

# WE ARE STILL HERE: Bringing History to the Public in Turbulent Times

Rather than retreat from the public in the midst of a global pandemic and far reaching protests for social justice, Southern California's historic sites and museums have directly addressed our historic moment, offering innovative programming in novel formats. As our state re-opens, the *Southern California Quarterly* is showcasing a sample of these recent and upcoming efforts in the second iteration of a feature that debuted in our Spring 2021 issue: *We are Still Here: Bringing History to the Public in Turbulent Times*.



SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY MUSEUM

As with most museums across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the San Bernardino County Museum (SBCM) to close its doors to the public temporarily and halted our in-person museum programming for over a year. Everyone was (and still is) dealing with the pandemic and the immense stress and loss that has come with it. However, SBCM staff recognized early on during this crisis that we had to maintain our relationship and communication with the public that we serve—our county's over 2 million residents and beyond. Our role within our community has become more significant than ever during these challenging times, so the museum has sought to connect

*Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 3, pp. 339–348. ISSN 0038-3929, eISSN 2162-8637. © 2021 by The Historical Society of Southern California. All rights reserved. Request permission to photocopy or reproduce article content at the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/scq.2021.103.3.339>.

to our audience in new and unique ways despite closures and staying at home for everyone's safety.

Last year, museum staff developed a virtual initiative called SBCM Connect with the mission of supporting the interests of lifelong learners, teachers and parents conducting at-home learning for families, students, and researchers by activating and increasing the museum's virtual presence through our website, social media, digital exhibits, online programming, distance learning resources, and division curator blogs. These resources are intended to create new digital museum experiences that individuals can enjoy from the comfort and safety of their own homes, complement in-person museum visits as we begin to reopen, provide an archive for future educational and research purposes, and create awareness and excitement for upcoming exhibits and programs, both in-person and virtual.

Although SBCM has rethought and reshaped the way we interact with our audience in many of the things that we do, our public programming is one area that we have largely reimaged. Traditionally, SBCM onsite programs are multidisciplinary as the SBCM is both a cultural and natural history museum. Alongside invited program partners—both non-profit organizations and government agencies, the museum's programs integrate live demonstrations, entertainment, and educational activities, with the goal of strengthening visitors' appreciation for the region and its rich history. From March 2020 through May 2021, the museum pivoted six regularly scheduled annual and quarterly onsite programs to the virtual environment, two of which were mainly history focused—our Old Spanish Trail Days and Old West Days events. These now virtual programs were initially hosted on the SBCM social media pages, and were later supplemented by drive-through pick up of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) focused activity bags so families could engage with the demonstrations and lessons in the posted educational videos.

Transitioning to virtual programming has allowed the museum to continue connecting with our audience and collaborating with non-profit organizations and government agencies across San Bernardino County and outside of it, helping us maintain connections with our county residents and beyond during statewide closures. In this process, it became evident to museum staff that our audience, now more than ever, needed to participate in engaging, educational, and fun programs from the safety and comfort of their own homes.

As the largest multidisciplinary museum in our region, the objective of transitioning to virtual programming was to maintain the live entertainment aspect, standard of educational content, and regional focus, while featuring invited partners to share our collective regional history via recorded videos and other digital content that can be accessible during the virtual program and after. Through the success of these virtual programs (having reached over 60,000 people via our digital platforms) and with the partnership of over forty-two new and existing organizational partners, it has become clear that adding a virtual component to our future in-person programs will add greatly to the visitor and audience experience. We can also connect the museum to those who do not typically visit the main museum or its branch sites. Additionally, we have started to develop digital exhibits, two of which have already launched and received positive feedback from virtual visitors.

Ultimately, by increasing the museum's virtual presence on its website and social media outlets, developing new virtual content for our audience, and working with community members and partners to create exciting ways to share our region's history, we have not only preserved our connection to our community and those beyond, but we have also provided outlets for people to enjoy and immerse themselves in during a time when so much else is weighing on their minds. The museum looks forward to engaging with our visitors and audience in new ways, and we are grateful to have made the best out of a very difficult situation.

*Jennifer Dickerson, Curator of History, and, Ashley Lothyan, Curator of History, San Bernardino Museum of History, Redlands.*



#### CARPINTERIA STATE BEACH, CHANNEL COAST DISTRICT

At Carpinteria State Beach, staff offered a variety of virtual field trips to classes through Zoom. Teachers were given the option of

learning about Ice Age fossils, Native American uses of tar, and tide pool animals. Our “Chumash Uses of Tar” program was our most in-demand program in the month of November due to Native American History Month. This new program was not going to be offered until 2021 but the demand from teachers was too great to ignore.

