

Golden Nuggets



JUNE 2007

SCHS Presents

Underground Sacramento:

Members-Only Walking Tour

Tuesday, June 26, 6:00-8:00 PM

California State Railroad Museum-West Entry
6:00-Doors Open; 6:30 slides & intro; 7:00 PM Tour

There is a city beneath parts of downtown Sacramento! Sixty SCHS members will literally walk back in time and see parts of that city at a special tour led by the CSRM's Paul Hammond on June 26th. You'll be surrounded by historic sidewalks, doors, and building remnants that stood above-ground before the city's business district was raised ten to twelve feet in the 1860s due to repeated flooding. It will be a rare glimpse of the 13-year period when the city was raised in a slow and sometimes chaotic process.

The tour is limited to the first 60 SCHS members who reserve a space by phoning 916-264-7073 between June 20th and June 25th (or when the



Underground tours offered as part of Gold Rush Days 2006 were very popular. Call between June 20th and 25th to join the SCHS tour.

Photo: HOSF

tour is filled.) Earlier calls will be ignored. Leave your name and phone number so we can contact you if needed. You must be able to climb stairs and walk over some uneven terrain unassisted, and be comfortable in the damp, closed space below the BF Hastings building. Park at the I St. city lot under the freeway; limited spaces may also be available behind the railroad museum.

The Historic Old Sacramento Foundation and the Old Sacramento Living History Association are planning to offer underground tours for the public on a regular basis as soon as this fall, and some HOSF staff will help with our tour. Do join us!

Walter Gray's Life-Long Voyage of Inquiry

By Jim Henley & Bill Gaylord

It's difficult to write just a few words about a guy as diverse and universally admired as Walter P. Gray, III, a former president of SCHS, who died on May 8, after a yearlong battle with liver cancer.

We offer our condolences to his wife of 28 years, Mary Helmich, SCHS immediate past president. But beyond that, we'd like to share with our members one of Walter's most defining qualities: his intense intellectual curiosity. How ingredients were organized on a product label or how a railroad operated—from its management to its right-of-way maintenance crews—fascinated him equally.

He subjected his disease to the same level of scrutiny as he treated other events in his life, describing his cancer treatments in emails to friends and colleagues with the wry good humor for which he was also known. The following excerpt from one of his email messages exemplifies his observant eye and unflinching wit.

The infusion suite at Sutter Cancer Center is decorated for Halloween with festoons of orange and black garland, various depictions of ghosts, goblins, bats and skeletons taped to the walls, numerous jack o' lanterns, and festive Halloween-themed smocks on most of the staff. There is a very good assortment of candy available. Surprisingly, for a place that handles a lot of blood, they don't seem to do much with vampires. Go figure.

He chose to be upbeat to the end, according to close friends and family members who were with him in his last days at Sutter Memorial Hospital.

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Walter's interest in railroads predated the development of the Railroad Museum. In 1972, the Sacramento Trust for Historic Preservation was promoting the vision of a railroad museum in Sacramento. Advised to develop a model of how a museum could be incorporated into Old Sacramento, the Trust sought help from the Sacramento Model Railroad Club. One of the club's members was Walter, who became actively involved in the project that led to the decision to build the California State Railroad Museum. This experience not only gave Walter early exposure to the developing museum, it allowed him to add his vision to the project at its inception. His insights surely helped launch the fledgling museum toward the lofty position it soon occupied among similar institutions.

Walter was only 54, but in his lifetime had accomplished more than many do in a much longer span. He served as Director of the State Railroad Museum, was California State Archivist, and was most recently Chief of Archaeology, History and Museums with California State Parks. It is fitting that this vital Renaissance man's passing is to be honored with a public Celebration of Life. It will be held at the California State Railroad Museum on Saturday, June 2nd from 6:00 to 9:00 PM.



Walt Gray presenting the Preservation Award to the California State Railroad Museum, Sacramento Southern Railroad program at the SCHS Awards Dinner on March 27. Photo by BranDee Bruce

See You in September!

We're off for a two-month break from both monthly meetings and this newsletter. Make good history with your time this summer.

The Solons Strike Out Baseball Ends in Sacramento

By Alan O'Connor

A major high point for the Sacramento Solons of the 1950s occurred when the Solons broke the "color barrier" with former Negro League players Marvin Williams at second base and pitcher Walter McCoy. However the team's record during the fifties was considerably less memorable. They finished last four times and never climbed any higher than fourth.

While the Solons as a team were unremarkable, there were several notable players during the decade. One of these was

Joe Gordon, who from 1951-1952 was one of the last player-managers in baseball. Playing second base for the Solons, he was the league home run and RBI champion in 1951. This was no surprise, as Gordon had just ended a stellar major league career. He



played second base for the New York Yankees from 1938-1943 and in 1946, and for the Cleveland Indians from 1947-1950. A nine time all-star, he was also the 1942 American League Most Valuable Player. He appeared in the World Series six times with his teams winning five of the six. Gordon later became a color announcer for the 1974 Solons and was a very popular baseball figure in Sacramento.

