

THE CARMEL VALLEY HISTORIAN

CARMEL VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Descanso Oak and its Lore in Carmel Valley History

By Elizabeth Barratt, CVHS Historian

Since 1973, drivers headed west along Carmel Valley Road just beyond the Del Mesa Carmel entrance have passed a weathered boulder bearing a large bronze plaque. Intended to honor the Valley's deceased local natives, the often flower-bedecked roadside memorial has a long and poignant history in the Valley. The marker, and a very old oak tree next to it, were originally located across the road and farther east, near today's Hacienda Hay and Feed.

Discussion to preserve and dedicate the historic oak, variously known as the "Oak of the Crosses," the "Descanso Oak," or in Spanish, "El Encino del Descanso," began in 1951. A year later, a massive granite boulder was selected at the Cooper Ranch and moved to the site. The Carmel Valley Property Owners Association (now CVA), the Carmel Valley Women's Club, and other local societies joined the effort to memorialize the ancient oak with a bronze plaque for the stone. Additional funding came from the Monterey History and Art Association and the Tularcitos Mothers' Club, with technical assistance provided by the M.J. Murphy Company, Granite Construction, El Carmelo Cemetery, the Paul Mortuary, a tree surgeon and a stone mason.

The simple wording on the plaque reads, "El Encino del Descanso, Indian carriers rested here with their dead on way to burial." The simple tribute reflects a heart-rending era in the lives of many Carmel Valley Indians. Old timer Joe Hitchcock described the ancient oak's significance in his memoirs, published at the time in a regular column in the former *Carmel Valley News*. He wrote that during the mission era, the coast live oak offered shade for Mission Indians who lived as far up the Valley as Cachagua. Men carrying their dead enroute for

burial at Mission Carmel would stop for rest under the oak's shade waiting for the cart to come from the mission. While these *anderos*, or pall bearers, sat under the spreading branches, they would carve a

cross in the trunk in memory of the deceased. This gave rise to a second name for the tree, "La Encina de las Cruces," or "Oak of the Crosses." Joe Hitchcock wrote that he once counted 200 crosses on the tree.

(See Descanso, page 7)



Photo by Orville Myers



Descendants of Carmel Valley Indians hold the holy water vessel originally owned by Padre Junipero Serra. (L to R), Joe Hitchcock, Bert Onessimo, Alex Onessimo and Joe Garcia.

A Message from CVHS President Kim Williams

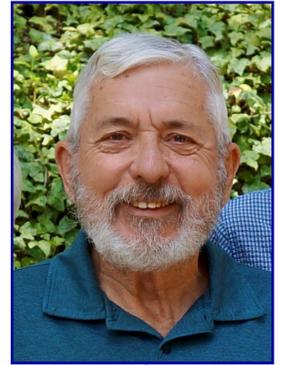
It's beginning to look like Christmas...Thanksgiving is now behind us and winter is soon to be here. It's incredible that another year has flown by so quickly. To prove that time flies it was on December 7, 2013 that we celebrated the Grand Opening of the Museum at the History Center...8 years ago!

The photo below takes a look back as to how far we've come since we've opened. We've had over 10,000 visitors, added dozens exhibits and displays since original three at opening, entertained a multitude of schoolchildren, and hosted many community meetings. Also there has been a growing crew of vol-



March 2013 Annual Meeting – The building was completed but the museum hadn't opened yet. Photo by Jeff Ohlson

unteer docents who graciously welcome visitors to our little museum. Pretty amazing when you think about it!



Kim Williams

A couple of important dates are coming up.

◆ **Saturday, December 4** is our **Annual Christmas Party** (3:00-6:00). Come to the party, enjoy some treats, and walk over to the park for the Community Christmas Tree Lighting at 5:00. Then come on back to the History Center to warm up and visit some more.

◆ We've scheduled our **annual membership meeting** for **Saturday, April 24**. We've missed our last two annual meetings. We will have much to report and discuss.

Volunteers in Action



Recognition

Docent Trainer Cherie Ohlson

We appreciate all the time and effort Cherie Ohlson takes to provide docents with training, assuring that experienced docents are paired with trainees. She also comes when we're open to assure everything is running according to plan, and make sure there aren't questions or extra needs. Cherie also produces a monthly update of information for the docents so everyone knows what's been happening at the History Center.