In this virtual field trip, students were introduced to asphaltum, or tar, a naturally occurring substance that oozes out of the ground at Carpinteria State Beach. Then park staff showed students the various ways that the Chumash people used tar. One of the highlights of the program is when the class gets to play a game aptly titled “the walnut shell dice game” which has been referred to by various names in different languages. This game involves rolling walnut shells and counting the number of walnuts that fall face up. Students get a choice, “team odds” or “team evens” and the game can get hotly contested. Perhaps it is due to the natural shape of the walnuts we use, but the odds seem to win more than 50 percent of the time.

The class is also shown how the Chumash would construct their plank canoe, the tomol. These seafaring vessels relied on tar to help make them waterproof. A very important feature, considering these tomols could be taken out to the neighboring Channel Islands over thirty miles away. Students are amazed to learn that these tomols could hold around twelve adult men.

We have gotten a whole range of questions from students about the Chumash concerning Chumash houses, tomols, games, and clothing. However, my personal favorite is when a student wants to share a connection they have with the Chumash. For instance, students will often share with the class how the musical instruments they play are similar to the Chumash instruments, or they will share a story of when their family went fishing.

We hope that our program can highlight the long cultural tradition that Chumash people continue today. While our program focuses on the past, we remind the students that Chumash people still take tomols out to the local islands; a suggested post-visit activity is to watch a video documenting a modern-day tomol crossing. We are thankful for Chumash artist Michael Ward for supplying our Visitor Center with a lovely mural depicting the construction of a tomol. His work helps bring the story of Mishopsno alive; Mishopsno is the name of the Chumash village that existed at Carpinteria State Beach.

Although pandemic restrictions are lifting, we do plan to offer this program permanently. Even before COVID-19, many schools did not have the funding to take field trips and teachers often ask if our program will become a regular option for educators. To date, our programs have been able to reach over 6,500 students and we hope to continue reaching more students. We want to strengthen our program over the next year by creating more pre-visit materials and incorporating more perspectives from Chumash people today.

*Heidi Ortoloff, State Park Interpreter, Channel Coast District, California State Parks*



### MOULTON MUSEUM

Moulton Museum has shown true grit by sustaining the mission statement established during strategic planning prior to the shutdowns. We stand for heritage, community, and philanthropy. L. F. Moulton & Co. used to cover nearly 22,000 acres and operated under the name Moulton Ranch. The icon of the cowboy in the West remains relevant for the Moulton family, which owns ranches to this day. As members of the American Alliance for Museums, we are committed to best practices. Our first exhibition, titled “1874: Into the West,” details the journey that twenty-year-old Lewis F. Moulton made that year from Boston to Southern California. J. P. Daguerre, his initial Basque business partner, also immigrated the same year. We will have an online webpage for guests to enjoy remotely and QR codes in our display for additional in-person information. The projected opening date is Fall 2021.

The Moulton family hosts annual livestock roundups. The iconic “LM” brand has been used even before California established the Bureau of Livestock Identification. Our video series has allowed us to capture modern and historic ranching practices while showcasing family-operated ranches. We prepared a film in order to demonstrate how cowboys round up the cattle for branding and veterinarians administer the vaccinations. Our goal is to provide twenty-first-century clarity to this multi-generational tradition that has its

heritage in Orange County. The history will be taught in local classrooms through our strategic partnership with the Capistrano and Saddleback District and private schools in our area. The Moulton Ranch has become the incorporated cities of Aliso Viejo, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Laguna Hills, and parts of Laguna Beach and Dana Point. These cities have been recognizing their heritage with anniversary celebrations.

Aliso Viejo Ranch opened to the public on May 1, 2021. This 7.7 acre, multi-agency project contains rehabilitated historic buildings. The Moulton Museum provided historical artifacts and contributed to the exhibitions throughout the space. We integrated a QR code onsite to expand the historical narrative beyond the physical installation. This site is part of our network of local, county, and state partnerships.

We were scheduled to open the Nellie Gail Moulton exhibit at Casa Romantica at the beginning of the California shutdown in March 2020. Fortunately, the site was able to eventually open and we hosted a reception. Our team was dedicated to providing the fine art and sketches in a multimedia format. We created a webpage, [moultonmuseum.org/nellie-gail-moulton-exhibit](http://moultonmuseum.org/nellie-gail-moulton-exhibit), that includes an on-site film. We conducted an in-person interview with Jane Barnes, Nellie's granddaughter, featuring the historic gallery and her personal story. We have an ongoing oral history program with those who recall living on or near Moulton Ranch in the twentieth century. This series is available on our website.

