

# Golden Nuggets

May 2009

SCHS Presents

Gary Kurutz

## Knights of the Lash

→ Tuesday, May 19, 2009, 7:00 PM ←

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



Mountain Stage Rey Britton & Company, lithographer

The Sacramento County Historical Society is pleased to present a lecture by California State Library Director of Special Collections, Gary Kurutz, highlighting the fascinating characters who served as California stagecoach drivers. An accomplished writer and editor and an excellent speaker, Kurutz edited and introduced *Knights of the Lash, Stagecoach Stories of Benjamin C. Truman* (San Francisco Book Club, limited edition) in 2005. This talk, originally intended as the grand finale of State Parks' statewide celebration of Stagecoach Days this past fall, had to be rescheduled. We are fortunate to have a second chance to attend what is certain to be a very entertaining program. Please note that it will be held on the **third** Tuesday in May. Don't miss it!

Come early for off-street parking behind the building, but there is ample free parking along Elvas Boulevard. For complete directions, see

[www.ssvms.org/directions.asp](http://www.ssvms.org/directions.asp).

## Hank Monk's Last Ride

From Helen Wilmans' *Search for Freedom*

Contributed by Pat Turse

"Poor, splendid Hank Monk was the prince of stage drivers. For twenty years he drove every day over the Sierra Nevada Range. But one day he was sick; he could not go. Presently he became delirious and in his burning fever he was on the stage box again talking to his old friends, the horses.



Hank Monk

Steady now, boys; you know this slide as well as I do; go slow. What's the matter with the light? Its gettin' dark long before it ought to! Steady, boys; steady! He was now making strong movements with his foot. Then he rested as if in despair, and with a voice so truly tragic it started the hair on the heads of those about him he said, "I'm on the down grade and can't reach the brake."

"These were his last words, and they were spoken as if the responsibility of lives was resting on him, and he was powerless to help. The responsibility of lives had been resting on him for many years, and he had not ceased to feel it and to be true to it.

"Where is the monument for these staunch souls who have never flinched in the face of duty? Where but just where it ought to be, locked in the hearts of a thousand nameless ones who owe so much to them for the splendid patterns of humanity they have furnished."

Helen Wilmans, whose life I hope to chronicle, lived in the area of Clear Lake, California in the 1860s & 1870s. Hank Monk died of pneumonia in 1883. -PT

*Sacramento and the Catholic Church  
Shaping a Capital City*  
By Steven M. Avella

Review by Dylan J. McDonald  
Archivist, Sacramento Archives & Museum Collection Center



Book jacket image, *Sacramento: Early Spring*, painting by Steve Memering, courtesy Smith Gallery.

In the last few years, no one has more ably chronicled Sacramento's past than Steve Avella. The Marquette University professor wrote two Arcadia Publishing titles, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* and *The Good Life: Sacramento's Consumer Culture*, in 2003 and 2008 respectively. The publications received accolades and set the stage for his latest release, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church: Shaping a Capital City* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2008). Here, Avella explores what is often overlooked by other historians, namely the role religion has played in shaping and sustaining urban communities. Rarely does a Sacramento-centered work come along that is so timely and well-documented. It is a must read for all students of Sacramento history.

The book examines the interplay and the building of an urban agenda between Sacramento's political, economic, and cultural powers and the Roman Catholic Church's ordained and lay membership. Avella selected the Catholic faith for his study because he is a practitioner himself (in fact he is an ordained priest) and therefore familiar with the denomination. In Sacramento, the Church has had an institutional breadth of operations (schools, medical centers, and orphanages with numerous full-time religious workers), allowing for an in-depth study. Readers should not conclude that

this is a history of the Diocese of Sacramento; for that they can turn to Avella's *Diocese of Sacramento: A Journey of Faith*. Rather, this book selects Sacramento as a case study in the development of religion in a western American city.

Each of the nine chapters generally follows a chronology, beginning with the history of a topic, then moves between a broad national perspective to how the issue evolved in Sacramento (refer to chapters four, five, and six in particular). This provides crucial context for readers, aiding those without a background in the history of Sacramento or Catholicism to easily understand the narrative. Perhaps just as important, the prose is enjoyable reading.

Religion placed second to commerce in Sacramento. Avella notes that for its survival, and for religion to have a place of importance in this diverse and secular city, it had to adapt to the civic agenda. The book details the attempts of Catholics to adjust, including assimilating Irish into society to propel the Church forward, and erecting a cathedral—the city's largest religious edifice—with help from Sacramentans of diverse backgrounds. Avella aptly describes the internal struggle to provide ethnic parishes for the faithful of German, Italian, Portuguese, and Mexican descent amidst the greater community's expectation of Americanization. Catholic workers and lay persons resolutely stepped in to fill community needs for education, health care, day care, orphanages, and homeless services.

