

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH 2012, NO. 3

## A Night at the Zanzibar

SCHS Annual Awards Dinner & Fundraiser  
Tuesday, March 27, 2012, 6 PM  
Dante Club, 2330 Fair Oaks Blvd., Sacramento

### Program

6:00 to 6:30 Check-in, cocktails, view video loop of Zanzibar photos with some performer audio

6:30 to 7:30 Dinner served

7:30-8:15 Awards presentation

8:15 to 9 Club Zanzibar slide presentation

9:00 to 10:30 Harley White Orchestra

It is the time of year when the Sacramento County Historical Society acknowledges outstanding contributions to history made over the past year. We have a very deserving group of awardees this year, as seen in the adjacent text box. We believe we have put together what may be our most comprehensive program to celebrate their achievements. It promises to be a most entertaining evening.

Time is short, but you can still order online at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/219781>. Or you can try mailing the order form in last month's newsletter (online- see back page) at your post office today. Orders are needed by March 20.

## 2012 SCHS Awards Recipients

We are pleased to announce the following recipients of our annual Awards of Excellence.

### Education

The Old City Cemetery Committee, marking 25 years preserving the cemetery

### Preservation (Dual Award):

D & S Development, Maydestone Apartments  
Linda Whitney, preservation activism

### Special Achievements

#### History Volunteerism

Suzanne Hicklin, Old Sacramento Schoolhouse

#### Media Production

Nimbus Productions: Bill George, Brendan Compton, Chris Graves for the video, *The Hidden Wonder of the World: The Trans-continental Railroad from Sacramento to Donner Summit*

#### Preserving Area Music History

Dennis Newhall for the newly expanded Sacramento Rock and Radio Museum

## Uncovering the Story of the Zanzibar

By Maryellen Burns



Photo: Keith Burns collection

Keith Burns is a collector of history. Most days find him searching through the detritus of other people's lives - rummaging through musty boxes at estate auctions, thrift stores, flea and antique markets. Over the years he has purchased over 100,000 books and a million pieces of ephemera, art, and relics. Like antique sleuth Lovejoy, in the picaresque novels of Jonathon Gash, he has an almost supernatural talent for recognizing the exceptional.

It was on just such a foray at a local auction house that he discovered a half dozen boxes from the estate of Louise Jackson, a name he didn't recognize.

Most of the box was sealed but he could see a few photographs of a multiracial audience at a nightspot. Intuiting a find of great importance he bid; succeeding in acquiring what proved to be a treasure trove of more than a hundred original photos, advertisements, and posters of a nearly forgotten part of Sacramento History - the Club Zanzibar. He called friend Clarence Caesar, a local historian and specialist on local African American history to help him uncover more of the story.

Originally the Zanzibar Café, on the corner of 6th and M Streets, it became the Club Zanzibar after obtaining

liquor license in 1942. (More details and a broader view of the West End and the Zanzibar's history can be seen in the adjacent article by William Burg.)



Interracial audience at the Club Zanzibar, c. 1948-52  
Photo: Keith Burns

During the almost decade the Zanzibar was open, it boasted one of Sacramento's first interracial clientele, fine dining, many say the best fried chicken in town, and some of the best entertainment.

The Club Zanzibar closed in 1949 after state liquor control officials revoked the club's liquor license amid rumors of prostitution. Many African Americans, who lived in the area at the time, disputed the allegations.

"Despite its controversial demise", Caesar says, "the social and cultural impact of the Club Zanzibar remains an intriguing story within the larger cultural and ethnic history of Sacramento".

Keith Burns and Clarence Caesar will share the Zanzibar story at our annual dinner, accompanied by a visual array of a hundred plus photos, advertisements and other artifacts, and the Harley White Orchestra.



All-Girl bands toured in the 1940s. Photo: Keith Burns

Production Notes from the President's Desk  
by Patricia Turse

To help our institutional subscribers we are now numbering our newsletter issues with each year starting at number 1 in January. I forgot to number the two prior issues, but this is no. 3.

So what happened to the "golden" paper used for these Golden Nuggets? Due to constant problems with postal machines shredding the 20-pound "ivory" stock we used for many years, we switched to 24-pound stock, which comes in limited colors.

We are very close on two different publications, but life keeps getting in the way. The booklet on Sacramento in the Progressive Era should go to the designer in April and be out some time after that. The major publication on the railroad shops needs only some final trimming edits, but is in an editorial health-related hiatus. The Publications Committee is trying to find a way to speed up the process. If you have writing and/or editing experience, a background or strong interest in history, and would like to explore helping out, let us hear from you.

**Coming April 24, 7PM**  
**From Burlesque to B Street:**  
**The History of Sacramento Theater**  
 Panel Presentation  
 featuring  
**Melanie Smith, James Wheatley & Ray Tatar**  
 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Bldg.  
 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**GOLDEN NUGGETS**

Published at least bimonthly, September to June  
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## Sacramento's Bourbon Street

By William Burg

In the 1940s, Sacramento's West End was filled with the sounds of jazz. Based around M Street (renamed Capitol Avenue by 1940), the neighborhood was radically changed by the start of World War II, the forced relocation of Sacramento's thousands of Japanese Americans to internment camps, and a migration of African Americans to Sacramento. Many of these migrants came from the Southern states for jobs in Sacramento's railroad shops and canneries, or at nearby airfields and Army bases. Some purchased businesses from the departing Japanese, opening a variety of businesses, but the best known were the jazz clubs. These clubs became so popular they crossed racial barriers and made Sacramento a stop on the touring circuit for the greatest jazz musicians of the 20th century.

