Voices of Gold: The Impact of the Gold Rush on Santa Clara Valley

The History Museums of San Jose will come alive with new interpretations of the Gold Rush. Voices of history will mingle with contemporary voices as visitors explore the many facets of this powerful period in California history. The museum is developing an exciting educational exhibition, Voices of Gold: The Impact of the Gold Rush on Santa Clara Valley, which will open April 8. The series of public events and school programs that focus on the influence of California’s Gold Rush on the Santa Clara Valley will accompany the new exhibition. The exhibit strives to dispel popular Hollywood myths, presenting instead the real challenges faced by the pioneer and the unique opportunities presented by the events of the era. Voices of Gold will also chart the course of irreversible change that affected native peoples and the environment. Through June 6, the museum will host a traveling exhibition from the Oakland Museum of California, Gold Fever! The Lure and Legacy of the California Gold Rush, which uses text panels and images to provide an overview of the Gold Rush.

As visitors explore the two complimentary exhibitions, they will have a chance to view many never-before-seen historic documents, photographs, and artifacts; hear music of the period; engage in interactive elements; and take in contemporary photographs and voices that demonstrate how the Gold Rush continues to affect their lives and the Santa Clara Valley. Voices of Gold is the museum’s first new gallery exhibition in more than a decade. The gallery will be completely renovated to kick off a series of changing exhibitions centered on annual themes.

In conjunction with the two Gold Rush exhibitions, the museum will present a variety of public events and school programs. The school tour program for this exhibition will be targeted at 4th, 5th, 8th and 11th grades and will feature an interpreted tour through the exhibition and will include a hands-on activity that explores issues raised in the exhibits. A teacher-training workshop will be offered to fourth grade teachers in collaboration with the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). At the workshop teachers will receive a comprehensive new curriculum that OMCA produced in conjunction with their Gold Fever exhibition.

The History Museums of San Jose will present a major three-day Festival, Gold Rush Days, where visitors can try their hand at panning gold, laugh at a melodrama, watch craft demonstrations, listen to music, and make old-time toys and crafts items. Lecture-discussions will explore the dynamics of diverse people living together during the Gold Rush era. Special summer Golden Evenings will fill the air with music and encourage visitors to view the exhibition with their families after hours. A series of Sunday Sundays, afternoon family programs, will engage youngsters and their families in storytelling, dancing, and creating artwork that relates to historical and cultural themes. An overview of the exhibition and a listing of the events and school programs will be posted on the museum’s Internet website www.sj.com/history. Of course, all these wonderful plans are subject to full funding. The exhibit will open to the public on Saturday, April 10th, but we look forward to seeing all members at the Members’ Preview Opening the evening of April 8th.

News from the Collections

The Research Center has acquired a new state-of-the-art Canon Microprinter, which reads both microfilm and microfiche and replaces two old and tired machines. This purchase was funded through the City’s capital improvement budget. More new equipment and furniture will soon follow to help reconfigure the center to further organize and expand work areas for both volunteers and the public. Currently, the Research Center has a full house on Wednesdays with archaeologists, college students, scholars, city engineers, and Santa Clara Valley residents busy researching everything from personal genealogies to locations of old oil tanks for environmental impact reports. The new equipment and reconfiguration will help improve and increase service to the center.

The exhibit in the De Luz House has changed. Don’t miss the installation of hand-made reproduction antique dolls and vintages on loan from Mary Isabella Dolls, San Francisco. Catherine McCaulland, owner of Mary Isabella Dolls, casts, fires and hand paints the forms of these charming dolls and makes wys for them from angera goat hair. She finishes the dolls with faithful reproductions of Victorian costumes and period surroundings. In addition to the dolls, costumes from the museum’s collection are featured with beautiful holiday decorations done by HMJS volunteers. The doll exhibit will be in the De Luz House through the end of January.