Avella pushes his readers to look deeply into how the faith became a key player in the urban agenda. First, the location of Catholic places of worship served as evidence of Sacramento's resurrection from past trials by fires and floods. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament's placement at 11<sup>th</sup> and K Streets, near the recently completed Capitol Building, proved that the city was no longer a backwater. It provided citizens with an architecture that all could celebrate. The Church was also a willing partner to help support the city's growing tourism trade. While city leaders worked to attract tourists to the refurbished Sutter's Fort, the Diocese reoriented the new Saint

Francis Church at 26<sup>th</sup> and K Streets to face the fort and built its façade to imitate the era’s popular California Mission Revival style. Second, Avella recounts the critical role Catholics played in serving as a clearinghouse for Spanish-speakers interacting with city and county authorities in the 1920s, as well as in the 1960s fight for farmworker justice. Finally, the dramatic showdown between the homeless advocates at Loaves & Fishes and the Sacramento City Council in the late 1990s is another example where lay members’ religious convictions put them at odds with city leaders. As Avella states, the issue of homelessness is bound to explode again—and it has.

Meticulously researched, Avella’s work took him to archives throughout California, across the country and even a few overseas. His penchant for detail is apparent in the narrative, which is masterfully crafted.

There are a few minor criticisms. As is so often true of academic presses, the story begs for more illustrative graphics and photographs. The photographs that do appear are often placed with text that does not relate to images, or they do not fit the timeframe covered in the chapter. The book does not discuss the Catholic cemeteries in the city, something oddly missing given the breadth of this study and that burying the dead is both a civic and religious concern. The section about the Sisters of Mercy’s hospital efforts could have been expanded and brought up to date, considering the importance of their work in the city and the current state of the health care industry. Still these minor concerns in no way detract from the overall thesis of the book.

This volume is long overdue, especially for a city whose very name bears significant religious connotations. Avella’s poignant *Sacramento and the Catholic Church: Shaping a Capital City* should do much to bring an honest and “proper understanding of the role of religion in public life”, and how that role played and continues to play out in Sacramento. Dylan McDonald assisted Steven Avella with his SAMCC research and was recognized in the Acknowledgements. See page 4 for details on the June 12 exhibit opening, book signing, and reception for Steve Avella at SAMCC. -Editor

### Photo Highlights from Awards Night

Photos by Tom Herzog and others as shown  
A last look at the Awards Night presentations...



Above: Suzanne Hicklin, center, Old Sacramento Schoolhouse, introduces Education Award recipient, Diana Vizzard. SCHS President William Burg looks on with award. Photo: Dale Hankin



From left: Tom Hammer, Burnett Miller, and current Sacramento Trust for Historic Preservation President, Johan Otto, accepting Preservation Award, Bill Burg.



Publications Award recipients from left: Phillip Choy, author, Jeanie Lee, Karun and Douglas Yee, Chinese American Council of Sacramento, accepting award for *Canton Footprints*, and Bill Burg. Photo: K. Louie



Left: Mary Otis accepts a Special Achievement Award from SCHS president Bill Burg, as some of the 90 guests listen attentively.

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## Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
<b>MAY</b> 17 Sunday	10 AM to 5 PM	<b>Pacific Rim Street Festival</b> Enjoy programs, entertainment, art and food of diverse Pacific Rim cultures at this 17th annual event. Fun for all ages. Hats & Head-dresses theme should add to the color.	Old Sacramento & Downtown Plaza K St. from Front to 7th Sts. & thereabouts <a href="http://pacificrimstreetfest.com">http://pacificrimstreetfest.com</a>
<b>JUNE</b> 5 Friday	6 PM to 9 PM	<b>Riverboat Casino Night</b> An evening of 1850s-style gambling and entertainment. Food & no-host bar; historical attire. Must be at least age 21. Benefit for exhibits and programs at Historic Old Sacramento Foundation/Sacramento History Museum. \$45 members, \$50 non-members.	Delta King Riverboat, Old Sacramento For advance tickets, call 916-264-7059 OR Visit Sacramento History Museum, 101 I St., Old Sacramento, OR Email <a href="mailto:LMEYERS@cityofsacramento.org">LMEYERS@cityofsacramento.org</a>
12 Friday	7 PM	<b>Opening Reception</b> City of God, City of Man photo exhibit and book signing. The exhibit is drawn from Steven Avella's recently released book on the Catholic Church and the shaping of Sacramento, reviewed on pages 2-3. Free!	Sacramento Archives & Museum Collection Center 551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd., Sacramento 916-264-7072
23 Tuesday	7 PM	<b>Rock and Radio Museum Tour &amp; Slide Talk</b> Join SCHS at the site of Sacramento's old Oasis Ballroom, where some of the finest collection of area R&R memorabilia is housed. This will be quite a finale to our program year. Come on out and rock on, fellow boomers!	907 20th Street, Sacramento SCHS message phone: 916-443-6265 <a href="http://www.sachistoricalociety.org">www.sachistoricalociety.org</a>