farms.



Yes, American farmers worked hard themselves. Most here in Simí Valley had high standards of honesty and diligence. Their families worked right alongside them. It took hard labor to earn a living.

The obscure, practically hidden, Simí Valley soon began to flourish. The population was not large, and there would be no civic government (except the school board) until 1969. County government was a long distance away. They were on their own, often complaining that they needed attention for roads and other improvements.

They worked well together, truly making democracy work under the natural leadership of local citizens. They did their best.

But we were not immune from some of the behaviors that people did. Most obvious was segregation in Simí Elementary School, from its founding in the mid-1920s until 1943, under the pretense that language differences made it necessary. The fact that much of the southwest followed that thinking is no excuse. And it has affected our local history.

The radical changes that began in the 1950s and 60s brought in new population that was very difficult to keep up with. It was amazing to watch the school district adapt to the fast growth. Early attempts to incorporate the city were fumbled, and when it did succeed, elected leaders were novices, which also hampered smooth merging of people and customs. There had to be some adjusting by newcomers – to realize that they couldn't just change Simí into whatever community they came from, such as PTA, church, etc.!



A small group of us became concerned that we must organize to preserve our past.

The historical society was formed in 1964, with input from the second generation of pioneer families, as well as concerned newer residents. One major goal, of course, is to protect buildings and the unspoiled site at Strathearn Park.

Of equal importance is the necessity to maintain and preserve the human story. To establish and maintain files that can be examined, with photos being very important.

I have spent this long year of 2020 reviewing many of those files. I have learned – and relearned – so much of our unique history. I am more convinced than ever, that this is a wonderful community, of which we can all be proud and respectful, as well as entertained, in many ways!

Some of the founding members of the Simi Valley Historical Society

Ann Lindeen- May Heflin- Pat Havens- Hildie Appleton

*Pat Havens
Simí Valley City Historian
Museum Director*

Photo at top of page: C.B. McCoy (left) and C.E. Hoar, two early ranchers in Simi, stand in the foothills of the Santa Susana mountains, near Mr. Hoar's residence, the Hummingbird's Nest ranch, at the NE corner of the valley. Photo courtesy of Ventura Co. Museum.

☞ Membership Cards ☞

If you have renewed your membership for 2021, your Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum membership card will be sent to you soon! The drawing will be held soon for the 'door prizes,' as we did not hold our annual dinner in 2020. If you are a lucky winner we will notify you!

We would like to thank you for your 2021 Membership! The Society depends on membership dues, donations and volunteerism to sustain itself as we continue to preserve the history and culture of Simi Valley for our community as well as future generations.

Additional benefits of your membership are:

☞ Quarterly issues of the Mail Cart

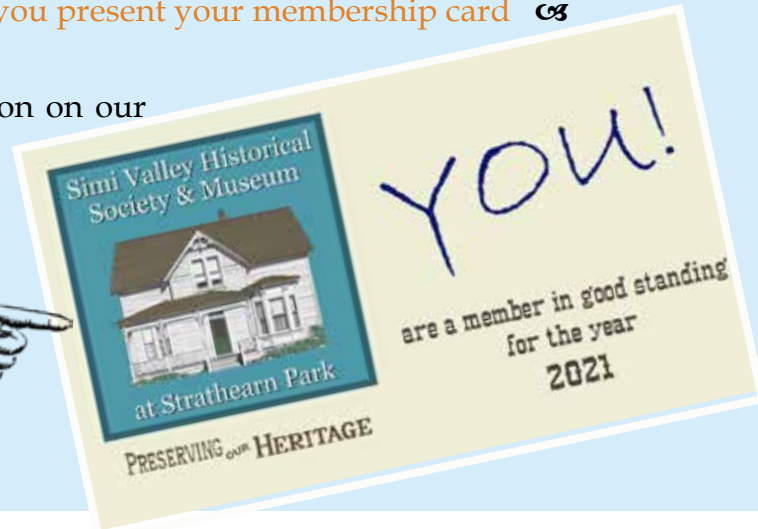
☞ Free Strathearn Park Museum tours with your membership card (when we safely re-open)

☞ 10% discount on all items in our Simi Store when you present your membership card ☞

Please check our website simihistory.com for information on our park and events, and look for us on FaceBook at <http://www.facebook.com/Strathearnpark>.

*If you have already sent in your membership renewal...**THANK YOU!!** Your card will be sent to you shortly!*

If not...there's still time! Become a member today!



Civil War Days at Strathearn Park...Cancelled.