Thank you, Cherie

Photo by Jeff Ohlson

Financial Contributions (Aug, Sept, Oct)

General Fund: Pam Austin, Carolyn Gray, Ellsworth Gregory, Scot & Donna Leisy, Joseph MacDonald, Alison McFarlane, Ellen McGrath, M.J. Murphy, Tom Oliver, Jimmy Panetta, Sue Pius, Cynthia & Frederick Riebe, Suzanne Taunt, Art & Elaine Taylor, Jeffrey Wood, Warren & Penny Wood, Reid & Karen Woodward

Grants: California Upjohn Foundation

Thank you all for your generous support!

Donations: Documents, Photos, Artifacts, Library Materials (Aug, Sept, Oct)

Arliss & Carol Duncan: A bank of three theatre seats, upholstered in red velvet, from the Magic Circle Theatre located at 8 El Caminito, a 60-seat theatre, founded in 1999 by Elsa Con, closed in 2004, reopened in 2010, and closed permanently in 2014.

Sara Talbott Hawthorne: Various vintage copies of "Game & Gossip" and a copy of "CV Home Tours, 1963" newspaper insert.

Ben & Heather Lazare: 1) Packet of 5 B/W 8x10 photographs: 1950 Carmel Valley flood and washout near what is now Garland Ranch Park.

2) Packet of 6 B/W 8x10 photographs dated April 2nd, 1953 of the unveiling and dedication

of the plaque at the Descanso Oak "El Encino Del Descanso - Indian Carriers rested here with their dead on way to burial". Showing many of the attendees, one includes four men standing alongside the plaque: Joe Hitchcock, Bert and Alex Onessimo, and Joe Dolores Garcia.

Robb Talbott: Color 8x10 photograph depicting old red CVFPD Dodge Power Wagon Fire Truck #713 and a variety of "No Trespassing" signs from local ranches, etc.

Gail Thomsen: Scan of color photograph of the Hatton Dairy farmhouse, outbuildings, etc. in winter 1950 with Carmel Valley's hills in the background blanketed in snow. (Below)



Hatton's Lower Dairy, Winter 1950 (Now the Barnyard Shopping Center)

Photo: CVHS Archives - Donated by Gail Thomsen

Exhibits Committee at Work



Clockwise from bottom left: Reggie Jones, Jeff Ohlson, Dick Barratt, Elizabeth Barratt, Jane Chaney, Kim Williams, Cherie Ohlson



Exhibits Committee members, (l to r) Jeff Ohlson, Cherie Ohlson, Kim Williams and Jane Chaney make plans for this marker recognizing the airfield as an historical point of interest. Installation on the trail near the post office is scheduled for early next year.



The farm exhibit has been dismantled and new homes found for our "rusty iron." Two pieces of equipment are now on display at the new Hacienda Hay and Feed, and two are at the old Berta Ranch. Thanks go to Jeff Ohlson for making all the arrangements, and to Paul Guglielmo, Brian Jaegar, Craig Painter, Jon Wescott for doing the heavy lifting. And thanks to PSTS's Rod Lambert for manning the forklift.

Fighter Airplane Crashes in Valley!

By Jeff Ohlson, CVHS Historian

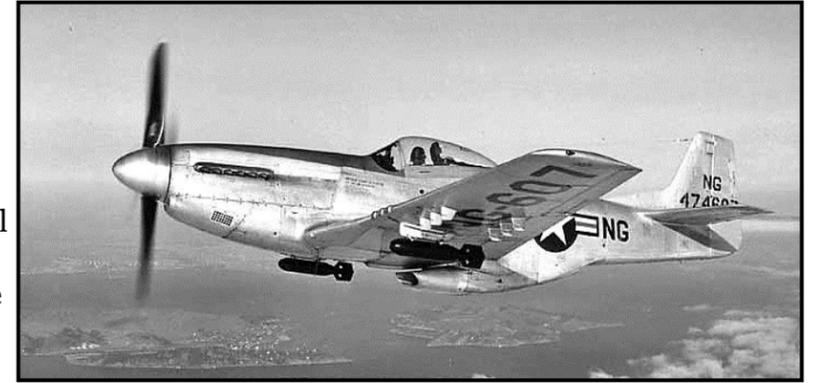
Have you ever heard the story about an Army fighter plane that crashed here way back when? Old timers tell of souvenir hunters salvaging artifacts from the crash site and hikers are said to have occasionally stumbled upon it. Memories can be fallible, though, and storytellers may embellish or not get the facts straight. Nonetheless, curious Valleyites and aviation buffs will want to know what really did or did not happen.

