

Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JUNE 2014 VOL. 10

SCHS Event: Tuesday June 24, 7:00 PM (Social Time, 6:30)

The Living New Deal

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento



The Tower Bridge, dedicated in 1935, was a New Deal project. Eugene Hepting Collection, Center for Sacramento History

In the depths of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised the American people a “New Deal.” Over the decade 1933-43, a constellation of federally sponsored programs put millions of jobless Americans back to work and helped to revive a moribund economy. The result was a rich landscape of public works across the nation, often of outstanding beauty, utility and craftsmanship.

Because these public works were rarely marked, the New Deal’s ongoing contribution to American life goes largely unseen. Given the scale and impact of the Roosevelt years across America, it seems inconceivable that no national register exists of what the New Deal built. The Living New Deal is making visible that enduring legacy to help preserve it.

The Living New Deal began as a book on the Works

Project Administration (WPA) in California but outgrew that intention as the extent of New Deal public works projects became clear. By about 2005, the project expanded to documenting California’s New Deal projects using an all volunteer staff. By 2007 the California Living New Deal Project was officially launched under the direction of Dr. Gray Brechin as Project Scholar and Professor Richard Walker as Principal Investigator. A partnership with the California Historical Society provided visibility around the state. In 2010 the Living New Deal was expended to the whole country, and paid staff positions grew accordingly. The program is currently hosted by the Department of Geography at the University of California, Berkeley. It is funded by a mix of public grants, private donations, and bequests.

Please join members and friends of the Sacramento County Historical Society on June 24 at 7 PM (location in headline) for a presentation by New Deal experts Dr. Gray Brechin and Harvey Smith as they explore the legacy of the New Deal in Sacramento and the Central Valley. Harvey and Gray will demonstrate how to use the Living New Deal website, map and archive as a resource, as well as share details on how you can contribute to this monumental effort. The scope of this project is astounding, and that alone makes this program worth attending. As always, free parking in the side and rear lots goes to the early arrivals. Street parking is also available and free. Snacks and social time start at 6:30. Guests are welcome!

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR JIM HENLEY

Saturday, June 14, 1:00 PM

Center for Sacramento History
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd, Sacramento, CA

REMINDER

SCHS will not meet in the months of July and August. Newsletters and programs will resume in September. Enjoy your summer!

A Man of History



Jim Henley relating Small Bites of Sacramento History (SBSH), 55 tasty YouTube local history videos. See link below. Image & videos, Center for Sacramento History

On May 12, 2012, a remarkable man—James E. Henley—passed away. Jim’s legacy in Sacramento will live long. Many of you knew him as the President of the Sacramento County Historical Society from 2000 to 2004. His focus during those years and, as editor of the *Sacramento History Journal*, was to improve the caliber of this organization’s publications. He brought to the job a remarkable understanding of history.

Jim’s leadership in the preservation of Sacramento’s past dated back to the 1960s. As director of the Sacramento City and County Museum (then located on the 2nd floor of Pioneer Hall) and through the Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission, he sought to collect and preserve at-risk local government records, photographs, and a broad array of Sacramento’s material culture, including paper ephemera, furniture, signage, textiles, television film footage, etc. He led efforts to establish what is now called the Center for Sacramento History—a wondrous collections facility for archives and artifacts.

In the 1960s and 70s, as central city buildings were being felled by bulldozers, Jim organized the first survey to record Sacramento’s Victorian architecture. His support of the American Association of University Women’s landmark book, *Vanishing Victorians*, helped to set Sacramento’s preservation movement in motion. He regularly hired student interns to assist with

projects, giving many their first assignment in what would later become life-long careers in history.

Jim had vision. With the Sacramento Trust for Historic Preservation and others, he fought hard to preserve the derelict city blocks on the city’s waterfront that would be placed on the National Register of Historic Places as Old Sacramento Historic District. He worked with Sacramento’s Redevelopment Agency staff to ensure the accuracy of the varied 19th century building façade restorations. Alongside the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Jim helped make the dream of the California State Railroad Museum a reality for Sacramento.

And, through his leadership and support of the Friends of the Sacramento City and County Museum, a permanent museum for the community was established in the reconstructed City Hall and Waterworks building in Old Sacramento. He also lent his support for the restoration, ongoing maintenance, and interpretation of the Old City Cemetery, recognizing its historic value to Sacramento.

Jim had a gift for storytelling. He captivated both professional audiences and friends alike with his breadth of knowledge and passion for history. His curiosity was boundless. He could and often did read a book a day. His adept storytelling remains in the books and articles he wrote or co-authored, including *The City of the Plain: Sacramento in the Nineteenth Century*; *Sacramento: Gold Rush Legacy, Metropolitan Destiny*; and in numerous *Sacramento History Journal* articles.