Nippy Jones played first and second base for the Sacramento Solons in 1943. He moved on to the majors, where he played for the St. Louis Cardinals from 1946—when the Cardinals won the World Series—through 1951. After spending part of the 1952 season with the Phillies, he returned to the Solons from 1953 through 1957 and maintained a .299 batting average. He moved back to the majors with the Milwaukee Braves in time for a memorable 1957 World Series highlighted by the still-discussed "shoe polish incident". In the bottom of the 10th inning of the fourth game with the Braves trailing the New York Yankees 5-4, it appeared Jones had avoided a wild pitch. But after pointing to a polish smudge on the ball, he was awarded first

base. The Braves rallied for three runs to win the game and went on to win the World Series as well. Jones settled in Sacramento after his baseball career ended.

Elk Grove High School's Richie Myers was the Solons starting shortstop in the early 1950s. A great fielder said to have one of the best arms in baseball, Myers finished his PCL career as a member of the 1956 PCL Champion Los Angeles Angels and played briefly with the 1956 Chicago Cubs.



Roger Osenbaugh played baseball at McClatchy High School and at Stanford. While there was no formal baseball draft in 1952 when he graduated, he received six offers from major league teams. He turned them all down and accepted an offer from the Solons. The Solons had offered more money but Osenbaugh was born and raised in Sacramento, and playing for the Solons had been a childhood dream. As a kid growing up in Sacramento Roger fell in love with the late 1930s and early 1940s Solons, especially the 1942 PCL Championship club managed by Pepper Martin and led to victory by Tony Freitas. Later when pitching against the Padres in the 1950s, Roger had to face one of his early Solon heroes, Lou Vezelich, he was quite "staggered" by it. Osenbaugh was a starting pitcher for the Solons from 1952 to 1959.

Bud Watkins, who had played baseball at the College of the Pacific, became a regular pitcher for the Solons from 1955 through 1958. Watkins split the 1959 season with the Vancouver Mounties and the Phoenix Giants, but returned to the Solons in 1960. During his Solon career, Watkins was a fan favorite. He remained in Sacramento for many years after retiring.



Cuno Barragan was a catcher on the 1949 state champion Sacramento High School team and later at Sacramento Junior College. He went on to catch for the Solons in from 1957 to 1960. After hitting .318 and throwing out 24 runners attempting to steal in 1960, he was drafted by the

Chicago Cubs for the 1961 season. In his first game as Cub, Barragan hit a home run at Wrigley Field. After the 1963 season he retired and returned to Sacramento.

Many people consider 1957 to be the last true year of the old PCL, and it was indeed the beginning of the end for the Solons. With the coming of the San Francisco Giants in 1958, Sacramento became part of a smaller market league, and attendance continued to drop off. Financial losses mounted, and the franchise left Sacramento in 1961 to become the Honolulu Islanders. From 1961 through 1973 there was no professional baseball in Sacramento. In 1964, Edmonds Field was demolished, leaving Sacramento without a team or a ball park.

In 1974 the Pacific Coast League's Eugene Emeralds moved from Oregon to Sacramento and became the Sacramento Solons. The team established a working agreement with the Milwaukee Brewers and hired Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Lemon as the manager. The new Solons played at Hughes Stadium on the Sacramento City College campus. The Hughes Stadium ballpark had a serious drawback: the 40 foot high left field fence was only 251 feet from home plate. Later measurements determined it was actually just 232 feet away! Sacramentan Bill McNulty's record 55 home runs in 1974 became an "asterisk record" because of the short fence.

Attendance was very good that year, but the "home run derby" atmosphere—and another last place finish in 1975—began to make sustaining a team in Sacramento unlikely. Many of the Solons' better players either moved up or moved on, and the quality of play declined. Attendance began to drop off. Deeming Hughes Stadium a poor place to develop young players, the Brewers ended their agreement with the Solons. In 1976 the Solons established a working agreement with the Texas Rangers, but drastically dropping attendance led the team to move to San Jose after the season. Sacramento was without professional baseball until the arrival of the Rivercats in 2000. But the Rivercats will have to be a subject for future baseball historians. This concludes Alan's series of articles on Sacramento baseball history from its Gold Rush baseball club beginnings to what just seemed like its demise in 1976. If you want to know more, watch for his book. -Editor

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GOLDEN NUGGETS

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Please deliver by June 2, 2007!

Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
June 20 Wed	1:00 PM Museum open daily; Da Vinci Experience exhibit closes August 19th	McClellan AFB Talk & Da Vinci Exhibit SCHS member Ray Oliver's presentation includes McClellan's 50th anniversary video. Talk sponsored by Rancho del Paso Historical Society and open to all. Later, tour the new Aerospace Museum of California and the Da Vinci Experience exhibit. Seniors & students, \$12; adults \$18; kids 6 and under free.	Aerospace Museum of California Freedom Park Drive, off Watt Ave 916-643-3192 http://aerospacemuseumofcalifornia.org [Note the lack of "www" - Editor]
26 Tuesday	6:00 PM gather 6:30 slide show 7:00 tour	Sacramento Underground Tour Members only. Reservations required; limited to first 60 members who confirm between June 20 and 25. Not suitable for all. See page 1 for more details.	California State Railroad Museum 111 I Street, Old Sacramento Reserve by phone at 916-264-7073 between June 20 and June 25th.
July 7 Saturday	10:00 AM	Old Sacramento City Cemetery History Tour SCHS Board Member, photographer, and general good fellow, Doctor Bob LaPerrière, presents his Medicine Bag tour highlighting medical tales behind the tombstones. Free - but donations appreciated. Saturday parking in lot opposite 10th & Broadway entry.	Old City Cemetery 10th & Broadway, Sacramento 916-448-0811 www.oldcitycemetery.com