

The San Lorenzo Valley Historical Society

THE SAN LORENZO VALLEY Historical Society owns and operates the San Lorenzo Valley Museum in Santa Cruz County. The museum is the public face of the society. It hosts a permanent exhibition of artifacts that tells the history of the San Lorenzo Valley. The permanent exhibition is the core of its second-grade school program. The largest artifact in the collection is the museum building, the former Grace Episcopal Church, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Artifacts that are on permanent exhibition include an Alta California–era pit-saw blade that was used locally to cut enormous *Sequoia sempervirens* (coast redwood) logs into boards; many other logging-related artifacts such as spring boards, wedges, oxen yokes, hand-forged iron gulching cradles used for transporting gathered wood, wooden pack saddles, a drag saw, and log jacks; and a branding iron from the Paul Sweet Ranch.

The museum also hosts three or four temporary exhibitions each year. Artifacts, documents, photographs, and ephemera from the collection are used to supplement historical display panels. For example, when the museum hosted the Exhibit Envoy exhibition “War Comes Home,” we were able to complement this thoughtful traveling exhibition with letters and newspaper clippings from local veterans describing their experience coming home from war to California.

The collection is broad and represents the way the valley has changed over time through documents, photographs, and artifacts. Specifically, documents such as the 1877 bylaws and charter of the local Washingtonian Society; photographs such as those of the Boulder Days celebration, a three-day extravaganza held annually between 1941 and 1962 celebrating the past; and artifacts such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) banner. A WCTU chapter was organized here in 1892 to provide the young and impressionable loggers an alternative refuge from the multitude of saloons, through the establishment of a free library: “Here a village surrounded by extensive lumber interests, a railroad terminus

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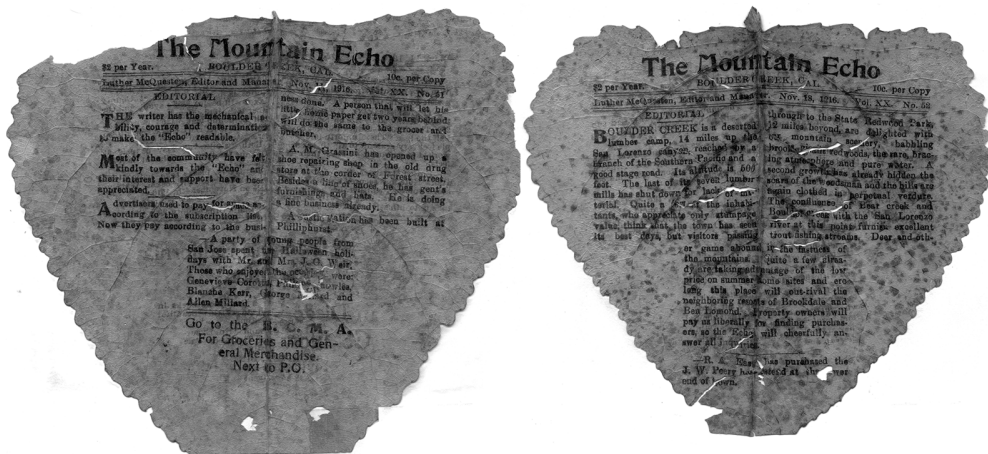
with scores of young men on the streets with little but evil before them; boys on the road to death.”¹ And yes, there is a copper still and condenser in the collection!