Jim’s knowledge, creativity, leadership, understanding of history and technology, and his rare ability to apply them to a multiplicity of projects, programs and situations has served this community, his family and his friends well. He will not be forgotten.

We will miss him.

-Mary A. Helmich, Past President, Sacramento County Historical Society

SBSH link: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0B930D162D2D21B3>

Almarian William Decker

by Dan Winkelman

When we speak of the men who brought us electricity, one name is consistently overlooked: Almarian



Almarian Decker 1888

Decker. He solved the problem of creating an Alternating Current (AC) system that could power both electric lights and motors across long distances.

Decker was born in Turnbull County Ohio in 1852. His early works included several patents in electroplating and telegraph equipment. He worked on telegraph and telephone systems in Cleveland before developing AC

powered arc-lighting systems for the Brush Electric Company.

In 1891 Decker moved his family to California, whose climate he hoped would help relieve his tuberculosis. In Sierra Madre Decker became an engineer for the new San Antonio Hydroelectric Powerhouse, and the Mount Lowe Inclined Railway.

New and exciting hydroelectric power plants were being constructed in Southern California that brought arc lighting to cities. The San Antonio River canyon provided high water flow and it became Decker's final project, Mill Creek #1.

Decker insisted to General Electric that three-phase electric generators would provide far superior power to those that could only create light. Three-phase systems use less conductor material to transmit electrical power and are commonly used for electrical grids now. Three-phase current will start an AC motor; one phase current will not. Decker's plan utilized Tesla AC and induction motor concepts, as well as German design transmission systems. The plans were reviewed by GE engineers who concluded that running two generators in parallel would not work. The Redlands Light and Power Company rejected the alterations and required GE to manufacture equipment for Decker. Ironically, the final transmission system was designed by Dr. Louis Bell following Decker's plans. The Decker/Bell three-phase system was first used at Redlands in 1892.



Present-day view of Mill Creek #1 hydroelectric plant in Redlands, California.

While the Chicago World's Fair was lighted by thousands of light bulbs driven by Tesla-designed single-phase AC generators, Decker was only a month away from the creation of a three-phase 50 cycle AC electrical system for commercial use at Mill Creek #1. The Redlands Light and Power Company would supply electricity to the compressors of the Union Ice Company and to a city railway company.

Although Decker died in 1893, three-phase design generators (photo below) were used by GE for the Folsom Powerhouse that was completed in 1895. The



Folsom Powerhouse California State Parks

Folsom Powerhouse was the first to use three-phase 60 cycle AC that is the United States standard today. Westinghouse would also use the Decker/Bell GE system to transmit AC from Niagara Falls to Buffalo New York 1 1/2 years later.

SCHS Treasurer Dan Winkelman is a retired State Parks Ranger and a longtime docent at the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park. The Powerhouse docents are working on a book about the pioneers in the history of electricity.

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Please deliver by June 11, 2014

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Out & ABOUT

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
Ongoing	Tues-Sat 10-5 Sun. 12-5	California Indians: Making a Difference Huge tribal input exhibit shows the unique contributions of the state's Native peoples through artifacts, art, oral histories, video stations and an interactive Native language kiosk. Over 400 artifacts —many never publicly viewed before—on display. Two adults for \$10 museum promo thru July 31.	California Museum 1020 O Street, Sacramento Archives Plaza light rail stop 916-653-7524 Californiamuseum.org
Saturdays June 21, July 19, Aug 16, Sept 20	5:30-8 PM	Rich History & Dirty Little Secrets Downtown Sacramento Partnership's Old Sac Speakeasy Tours fill up quickly so mark your calendars & reserve ahead June 21 tix on sale here . Must be 21 or older. \$10	Starts at River City Saloon 916 2nd St., Old Sacramento Reserve here too: 916-442-8575 Or email dsp@downtownsac.org
Thursday June 26	10 AM	The Worlds of Bernice Bing Riding the waves of American history, this documentary explores the life and art of an abstract expressionist painter, beat-era existentialist, buddhist, feminist, activist, and Chinese-American lesbian. Museum entry fee.	Crocker Art Museum 216 O Street, Sacramento 916-808-1178 crockerartmuseum.org
June 28 thru August 30	10-6 daily 10-9 on 3rd Thurs	Selling the Dream: Sacramento's Early Car Dealers Architectural impact of buildings, effects of print, TV media and other marketing media, and dealers and families who sold the cars. Interactive Make Your Own Ad Component.	California Auto Museum 2200 Front Street, Sacramento 916-320-9573 calautomuseum.org