Sacramento already had jazz clubs dating back to the ragtime era. Ancil Hoffman's saloons and restaurants dominated K Street through the 1920s, and Japantown had its own jazz bands and venues dominated by the "Night Hawks" and the M Street Café. The African American owned Eureka Club on 4th and K was considered one of the biggest nightclubs in northern California, reputable enough for inclusion in a Sacramento guidebook aimed at tourists attending the 1939 California Centennial. But racial lines were difficult to cross in Sacramento, even if segregation was "de facto," more by tradition than force of law. New arrivals from the South (where segregation was statute law) felt less restricted, and the 1940s saw Sacramento's first Black doctors, morticians, policemen, attorneys and other professionals—and nightclub owners.

Louise and Isaac Anderson and William "Nitz" Jackson purchased a liquor store from a Japanese owner in 1942, and established the Club Zanzibar at 530 Capitol. The Zanzibar featured touring musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington. Local musicians like Vincent "Ted" Thompson (who owned the nearby Thompson Mortuary) also graced the Zanzibar's stage. Across the street from the Zanzibar, the Mo-Mo Club, owned by brothers Alex and Hovey Moore, featured both dancers and musicians. Other clubs included the Congo Club, at 329 Capitol, the Cotton Club at 6th and J, and the Clayton Club at 1126 7th Street, beneath the Marshall Hotel (originally the Hotel Clayton.) The Clayton featured musicians like The Treniers, Cab Calloway, and comedian/tap dancer Gene Bell. These clubs became a major part of Sacramento's live music scene, which included venues like Buddy Baer's, The Tropics, and the Grand Ballroom at the Senator Hotel. Acts that outgrew the local jazz clubs played bigger shows at the Memorial Auditorium.

The widespread appeal of swing and bebop jazz drew crowds that trampled Sacramento's color line under dancing feet. While Sacramento's small population could not match the big-city jazz scenes of Los Angeles or San Francisco, strong attendance at West End clubs put Sacramento on the touring circuit of most major acts. In addition to regular weekend shows, the Zanzibar was best known for its informal Sunday afternoon jam sessions, free-form experiments that drew performers like Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie.

The success of the Zanzibar also brought negative attention. Challenges to Sacramento's long-held color line met strong resistance from established white interests. Based on rumors of prostitution at the Zanzibar, state liquor officials revoked its liquor license in 1949, effectively closing the club. Some saw the revocation as retaliation by white businessmen jealous of the Zanzibar's success. Nitz Jackson moved to southern California after the closure of the Zanzibar. The Andersons kept a nearby liquor store, A&J Liquor, relocating to Stockton Boulevard when the West End was redeveloped in the 1950s.

The redevelopment of Capitol Mall meant the end of the West End jazz clubs. Sacramento's Chamber of Commerce had promoted conversion of M Street from a mixed-use immigrant neighborhood into a ceremonial boulevard since 1909, but federal funds for acquisition and demolition were not available until the 1950s. Changes to redevelopment law in 1954 eliminated the need to provide replacement housing for the 10,000 Sacramentans who lived in the redevelopment zone. A media campaign urged redevelopment of the West End, and its bustling clubs were characterized as "blight" by those seeking to expand Sacramento's central business district. By the 1960s, M Street was transformed into the placid Capitol Mall we know today, and erased clubs like the Zanzibar and the Mo-Mo from downtown Sacramento and public memory. Today, as downtown Sacramento works to re-establish itself as a destination for music and nightlife, the stories of Sacramento's jazz legacy can be shared and celebrated after decades of silence.



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Please deliver by March 16 , 2012

See this newsletter in color at the Newsletters link on our web pages above.

## OUT & ABOUT

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
Thursday March 22	7 PM lecture 6 PM donor reception	<b>The Time is Now: The Civic Life of Sacramento's Nathaniel Colley</b> , featuring a talk and book signing by UC Berkeley Professor of History Dr. Mark Brilliant. ADVANCE TICKET SALES ONLY and limited seating, \$15 or \$100/donor package	The Center for Sacramento History 551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd, Sacramento 916-808-7072 <a href="http://cityofsacramento.org/ccl/history/exhibits/speakers.asp">cityofsacramento.org/ccl/history/exhibits/speakers.asp</a>
Saturday March 24	4 PM - 8 PM	<b>Twilight Open Cockpit</b> Explore, climb into or imagine what it would be like to soar through the skies in several of the aircraft on the ramp.	Aerospace Museum of California 3200 Freedom Park Dr. North Highlands 916-643-3192
Wednesday March 28	6:30 PM - 8 PM	<b>The Big Tomato.</b> Historian William Burg tells how Sacramento's industrial and transportation facilities transformed the agricultural bounty of the Sacramento Valley into products that could be shipped and sold around the world. Free.	Sacramento Natural Foods Co-Op 1914 Alhambra Boulevard, Sacramento <a href="http://sacfoodcoop.com">sacfoodcoop.com</a>
Saturday March 31 through May 13	11 AM-4 PM Tues-Sun	<b>California and the Civil War</b> Exhibit presented by Richard Hurley and TJ Meekins, authors of the novel, <i>Queen of the Northern Mines</i> .	Folsom History Museum 823 Sutter St., Folsom 916-985-2707 <a href="http://folsomhistorymuseum.org">folsomhistorymuseum.org</a>
Ongoing Thru Aug. 5	10-5 Mon-Sat 12-5 Sun	<b>Tuskegee Airmen: Journey to Flight</b> Exhibit celebrating the gallant African American men and women who broke barriers as aviation heroes and champions of equality. Sponsored by the California Legislative Black Caucus and initially developed by the California African American Museum.	California Museum 1020 O Street, Sacramento 916-653-7524 <a href="http://californiamuseum.org">californiamuseum.org</a>