An account of the incident follows...

On Friday afternoon, February 6, 1953, U.S. Air Force pilot First Lieutenant John C. Maxey Jr. strapped into a 21st Fighter Bomber Group's F-51D fighter at Castle AFB, California – located about 100 miles northeast of Ft. Ord. His WWII era fighter, famously known as the North American P-51 Mustang, would have looked like the one pictured. First Lieutenant Maxey was in a flight of seven other F-51s that flew from Castle to Ft. Ord to take part in a firepower demonstration exercise. Home base for these fighters was George AFB down in Victorville.

Unfortunately, Maxey's fighter developed several problems that day. The first was an electrical problem which caused loss of radio contact and also prevented the firing of his rockets. After dropping one of his two 250-pound bombs, a failure of the bomb release mechanism caused the other bomb to hang up in its rack. A bad day then turned into an emergency after his engine lost coolant and caught fire. Maxey then needed to land or ditch fast!

Since his Mustang carried live munitions, he could not land at Naval Air Station Monterey (now Monterey Regional Airport) or return to Castle so he flew out over Monterey Bay and then flew inland, hurriedly heading for unpopulated hills where he could bail out - his route is depicted on the map below. Maxey's leg got caught in the chute's lines when it opened - severely twisting it. His doomed mission ended when he safely landed on the Oppenheimer Ranch (now the Santa Lucia Preserve), narrowly missing an oak tree and telephone lines on the way down.



Meanwhile, his pilotless Mustang struck the crest of a nearby hill and slid down a remote ravine where its remaining 250-pound bomb and rockets exploded. Many Carmel Valley residents heard or felt these explosions and word got out fast to Deputy Sheriff Tiny Marrs at the Airway Village (now Carmel Valley Village) and to the Tularcitos Fire Department. A search & rescue team quickly trekked up the rugged Garzas Canyon toward the Oppenheimer Ranch, lugging stretchers and first aid equipment. They were at first unaware that the pilot had already bailed out and found little left of the plane which was strewn great distances in all directions from the explosions.

A WWII and Korean War veteran, Maxey expertly guided his stricken fighter to the remote hills of Carmel Valley so that his explosives-laden Mustang would not endanger the lives and properties of populated areas. Seven decades later, after knowing the full story of this incident, we commend his selfless actions rather than attempting an emergency landing at an airport in a burning plane with live munitions under its wings.

Maxey eventually retired from the Air Force with the rank of Captain and continued his flying career as a commercial pilot for Federal Express. He then went on to lead an active family life in San Antonio, Texas before his death in 2007.

First Lieutenant Maxey's Bailout Route



THUNDERBIRD BOOKSTORE SIGN

By Jeff Ohlson, CVHS Historian

Many Valleyites will nostalgically recall being surrounded by the old Thunderbird Bookstore's 50,000 books - and wistfully miss the bygone days before digital technology pushed almost all privately owned bookstores into obsolescence.

This iconic Thunderbird Bookstore sign first hung over the entrance to the bookstore when it was located at the Baja Cantina building in Carmel Valley from 1968 to the early 1970s. It then hung from the Thunderbird bookstore building in Carmel's Barnyard from the early 1970s until the bookstore went out of business in 2000.

The sign was made in 1968 by well-known local sculptor Gilbert W. Amberg who frequented the bookstore. It is believed the idea for the sign originated from the mythical Thunderbird symbol idolized by the Indians of the southwest. In 2013 the sign was donated to the Historical Society, and in 2020 was put on



display. The now weathered 51-year-old sign is located on the west side of the History Center as part of the *Signs of Times Past* exhibit.

The Thunderbird bookstore was owned and operated by Jim and Corenne Smith from 1961 to 1970. It thereafter was owned and operated by May and John Waldroup until the bookstore went out of business in 2000.