Continuing the tradition of showcasing objects from the permanent collection, the Pacific Hotel lobby case has a new display. Never enough is a fun mini-exhibit highlighting what San Jose collectors have amassed. HMJS will show a mere sampling of its numerous souvenir plates, more than 100 miniature dogs, and over 1,000 salt and pepper shakers from the collection. However, the most significant change to exhibits will come in April with the opening of Voices of Gold: The Impact of the Gold Rush on Santa Clara Valley. The main Hotel gallery will close mid-January to begin renovation. The floors will be refurbished, the walls reconfigured and painted, and custom exhibit cases installed to complete the new exhibit.

Finally, the fundraising goal for the restoration and framing of the German Verein Photographs has almost been reached. Made possible by generous donations from numerous individuals and corporations, $4,900 has been raised toward the $5,000 goal. Restoration and framing will soon be complete and a final report will follow.
From the President

I have just read an article that claims that General Motors consciously may have contributed to, and profited from, Nazi Germany’s war machine, including the use of forced labor. Whether or not the “proof” is really there, once again it has been demonstrated that history is never certain, but constantly is in the process of being rewritten.

Why is this so? First, history is memory, and we all remember things differently. Which Civil War happened,—the Civil War of the Daughters of the Confederacy or the Civil War as remembered by the descendants of Massachusetts’ volunteers? Both? Neither? Secondly, to paraphrase Napoleon, history usually is written by the victors. Rhetoric and later, when written as “revisionism” really is nothing more than history written by the victims, whether they be the Sioux Indians who defended their national boundaries at Little Big Horn or the descendants of Japanese-Americans herded into internment camps during World War II. But, without their story, it is not complete.

Recently, new "facts" are discovered every day, while other facts are proven wrong. One of the great ironies of modern scholarship occurred when a liberal historian forced the FBI to open its records in his effort to prove Alger Hiss innocent of perjury—only to prove him guilty. The facts in the General Motors case are yet to be determined, but most certainly those facts are different today than they were yesterday.

One of the great stories of historical revisionism focuses on a statue of an African American soldier in Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, that was erected in the 1880s in a blatant case of historical revisionism to honor free Blacks who had fought for the Confederacy. In recent years, Civil Rights groups have gone to war again to remove the statue as a gross inaccuracy that is offensively racist. Others defend the statue as a historical document, itself, attesting to a particular period of American race relations that gave birth to the civil rights struggles of Drs. King, Jim Crow laws. History now is being rewritten by the victims of the victims.

There once was a time (or at least a time in some places) when history was not rewritten or remembered. But, when the regimes of Communist Europe fell, memories were unlocked along with the freedoms, and history has taken its proper place again, in a state of constant revision.

There are people dying in the Balkans today because one group of people wants to impose its collective memory on another. The struggle is not so much about the future as it is about the past. No group will accept the validity of the other’s interpretation of history.

In the next year, the state of California will be adopting curricula and texts for teaching social studies in the state’s elementary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, much of “revisionism” again will foil the air. All of us have the responsibility to challenge those who don’t understand that the very nature of history is to be constantly revised. History may be the one thing that must be all things to all people, because history, unlike art, by nature is a collective experience.

So, join in celebrating the great, rich, American tradition of historical revisionism. We must not yield easily what others are giving their lives to obtain—

Board of Directors

Board Adopts Strategic Plan

As its regularly scheduled meeting on October 28th, the HMSJ Board of Directors officially approved a five-year strategic plan for the organization. Titled "A Plan to Serve," the plan included identified five goals and four initiatives to set the course from 1999-2004.

In an effort directed by President & CEO David Crosson, the plan is a result of three months of work and input from volunteers, board members, employees, public officials, the affiliate organizations, and a variety of community leaders and leaders. “As it is implemented, this plan will change who we are, what we do, and how we do it,” said Crosson. “We are creating a market-oriented, service driven organization that will expand dramatically public involvement in creating and implementing all of our programs.”

When the five-year expectations are met, by 2004 HMSJ will double the number of school children served and off site, and dramatically increase gate admissions and membership revenues. Major exhibitions will be opened in new facilities downtown, and imaginative partnerships will take programs out into the communities.