We had planned to host Civil War Days at Strathearn Park on March 27th and 28th 2021. As we got closer to the date, and realized that things are not likely to get better in time to host this event. We unfortunately had to make the decision to cancel 2021 Civil War Days at Strathearn. We sincerely hope that we can safely re-open and host events very soon. Please visit www.simihistory.com often and check our Facebook page ([facebook.com/strathearnpark](https://www.facebook.com/strathearnpark)) for updates often!



ON THE TAPO Simí Valley's Finest Agricultural Development



"On the Tapo" is on the horizon.

The Simí Valley Historical Society, Bill Appleton, and Pat Havens published a composite history book titled *Simí Valley, A Journey Through Time* in 1997. A second book, *Simí Valley, Strathearn Letters, Windows on the Past* was published in 2009. In this third book, **On the Tapo, Simí Valley's Finest Agricultural Development**, Patricia Havens endeavors to illustrate the agricultural era in Simí Valley.

We have been working towards publishing this book for quite some time. For several years now, Pat Havens has been combing through the wealth of information on the topic of the Tapo in the files at the Strathearn Park museum, and writing about what was Simí Valley's finest agricultural development. A couple hundred photographs have been compiled which illustrate and document Simí Valley in the agricultural era. The result is a 260 page book titled **On the Tapo, Simi Valley's Finest Agricultural Development**.

On the Tapo recalls Simí Valley in the agricultural era. It must be difficult for newcomers and younger residents to imagine that not too long ago, agriculture was the most important industry in Simí Valley. Before the housing subdivision boom, groves dominated the Simí Valley landscape. There were orchards which produced apricots, walnuts and oranges, and ranches that produced beets and barley. The Tapo Citrus Association and the Tapo District were the epitome of agriculture in Simí.

Author Patricia Havens remembers when it was apricot harvesting time. Almost everyone in the valley would stop what they were doing, work in the apricot pitting sheds until the harvest and processing was done, and then go back to their regular business. Patricia worked in the pitting sheds, as well as in the Tapo Citrus packing house located in Santa Susana, individually wrapping each orange in a square of tissue paper, before it was packed in a crate.

On the Tapo tells the story of the Tapo Rancho and the Tapo District through photographs, personal accounts, and documents obtained from the Tapo Mutual Water Company and the Tapo Citrus Association. The Tapo Rancho flourished for several decades of the 1800s before pioneers arrived in the valley. Its modern agricultural history, by way of the Tapo Mutual Water Company, lasted fifty years. This book invites you to go back to when the valley of Simí was dotted with orchards and ranches, and visit the area that was known as "the Tapo."

Due to the pandemic, and the suspension of many activities at Strathearn Park, there was finally time to finish this book... though now, due to the same suspension of activities...the funds necessary to publish this book will need to be raised. Stay tuned, and visit SimiHistory.com for updates on the publication date for "**On the Tapo!**"



2021 Board of Directors

Weekend Park Hours: Saturdays & Sundays: Between the hours of 1 & 4 pm

Week day Park Hours: Monday - Friday

9 am - 3 pm

Officers

President	Linda Bosley
Vice President	Judy Pepiot
Secretary	Shelley Howard
Treasurer	Karen Olson
Past President	Vicki Spilka

For information please call (805) 526-6453

Email: StrathearnPark@gmail.com

Board Members

Kris Grayson	
Richard Johnson	Nancy Kidd
Sylvia Moya	Don Novell

Directors at Large

Pat Havens	Joe Lansden
Alan Shack	Ryan Valencia

Strathearn Historical Park & Museum

Historian	Pat Havens
Hist. Park Specialist	Carolyn Valdez
Admin. Asst.	Louise Kaul

Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum

P.O. Box 940461

Simi Valley, CA 93094-0461

www.Simihistory.com

www.facebook.com/Strathearnpark



Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum
Located at Strathearn Historical Park & Museum
137 Strathearn Place, Simi Valley, CA 93065



The Mail Cart is sent quarterly to all current members. The Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum's membership year runs from January 1 through December 31.

The Mail Cart is electronically being sent to all members with an email address on file. If you are receiving a 'paper copy' of the Mail Cart and would like to receive it via email (*there are extra articles in the electronic version!*) please send us your email address. Any changes to your email address should be included to continue receiving the electronic Mail Cart! If you do not have an email address, or have requested a printed copy of the Mail Cart, the postal service will continue to deliver your copy. Questions regarding your membership? Call our business office at 805 526 6453 or email strathearnpark@gmail.com

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Credit/Debit Card: MC VISA Discover Card

_____ Exp _____ CVV# _____

Signature _____

(Payment Mailing Address) PO Box 940461, Simi Valley, CA 93094-0461

Please select desired membership.
Make checks payable to SVHS&M

- | | |
|--|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$15.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$25.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business/Sustaining | \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$500.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$1,000.00 |