Long before the practice became popular, the Thunderbird served coffee and meals. You could relax and eat with your favorite authors.

The bookstore was first located on the east side of Carmel Valley Village in the building where I. Brand tasting room is now located. It then moved into the building on Pilot Road where Roux Restaurant is now located prior to moving to its Baja Cantina building location.

Dining at a Bookstore?

Join these famous authors for lunch or dinner amid over 50,000 books at the Peninsula's fabulous

Thunderbird

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Carmel Valley Rd. Ph. 624-1803

(Descanso from page 1)

The custom was halted in 1882 when Father Angelo Casanova of Mission Carmel put a stop to the practice and directed burials to be taken to the San Carlos Cemetery in Monterey.

When the Descanso Oak memorial was completed, a dedication service was held on April 4, 1953. The plaque was unveiled by descendants of Carmel Mission Indians, including brothers Bertoldo "Bert" and Alejandro "Alex" Onessimo, along with Joe Hitchcock, himself descended from Loreta Onessimo, plus Joe Dolores Garcia.

On that dedication day, Msgr. Michael D. O'Connell of Mission Carmel blessed the plaque and the still-living tree, with water from a silver holy water vessel said to have been used by Padre Junipero Serra. The historic vessel had been used at San Carlos Cathedral in Monterey for a century until it was returned to Mission Carmel several years before the dedication ceremony.



Msgr. Michael D. O'Connell blesses the Descanso Oak and plaque at the dedication ceremony on April 4, 1953.

A fence had been moved so that the oak and its dedication plaque could become a permanent monument at the site, meant to be maintained by historical and civic organizations. This changed two decades later, when a pavement expansion planned to widen Carmel Valley Road caused the now-dead historic oak to be relocated. It was moved from its original site near Hacienda Hay and Feed, formerly known as Wolter's Hacienda Market, to its present site. The relocated



Monterey historian Mayo Hayes O'Donnell and Msgr. Michael O'Connell of Mission Carmel read the plaque next to the Descanso Oak on dedication day.

memorial site, its ancient oak no longer present, has been tended by locals as a sort of shrine ever since.

Joe Hitchcock once wrote that the old oak represented an era of deep sadness for local Indians. "After the missions were secularized about 1833, it disrupted the life of the many Indians who were wards of the mission fathers who taught them, but when they were deprived of the support of their teachers, they were helpless to shift for themselves and they scattered to many parts of the coast, from Point Pinos to Big Sur and inland as far as Cachagua, and any available Carmel Valley land where they could build their homes. In small groups, they had to shift for themselves. They experienced many hardships, hunger, sickness and disease. And many of them died and were carried on a litter to El Encino del Descanso to await the carreta from the mission to take them for burial among the ruins of the mission that their parents helped build."

Sadly, the long-dead oak has disappeared with time. The granite marker still stands, placed to honor the original site in 1953 and then moved the new location in 1973. The memorial serves to remind passersby today of the original inhabitants of the Valley, who now rest in peace.

Carmel Valley Historical Society

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 Virtual Tour | carmelvalleyhistoricalsociety.org

History Center Museum
SATURDAYS 1-4
SUNDAYS 11-2

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Upcoming Events

December 4-Saturday

CVHS Annual Christmas Party (3:00-6:00) at the HC
 Community Christmas Tree Lighting (5:00-6:00) in the park

December 11-Saturday

Santa Fly-in, Parade, and festivities (10:30-Noon) at the airport,
 the road through the Village, and at the CVCYC

April 24 Saturday

CVHS Annual Membership Meeting (4:00-6:00) at the HC



Like us (❤️ us) on our Facebook page:
 Carmel Valley History Center

Please come and join us at our annual

Christmas Party

Saturday, December 4, 2021

from 3:00 to 6:00

at the CV History Center

77 West Carmel Valley Road

Come visit with old friends, meet some new friends, greet your
 Board Members, and see our newest exhibits.

*If you can, please bring a finger-food hors d'oeuvre or dessert,
 or a bottle of white wine.*

*Call the History Center for more information, 659-5715.
 Or email Kim at CVHSPresident@gmail.com.*