Moulton Museum has been developing our website, which comprises online collections and research materials. We feature archival materials in our monthly newsletter and provide content in our social media accounts. We have been digitizing personal papers from Lewis Fenno Moulton dating from the 1800s that contain correspondence with other Orange County pioneers. These multilingual documents have been translated, transcribed, and uploaded to *Omeka*, an open source web publishing platform. Students from local universities have been able to conduct remote internships by collaborating with our team. We are developing our docent program with the Orange County Docent League. We look forward to hosting events at our outdoor space and inviting visitors into the remodeled physical building in 2021.

*Jennifer Keil, historian and archivist, Moulton Museum, Laguna Hills*



### LOS ANGELES COUNTY ARBORETUM

The Arboretum remained open during the COVID crisis of the last year, however, for about a month, some of the staff were self-isolating at home and working remotely. The County of Los Angeles determined that botanic gardens serve an essential therapeutic purpose during this crisis. However, limits were placed on the number of visitors, historic buildings that were usually open to visitors were closed, and other measures to ensure visitor and staff safety were put in place. Programming was paused and food services were adapted for the pandemic with safe distancing, plexiglass barriers, and regular cleaning and disinfecting procedures. The Arboretum has an



The Depot with its new roof, restored signage and, cresting board at the peak of the project, prior to removal of weeds that grew during construction.

Courtesy of Los Angeles County Arboretum.

extensive volunteer program which was halted, and the volunteers were furloughed for their safety. The Arboretum is a popular venue where the local community comes to walk for exercise and is a large green space for recreation in an urban area. Baldwin Lake, the botanical collection, historic trees, and landscape features as well as our historic buildings have always been popular and became even more so during the pandemic. With the relaxing of the restrictions, summer camp for children has resumed and our summer concert series with the Pasadena Pops will also take place this summer.

Several projects have been ongoing with our historic buildings in the last year. One of our historic buildings, the Santa Anita Depot (built in 1890), got a new roof and signage based on historic photographs of the building. The work was completed during the pandemic, but the building remained closed to visitors. Prior to the pandemic it was staffed by volunteers and open three days a week.



The restoration of the wrap-around veranda and eaves dramatically alters the appearance of the Adobe and protects the walls from moisture. It will also provide inviting shade on hot summer days for visitors.

*Courtesy of Los Angeles County Arboretum.*

The interpretation of the depot focuses on local history, the importance of railroads in Southern California, and social history during the period when it was active.

Construction has also been underway at the Reid/Baldwin Adobe. We are now using 1900 as its period of significance. When the building was restored in the early 1960s the work was based on a speculative Rancho Period appearance with an emphasis on Hugo and Victoria Reid. While it was informed by archaeological investigations, there was no documentation of the appearance of the building prior to the Baldwin era. The current restoration considers a variety of stakeholders in the community and will emphasize the Baldwin era. The work will probably be completed by fall of 2021. Construction work on historic buildings often encounters unanticipated delays given their complexity and the sensitivity that must be used in this type of work. The building will present a dramatically different appearance since the wrap-around verandas have been restored. Planning for the garden around the building and interpretive material are underway. The interior of the building and the restoration of a wood frame wing will have to be delayed for the time being.



The marble stairs and flooring of the Cottage veranda was lifted to enable stabilization of the foundation underneath and the structural elements supporting the tower.

Courtesy of Los Angeles County Arboretum

A project at the Queen Anne Cottage that aimed to address problems with the marble flooring on the veranda of the Cottage uncovered underlying structural issues that must be addressed, so work on the Cottage will be ongoing, probably through 2021. The area of marble flooring was intended as a dance floor. While the building has been known as the Queen Anne Cottage since its restoration in the 1960s, in Baldwin's time it was simply called "The Casino" and served as a guest house and what we would call today, an event venue. At the time, the word casino did not necessarily refer to gambling alone.

In the past, the Cottage and Adobe were dressed for their time periods and visitors were only able to look in through the windows. The Cottage was open for open houses held twice a year, once around Mother's Day and again a couple of weeks before Christmas. Given the societal changes brought about by the pandemic and the passage of time, a reconsideration of how the Arboretum interprets the historic buildings is due. It is likely that the uniquely diverse history of the site and its role in the environmental history of Los Angeles County will be featured.

*Mitchell Bishop, curator, historic section, Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden*