

Golden Nuggets

June 2006

Courtesy M. Hatano



Photo: J. Kosumoto, December 1924

Japanese Railroad Builders in America
Tuesday, June 27, 7:00 PM
Sacramento Area Museum Collections Center

California State Railroad Museum docent Mas Hatano has spent years researching the still largely unknown subject of Japanese railroad builders in America. A retired CalTrans engineering manager, Hatano has taught classes on this subject at various levels and is considered an expert. Please join us for what is sure to be an informative presentation. *This will be our last program until September.*

Your Voice Is Needed!

At the last Board of Directors' meeting for the Sacramento County Historical Society, we took an unusual action: the Board unanimously voted to oppose AB2782, as amended March 30, 2006. The bill proposed by Assembly member Dave Jones encourages the study and possible use of the 1849 Scene in Old Sacramento for a children's museum. We do not take issue with the concept of a children's museum, only its placement on the 1849 Scene.

Second only to Sutter's Fort, the 1849 Scene is the most important site in Sacramento's history of American settlement. It is the birth-

place of our city. Here the first ships from around the world arrived in the spring of 1849. Here the first canvas and wooden structures were located at what would become, within five years, California's capital city. Here Sacramento's first city offices were located in the City Hotel. Today the rich archaeological evidence of these first buildings remains buried here.

California State Parks acquired the property forty years ago to preserve and interpret this important history, and to protect the rich archaeological features that have survived from Sacramento's founding era. State Parks "temporarily" added fourteen feet of fill to protect the historic remnants. Although California State Parks has never been adequately funded to bring about this important project, that does not negate the values for which the 1849 Scene originally was acquired. The history remains, and State Parks' long-term plan for the site deserves to be carried out.

The Sacramento County Historical Society supports the proposal for a high quality children's museum in the Sacramento area. However, we respectfully disagree that the 1849 Scene in Old Sacramento State Historic Park -- part of the National Register District -- is an appropriate location. There are many potential sites for a children's museum, but only one place is the birthplace of Sacramento.

The Board of the Sacramento County Historical Society urges you, as a member and supporter of history, to write or talk to your City Council member and your representatives in the California legislature to amend the bill. Your voice could make a difference.

-Mary A. Helmich, President



Sacramento Immigrants, courtesy SAMCC

Sacramento, A Community of Immigrants by Rick Bettis

At our June 27th meeting we will be hearing from Mas Hatano about the contributions made by the Japanese in railroad building. Sacramento has always been a community of immigrants. The first recorded "aliens" to arrive here after the California Indians, were part of a Spanish expedition headed by Gabriel Moraga. In 1808, they reached the American River near Rancho Cordova. In 1821, a Russian Imperial Navy vessel sailed up the Sacramento to the mouth of the American River. Not long after, trapper Jedediah Smith's party camped on the American River in 1827 near what would become the site of Sacramento State University. John Sutter became the first "immigrant" to settle in 1839. And in 1848 and 1849, as James Holliday noted with his book title, *The World Rushed In* seeking gold.

Time Magazine reported Sacramento as being America's "Most Diverse City" in 2002. Of its residents, approximately 40 percent are non-Hispanic whites. The remainder represents not a melting pot, but a salad bowl of cultures and colors. Students in our schools speak more than 70 languages. Recently, somewhere between 15,000 (*Sacramento Bee* estimate) and 40,000 people (organizers' estimate) rallied at the Capitol in support of immigrant rights.

The contributions made by immigrants include: mining; railroad building; reclamation of the Delta; innovations by immigrant farmers; construction work; development and operation of businesses such as markets, laundries and res-

taurants, horticulture; and military service, including the famous 442nd Regiment of World War II. Immigrants continue to make major contributions in education, science, medicine and high technology

Immigrants have not always been treated with respect. In the past, a number of laws have been implemented to keep them out of the country and the work force, or to deprive them of rights allowed others. They have included:

- ◆ Chinese and Asian Exclusion Acts prohibiting citizenship, property ownership, and the right of return for Chinese, Japanese, and Asian Indians
- ◆ Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.
- ◆ Local covenants, conditions and restrictions (CCRs) that prohibited those of color from residing in some communities and caused segregation in schools.
- ◆ Proposition 187 in 1994 intended to bar illegal aliens, especially Latinos, from schools, medical care and other benefits.
- ◆ The actions of the eugenics proponents and to achieve "human betterment"

Today we speak of tolerance, acceptance and inclusion. Programs such as the California Museum's "Time of Remembrance" exhibit help to deepen our understanding of the experience of Japanese American internees of World War II. In response to local hate crimes, the Capital Unity Council was formed in 1999. It is planning a Capital Unity Center, an interactive learning and exhibition space highlighting the state's cultural history and diversity. We should recall both our successes and our failures. As George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Sacramento Immigrant Rights Rally photo from photo essay by Katie at www.indybay.org.



The Franklin Milkman

By Alan O'Connor

Lennie Backer, the "Franklin Milkman," was signed by the Sacramento Senators right out of high school. He played in the infield, primarily third base in the late 1920s and 1930s. When his father told him that he had to continue as a dairy farmer rather than as a ball player, Lennie negotiated a compromise by buying his father a milking machine.

He played so well that he put Senators management into a dilemma. He was a proven batsman, had a great arm, and fielded everything hit his way. He was "too good to be kept on a bench." However, despite his obvious talent, Lennie was still unable to break into the high caliber infield that included Earl Sheely at first base, Johnny Monroe at second, Ray French at shortstop, and Jimmy McLaughlin at third base.



The Milkman

"Farmed" out to the Twin Falls team of the Utah Idaho League, he led the league in batting with a .374 average. In 1928 he got his chance, took over at third base and became an integral part of the famous 1928 team which won the Pacific Coast League second half championship. The following years Lennie performed at a high level both with his glove and bat. His batting average was .334 in 1929 and .330 in 1930.

In the early 1930s, Lennie was a rising star with the Senators, attracting major league scouts from many teams. However, his career and his life almost ended on April 27, 1931, in a game against the San Francisco Seals at the old Recreation Park. A fast ball served up by "Wild Bill" Henderson hit him on the side of his head and fractured his skull. He lay unconscious for 48 hours and in the hospital for six weeks. When his teammates asked why he had not moved out of the way, Lennie explained that he had lost the ball in the big white letters of a

sign in center field. The 1931 baseball season was over for "The Milkman." While this incident put Backer's baseball career on hold, it launched that of future major league star, Stan Hack. Hack took over at 3rd base for the remainder of the 1931 season and joined the major league Chicago Cubs at the end of it.

Lennie recovered from the beaming in time for the 1932 season, and again became a steady performer for the Senators. He batted .313 in 1932 and .333 in 1933. Because of the beaming, scouts were wary and he never got the opportunity to move to the major leagues. In 1934 Backer was sold to the San Francisco Seals where he became teammates with Joe Marty and Joe DiMaggio. He retired from baseball after the 1938 season. Lennie returned to dairy farming in Franklin and later bought his own farm. He retired from the dairy business in 1967. Backer was elected to the La Salle Hall of Fame in 1972.

Editor's Notes

This month's newsletters were sent first class instead of bulk. It cost about a quarter more per piece to go first class. But we should all get this month's issue shortly after posting.

We've had a lot of problems with bulk delivery. My January newsletter arrived on the 4th of February. I still have not gotten my May newsletter, nor have several others. It's not fun to do a newsletter with volunteer writing, folding, labeling, and sorting for bulk distribution, and then have delivery be late or not at all. The bulk mailing facility says it's not their fault. My mail carrier supervisor says it's not the carriers' fault. Who is out there stealing these fascinating monthly epistles?

We have also had problems with our mailing list and member renewals as we transition to a new system and new officers handling these matters. We appreciate your patience as we sort through these difficulties. We hope to have things in better shape when we resume our newsletters in the fall. Finally, we are looking for help posting the Nuggets and other items on our website. If you have web page software experience, call 264-7072.

Sacramento County Historical Society
P.O. Box 160065
Sacramento, California 95816-0065
www.sachistoricalsociety.org

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GOLDEN NUGGETS
Pat Turse, Editorial & Layout
newsletter@sachistoricalsociety.org
Deadline: 20th of month

Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
June 27 Tues	7:00 PM	Mas Hatano, <i>The Japanese and Railroads in America</i> . Illustrated talk.	SAMCC, 501 Sequoia Pacific Boulevard, Sacramento, off I5 and Richards. Phone 916-264-7072
July 15 Sat	10:00-5:00	Pioneer Demonstration Days Costumed volunteers demonstrate pioneer crafts. Also, History Live interpreters daily thru Labor Day.	Sutter's Fort SHP 2701 L Street, Sacramento 916-445-4422.
July Wed, Sat, Sun thru Sept. 30	11:00 AM	Old Sacramento Historical Walking Tours . Costumed volunteers portraying colorful characters from Sacramento's past lead 1-hour tours, \$5-7.	Old Sacramento Visitor Center, 1004 Second Street. Phone 916-445-3301 for reservations.
August 18 Fri	5:00-11:00 PM	Winters Earthquake Street Festival Fifteenth annual celebration of Winters quake of 1892. Street fair, food, crafts, farmers' market, and street dancing.	Main Street, Winters. Phone 530-795-2329 for more information.