There are multiple hotel registers, including one from the Lorenzo Hotel (1883–1896). The hotel was lost in the devastating 1897 fire, which cost the town of Lorenzo its identity, as it was subsequently annexed by Boulder Creek.² The registers tell of vacationers, new and ongoing business ventures, and seasonal lumber workers, and one documents the people wooed here by local lumber baron Henry Middleton, the owner of the land that eventually became Big Basin Redwood State Park.³ Henry built a hotel, the Commercial Hotel, in which he hosted visiting delegations.⁴ The building is long gone, though the museum’s collection boasts a room key. But then why, on July 16, 1904, does the register of the Boulder Creek House record Andrew P. Hill and other members of the Sempervirens Club as staying there rather than at the Commercial? Josephine McCracken explains: “According to directions from headquarters, we met at Boulder Creek on Saturday July 16th, and though we filled the hotels there to overflowing, we were all made comfortable, some at the Alpine, others at the Commercial Hotel, and the rest of us at the Boulder Creek House.”⁵

The collection holds original issues of the *Mountain Echo* newspaper. While this newspaper is available on microfilm, not all issues were photographed. We encourage researchers to first examine the microfilm available at the main branch of Santa Cruz Public Library, but if the issue is not available there, we open up access to our very delicate collection. The newspaper was founded in 1895 by Charles Campbell Rodgers. Winfred Scott Rodgers Sr., his brother, was also an editor of the paper and continued in that role after his brother’s untimely death in 1898 at age fifty-seven. The *Mountain Echo* described its platform as “the advocacy of truth, justice and right as we see it.” In 1916, Luther E. McQuesten took over as publisher of the *Mountain Echo*. Owed money by his subscribers, faced with the high cost of printing and a paper shortage, he printed four editions of the newspaper on cottonwood leaves.⁶ Perhaps our favorite documents in the collection are two editions of the leaves shown here. Extremely fragile, they were, years ago, encased in a laminating material. In the subsequent edition of the newspaper, McQuesten printed the text of all four, for those who might have found the “fig leaf editions” difficult to read.⁷

The *Mountain Echo* was the successor to the *Boulder Blast*, and the first edition, which was printed on October 24, 1896, described itself as “the old paper under a new name and management.” In 2012, the museum doubled its holdings of copies of the earlier *Blast*, from one to two, when, during remodeling of the local veterinary surgery, a copy was found stuffed in the walls.

A 2009 acquisition includes over 2,000 photographs taken by local photographer Fredda Carlisle Carr. Fredda was the San Lorenzo Valley’s photographer for over forty years. She documented the activities and small-town life of the valley. The collection includes formal and informal imagery, portraits, business and community groups, and the 1955 flood. In addition, the collection includes personal informal photographs of Fredda’s life before she moved to the valley. When she died in 1992, she was described as “reclusive and a loner” by those who knew her and as “the most famous person in the valley that nobody knew.”⁸ But these informal photographs tell a different story. They document a long relationship she had with a man she met when she worked in San Francisco and who visited her over many years at her home in the valley. But one characteristic about Fredda that one does not glean from



The November 11 and 16, 1916, editions of the *Mountain Echo* newspaper printed on cottonwood leaves.

Courtesy of the San Lorenzo Valley Museum, Boulder Creek, California, Irwin Collection, catalog no. 2004-051-0027(a&b)

the photographs, and one that only those very close to her knew, was that she had been blinded in one eye.⁹

When the somewhat remote Alba Schoolhouse, located on the slopes of Ben Lomond Mountain and now in a parks and recreation district, was broken into for a second time, the school archives were donated to the museum. The one-room schoolhouse was built in 1895, and the archives include school records, registers, minutes, photographs, and scrapbooks.

The collection includes historical artwork. The largest piece is an oil-on-canvas work, three feet by five feet, entitled *Redwoods in the Big Basin*, painted by Lorenzo Palmer Latimer in 1914, recently transferred to the collection from the collection of the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History. It is housed on permanent exhibition in a case along with other redwood artwork, including an ornate curly redwood chair made by local woodsman and furniture maker Isaac Luttrell.