The goals identify what the organization must accomplish on a continuing basis to fulfill its mission and realize its vision at the highest level:

- Improve and create educational and public programs and delivery systems that ensure quality and expand audiences.
- Reinvest in the care, management, and public accessibility of the museums at San Pedro Square.
- Reposition HMSJ and its products, programs, and services within a competitive marketplace.
- Acquire the human and financial resources necessary to take a pre-eminent position of community service on a sound financial basis.
- Obtain professional accreditation by the American Association of Museums.

The four initiatives, on the other hand, constitute specific programs that HMSJ will undertake within the next five years to address special audiences, needs, and opportunities:

- Strengthen the relationships among HMSJ and the people and communities of San Jose.
- Secure the programmatic and physical viability of the museum in Kelley Park.
- Contribute to the growing cultural center downtown by expanding facilities and services at San Pedro Square.
- Capitalize on the marketing and programmatic opportunities offered by the Sesquicentennial of California Statehood.

Each goal and initiative will be accompanied by very specific and measurable expectations.

"More important than creating a strategic plan is thinking and acting strategically," said Crosson. "For the next five years HMSJ will prioritize those items that increase the organizational capacity to produce programs and services that expand our market and increase resources. Every existing and proposed activity and program will be evaluated on this basis. The entire plan will soon be printed and mailed to public officials, community leaders, and business leaders, as well as other cultural organizations. It also will be available to members, volunteers, and the general public upon request at the HMSJ offices at both the San Jose Historical Museum and the Peabody-Fallon sites.

New Members

As its October and December meetings, the HMSJ Board of Directors elected four new members to the Board: Dan Orloff, John McEnery IV, Gerry DeYoung, and Mary Ellen Helmsing. They will begin their terms immediately.

John McEnery IV is development manager of San Jose Plaza Properties. He has worked with DeMattei Construction Company and has served as a development officer for the San Jose Redevelopment Agency. McEnery is actively involved in downtown development.

Dan Orloff is vice president of Orloff/Williams & Co., a major downtown advertising and public relations firm. His clients include the San Jose Historical Museum, Harker School, and the Cinequest Film Festival. Orloff is a member of the Downtown Rotary and board member of the Santa Clara Valley Boy Scouts Association.

Gerry DeYoung is a former president of the San Jose Historical Museum Association. With a successful career as a board member and a number of San Jose nonprofits, including vice president of development and board president of the San Jose Repertory Theatre Foundation, he is currently fundraising chairman of the Lincoln High School Foundation, major gifts fundraising chair for the YMCA Central Branch, and major gifts fundraising chair for the Sicon Valley chapter of the American Red Cross.

Mary Ellen Helmsing served as executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara County for twenty years, where she developed an enviable reputation for sound management and successful fundraising. A member of the Downtown Rotary, Ms. Helmsing is a founding member of the Second Harvest Foundation, a non-profit board and past president of the local chapter of the American Association of University Women. She has served on the Health Trust Board and the capital campaign cabinet of the Sacred Heart Community Center and is an HMSJ docent currently in training for the new schoolhouse program.

In addition to Ms. Atkinson, the Board Development Committee consists of Art Land, John Davis, Patricia Bobba McDonald, and HMSJ Board Chair Steve Cox. Nominations for directors who possess similar experience and abilities will be sent to Ms. Atkinson at the HMSJ address.

Welcome New Staff

Vice President of Institutional Advancement

On January 18th, 1999, Judith Blais will join the History Museums of San Jose as vice president for institutional advancement. Ms. Blais will be in charge of all marketing, revenue generating, and fund development activities for the museums.

As director of development at the San Jose Repertory Theatre (the Rep) since 1991, Ms. Blais increased annual fundraising dollars by 150% and number of annual gifts by 60% increased annual contributions from corporate and individual donors by 80%, and from special events by 25%. Foundation gifts increased 64%. She also directed a $5 million capital campaign that was exceeded even as the Rep raised an additional $2 million to build the eye-catching new Rep Theatre facility that opened last year in downtown San Jose. Prior to joining the Rep, Ms. Blais served as director of development for the San Jose Symphony Orchestra for five years, with a similar record of success.

Ms. Blais enjoys the challenge of building organizations, the importance of a vital and comprehensive cultural community in San Jose. HMSJ is fortunate to have attracted someone of Judith Blais’s experience, success, and commitment to the local arts community.

Endowment Fund

The History Museums of San Jose gratefully acknowledges the receipt of the following donations:

In Honor: O’Brien’s Volunteers
Ambrose Bierce was at the peak of his powers when he discovered the beauty and serenity of the mountain region of Los Gatos. This crusading journalist, searing critic and creator of daringly realistic short fiction had suffered with bouts of illness throughout his life. He needed to get away from the foggy dampness of the City Bay. During the 1890s he was to find solitude and enduring friendships in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Bierce quickly adopted the nickname “Bitter,” for he made a career of being the sharpest, most cynical writer in the annals of literature. His pessimism was no pose, however, as it was rooted in a loveless childhood and the cruel reality of the Civil War.

He was born June 24, 1842 in rural Ohio and raised near the Indiana village of Warsaw. The narrow-mindedness of this small Calvinist-dominated community repelled young Bierce who would spend the rest of his life questioning orthodoxy. He was eighteen and the first in his community to volunteer in the Union Army when news of the Civil War attack on Fort Sumter. He saw action in some of the War’s fiercest battles: Shiloh, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Franklin and Chickamauga, and he was cited for his bravery. At the battle of Kennesaw Mountain he suffered a severe head wound.

During the war Bierce rose from private to Brevet Major, and he came west hoping to keep his rank with the peace-time Army. The older veterans would get few positions in the shrinking military, so Bierce was left in San Francisco with no job and little formal education. Having had some experience working as a printer’s devil, he decided to become a newspaperman, and he embarked upon an intensive self-study course of history and classical literature.

Rising Journalist

In 1868, at the age of 24, Bierce had his first articles published in The Golden Era, The Calliondon and The Alto Calliondon. Later that year he became an editor of the small but influential Newsletter where he created the satirical column “Town Crier.” When asked what he did for a living Bierce responded: “I sell abuse. Abuse wasn’t taken lightly in the rowdy atmosphere of early San Francisco, and more than one prominent editor was shot by an irate reader. Bierce, an impressive, tall, handsome figure with piercing blue eyes, was a magnet to women and a formidable adversary to potential enemies. To discourage the latter he carried a revolver.

In the “Town Crier” Bierce excoriated poets, action, politicians, preachers and suffragettes. At the height of one of his anti-suffragist periods he met and fell in love with Ellen “Mollie” Day, daughter of a successful miner. Her father offered to pay all the expenses of a trip to England as a honeymoon gift, so the Bierces were off to what was to become an extended stay in London.

The English social elite were, at that time, enthralled with writers of the American West, and Bierce found himself among such literary luminaries as Mark Twain, Bret Harte and Joaquín Miller. His satronic humor appealed to English sensibilities, and it was not long before he was contributing articles to London’s Figaro and Fun. His first book, a collection of newspaper articles entitled The Faint Delight, was published in 1873. Nuggets and Dust came two years later and was followed by Cobwebbs from an Empty Skull. (An empty skull became something of a trademark for Bierce whose more macabre works reminded readers of Poe. He kept a skull on his writing desk throughout his career.)

During this period Mollie, Bierce’s wife, had two sons and was pregnant with a daughter. She was finally able to persuade the author to leave his home “Dowtown” became the gathering place of artistic types from the Bay Area. Bierce, whose criticism in the Examiner could make or break an emerging author or artist, was the principal guest at Una’s salons. He had numerous admirers and proteges, and he frequently led the ladies on hikes and bicycle tours of the hills. Few of these ladies could resist his advances. Gertrude Atherton was one who did, but the two remained on good terms for many years.