But the most loved and most exhibited artworks are those that depict Lily the Cat Lady. Depictions of her in oil, acrylic, pen and pencil, wood, and plaster are in the collection, by local artists Barbara Winner, Rachel Bachrach, and Joe Elmore. Lily moved to the San Lorenzo Valley in the early 1960s after the death of her husband. She began to care for the stray cats, feeding them Friskies and watered-down milk. The cats began to rely on Lily and waited each day for her to feed them. Lily had a deformed spine and a neck injury, and because of this she slept upright in a chair. She was in constant pain but never complained. To hold her head up she would stuff paper towels under her chin.¹⁰ Everyone knew Lily, and many helped care for her. She was a local legend. In 1977, the *California Today* supplement of the *San Jose Mercury* ran a story on her life, as did the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1979.¹¹

The archive includes oral histories, though it is not an extensive collection. It includes two oral histories recorded in 1954 and 1960, among the first conducted in Santa Cruz County by the former Santa Cruz Historical Society and focused on the lumber industry. The first is an interview with former teamster Chris Iffert. Chris was just sixteen when he became a “bullwhacker.” He became famous for being the driver of the “big load”—a yoke

of six oxen hauling around thirty saw logs in one load, a load that when cut made over 42,000 feet of lumber.¹² The collection also includes a photograph that documents the historic event.

Increasingly, the archive contains digital-only collections composed of not just digitally born material, but digitized materials that donors want to ensure are preserved, although they are not yet ready to donate the original copies. A good example is the Worley Collection. This is a scanned collection of photographs from a family album that tell the story of the Worley family's garage business in the town of Felton. Harry Worley operated the first ambulance service in the valley. This collection of photographs is just one example of those scanned as part of an outreach program associated with the Smithsonian Museum on Main Street exhibition "The Way We Worked," which the museum hosted in 2014.

A recent addition to the archives includes an extensive collection of forestry archives, around sixteen linear feet and spanning twenty-five years, from a local environmental consultant.

The artifacts we hold in our collection can evoke powerful emotions. We will highlight three: sorrow, love, and mirth.

Sorrow: In the collection is a tiny wood fragment along with a handwritten note explaining its significance. It is a tiny fragment of a stagecoach that plummeted over a precipice on the road between Felton and Santa Cruz in June 1882. All the victims were teenagers. The injuries were awful and five young people perished. The driver exclaimed, "Oh God, forgive me." He did not know the road.¹³ This is a familiar story of the road along the San Lorenzo Canyon, which is as formidable today as ever.

Love: In the collection is a dogwood stick given to Annie Bennett in October 1878 by her then boyfriend Will Clark. Will is identified on the envelope as "Uncle Sam Clark's boy." In the envelope containing the stick were four reflections, each separately cut from printed material:

Where'er I go I think on you—
None else can love you half so true.

Oft, as I rove by silver Luna's beam
Thy image stamps imagination's dream.

If e'er I am challeng'd I will not indict,
But quickly make friends, and strive to unite.

The bands of love can give no pain
If Mary clasps the silken chain.¹⁴

Mirth: During the early 1900s, the valley was often a backdrop for the movie industry. In 1915, a pioneer village called Poverty Flat was constructed, initially for the movie *Lily of Poverty Flat* but used subsequently in others. The local population provided the "extras," and the collection holds many photographs of those exuberant times. The *Mountain Echo* printed within its pages six special editions of the *Poverty Flat Nugget* edited by (the fictional) Culpepper Starbottle, originals of which are in the collection.

In 1917, Boulder Creek Judge Reuben Page played alongside Mary Miles Minter in *Melissa of the Hills*, along with other locals.¹⁵ The collection includes the justice's early 1900s record book.

In 1922, the movie *Soul of the Beast* was filmed here. Circus elephant Anna May was the hero of the movie. She was allowed to “roam at will between the sets,” coming for her act “at the director’s whistle.”¹⁶ A newspaper article heralded, “Motorist Bumps into Elephant; Both Afrighted.”¹⁷ On the single lane of winding Bear Creek Road, a motorist ran into the rear of the elephant. Shocked, it immediately began to run toward Boulder Creek with the motorist in pursuit—hoping, in vain, to get a reward for its recovery. Anna May is depicted in several photographs in the collection.

The museum’s policy for access to the archives is simple. If we have it, we will digitize it and provide a digital copy, subject to copyright laws, free of charge. This policy forces us to continually add to our digital archives. For cataloguing we use PastPerfect database software, and we use Flickr to host our online photograph and postcard collection along with images of artwork in the collection.¹⁸ Not everything in the collection is catalogued and, as it becomes more and more of a challenge to keep up with the data entry, we are increasingly relying on inventories, rather than detailed catalog entries, for the larger collections of material.

About the San Lorenzo Valley Historical Society: The San Lorenzo Valley Museum in Boulder Creek is owned and operated by the San Lorenzo Valley Historical Society (SLVHS), whose mission is to preserve and share the history of the San Lorenzo Valley. The SLVHS was founded as the Boulder Creek Historical Society in 1976 and has been sharing the region’s rich history, natural history, and works by local artists at the Grace Episcopal Gallery, a National Register–listed building, since 2000.

About the author: Lisa Robinson has lived in the San Lorenzo Valley since 1990. She is president of the Board of Directors of the SLVHS, which owns and operates the San Lorenzo Valley Museum, where she manages the exhibitions and collections. She is a member of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) Landmark Committee and the MAH Publications Committee. She is the author of *The San Lorenzo Valley* (Arcadia Press) and *The San Lorenzo Valley Flume* (Lulu) and editor of *Redwood Logging and Conservation in the Santa Cruz Mountains—A Split History* (MAH). She is the local history writer for the *Santa Cruz Mountain Bulletin* newspaper.

NOTES

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2. The Fire at Lorenzo, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, April 16, 1897, 1:5.
3. Traci Bliss and Randall Brown, “Saving Big Basin: Heroes and Heroines,” *Redwood Logging and Conservation in the Santa Cruz Mountains—A Split History* (Santa Cruz, CA: Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, 2016), 117–126.
4. Ibid.
5. Josephine Clifford M’Crackin, “Sempervirens Club Will Build House in Big Basin,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, July 22, 1904, 1:3.
6. “Prints on Leaves,” *The American Printer*, December 20, 1916, 58.
7. “Reproductions of the ‘Fig Leaf’ Editions,” *Mountain Echo*, December 2, 1916, 1.
8. “Photographer Fredda Car Dies at 89,” *Valley Press*, December 2, 1992, 1:1, 2:2.
9. Ed Hill, personal interview with author.
10. Lisa Robinson, “Lily the Cat Lady,” in *Do You Know My Name* (Santa Cruz, CA: Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, 2016), 172–178.
11. Susan Hathaway, “Boulder Creek’s Cat Woman,” *San Jose Mercury, California Today*, May 1, 1977; Cynthia Robins, “The Cat Lady,” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 12, 1979, 1, 4.
12. “Some Saw Logs,” *Mountain Echo*, October 24, 1896, 3:4; Jan McGirk, “Lumbering with the Bull and Jerk Teams: ‘Mean Strength and Awkwardness,’” in *Redwood Logging and Conservation in the Santa Cruz Mountains—A Split History* (Santa Cruz, CA: Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, 2016), 61–80.

13. "Terrible Accident," *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 26, 1882, 2.
14. Will Clark to Annie Bennett, October 1878, Eleanor Fraser Collection, 2012-027-0103, San Lorenzo Valley Museum, Boulder Creek, CA.
15. Earle Snell, "Us Folks on the Film: A California Mountain Town That Has Gone Stark Movie Mad," *Sunset, the Pacific Monthly*, March 1918, 43-46; 2009-013-0001, San Lorenzo Valley Museum, Boulder Creek, CA.
16. "Motorist Bumps into Elephant; Both Afrighted," *San Jose Evening News*, May 1, 1922, 2.
17. Ibid.
18. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/12208289@No8/collections>.