The young eastern poet George Sterling became Bierce’s most devoted protege, and he owed his celebrity to favorable reviews and promotion from his “Cod.” The two fell out when Sterling became a close friend of Jack London. Bierce had liked London when they met at a Bohemian Grove retreat, but he was opposed to London’s socialist philosophy. Bierce was also contemptuous of Edwin Markham’s The Man with the Hoe for its socialist message. To get farther into the forest Bierce began staying at the Jeffrey’s Hotel at Wright’s Station. Here he rented a cabin where he lived with numerous wild animals that he brought back from his walks. Some of his friends credited him with mystical powers relating to these creatures. Bierce took his wife and children on extended trips with a good friend with the proprietors Mr. and Mrs. Cotton and their young daughter Lella.

It was at that time that he also became acquainted with Josephine Clifford McCrackin who lived with her husband at their nearby Rancho Paraiso. Mrs. McCrackin, whose articles boosted Andrew Hill’s crusade to save the local redwood groves, was a founder of the Semipervian Club. She was a woman of Bierce’s generation who was raised in Missouri, and she could share some of his Civil War memories. Ironically a forest fire destroyed Rancho Paraiso.

As the new century progressed Bierce began to feel like a relic from the past. Authors such as Jack London and Frank Norris had replaced Stoddard, and the dragons (the Big Four) had been slain. The author’s two sons, who had followed him into journalism, were both dead, one over a tragic love triangle and the other from alcoholism. A final book: The Devil’s Dictionary was published as part of his collected works in 1913. This collection of wry and satiric definitions has remained in print and is his best known work.

Discouraged with his life Bierce set out on a final adventure. After a sentimental journey through the Civil War battlefields of his youth, he departed for Mexico to experience once the bloody civil war that was raging there. He was never seen again.

In his last letter he wrote: if you should hear of my death, shoot me dead up against a Mexican stone wall and shot to rags please know that I think it is the proper and long way to depart from this life. It beats old age, disease or dying from collar stenosis. Be a Gringo in Mexico—oh, that is euthanasia!
Volunteer Opportunities

New volunteer training is just around the corner—Spring 1999!

Each year, thousands of adults and children visit the History Museums of San Jose, and they need friendly faces to welcome them and help them find meaning in history. Make new friends, serve your community, and brush up on local history as a volunteer at HMJS. Greet visitors, lead tours and programs, help with special events, scoop ice cream, sell souvenirs, or work behind the scenes—we’ll help you find the right opportunity for you.

Volunteers do not need previous experience for most positions and specialized training is provided, including field trips, guest presentations, video showings, special readings, and opportunities to interact with visitors, staff and other volunteers. If you are interested in joining the HMJS team or would like more information about volunteer opportunities and training, please call Jennifer Warner, education specialist, at 408-918-1050. HMJS is committed to a multicultural community and workplace, and volunteers who will contribute to that diversity are encouraged to participate.

Specials in City Stores

Get Ready for the Rush!

New books are arriving every day in anticipation of the Voice of Gold exhibition opening in April. We have a diverse selection of colorful and thought-provoking writings that provide insights into the Gold Rush era of California history.

Art of the Gold Rush, by Janet Dreibach, Harvey L. Jones and Katherine Church Holland, brings together significant artistic endeavors from the 19th century. The stories in Women of the Gold Rush by Frances Fuller Victor reveal the hearts and minds of the pioneer women coping on the frontier.

Days of Gold by Malcolm J. Rohricht examines the multiethnic and multicultural society that made up the Gold Rush era, while Robert Levinson’s book, The Jews in the California Gold Rush, looks at the involvement of Jewish immigrants during the period of 1849-90.

Visit the City Stores in January for the After-Holidays Sale. Enjoy fantastic savings on selected items up to 75% off!

K ids Korner

Creative kits from the museum stores will entertain and educate children of all ages. Kid’s Magnetic Poetry Book and Creativity Kit is the poet’s toolbox, and includes poems for groups, jigsaw poems, scorable poems and the exotic haiku. Legendary Worry Dolls is an irresistible collection of special wooden dolls combining simple crafting with the myths and legends of global culture. Artmaker Magnets with pre-printed words, pictures and symbols lets your imagination run wild.

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