

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JANUARY 2012

SCHS Presents

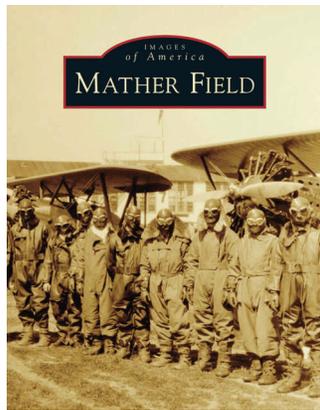
## James Scott and Tom Tolley: Images of America, Mather Field Tuesday, January 24, 7:00 PM

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Avenue, Sacramento

Join us on January 24th at 7:00 pm, as authors James Scott and Tom Tolley present a history of Mather Field from pre-history to closure and introduce their book: **Images of America, Mather Field**.

Born from America's need to train aviators for the Great War, Mather Field has sat sentinel to the east of Sacramento for nearly a century. Overnight, the base transformed a lonely domain of cattle and vineyards into an aerie where fledgling "man-birds" were taught to fly and kill. Although readapted to focus on fire control and mail delivery between the wars, Mather still inspired, and was home to 1930 Air Corps maneuvers. World War II renewed Mather, as training bomber crews and repatriating veterans of the Pacific War helped create what was becoming a self-sustaining city of churches, schools, and burgeoning neighborhoods. Through two world wars and the tense years of the Cold War, this base has changed into a suburban mélange of aviation, business, and housing in the shadow of California's capital city. Copies of the book will be available for sale and signing.

A native of Portland, Oregon, James Scott has been a librarian at the Sacramento Public Library for the last 11 years. He is a graduate of Marquette University and holds Master's degrees in European history and library science. He is currently studying to become a certified archivist, and speaks and writes on antebellum Sacramento and the Central Valley's World War One experience.



Tom Tolley has worked for the Sacramento Public Library for over 25 years, the last 12 as a library technician in Special Collections. A Sacramento resident since 1964 with an active interest in the region's popular culture and social history, he collects books and information on a variety of topics including motion picture history and genre fiction.

Applying nose art to a B-29 Superfortress in 1944 is one of Sacramento's favorite sons, Sergeant Wayne Thiebaud. From 1942 to 1945 he served at Mather as an artist. (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

A disassembled A-bomb nearly left a disastrous mark at Mather Field, a refueling point along its transit to Hawaii and beyond. "Little Boy" was brought to Mather on a B-29 Superfortress, it also carrying a nickname: the "Laggin' Dragon," (below). During a hurried takeoff, and at a mere 50 feet above the ground, a hinged door accidentally opened, sending a life raft astern, where it wrapped itself around the plane's right stabilizer, sending the B-29's nose downward and blocking any elevator movement. Pilots Edward



Costello and Harry Davis fought to turn the plane by 10 degrees, thus dislodging the raft and helping the plane land safely. Within a week of the incident, "Little Boy" had been dropped on Hiroshima. (National Air and Space Museum.)



## Betty Inada: A Sacramento Flapper on the Silver Screen

By William Burg

How did a Sacramento girl become the most popular jazz singer in Japan? The little-known story of Betty Inada began in Sacramento's Japantown. Like many Nisei, the first generation of American-born children of Japanese immigrants, her life was caught between the traditions of her parents and the culture of their adopted country. Born on November 10, 1913, her parents named her Fumiko but gave her the nickname "Bessie," which she disliked and later changed to "Betty." This independence characterized her life, and by her teens she fell in love with jazz. In the 1920s, jazz

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## Betty Inada: A Sacramento Flapper on the Silver Screen *(cont'd from front page)*

was wild, disobedient music considered responsible for the downfall of American morals, but kids like Betty loved it. Adopting flapper fashions, short hair with celluloid barettes and short skirts with rolled-down stockings, Betty's style



イトナダ・ベティは、ジャズ・ミュージックの流行と共に、ハリウッド映画界にデビューした。昭和八年、日本劇場で『恋の歌』の主演を務めた。『ラッパカッパヤ』など有名である。結婚はアメリカ人とす。

shocked her parents and more traditional Nisei youth but made her a popular figure in the local jazz scene.

Sacramento's Japantown was large enough to have its own bands, like Richard Okumoto's "Night Hawks," and its own venues, like the M

Street Café. Because many were illegal speakeasies, and due to the relative isolation of Japantown even from the rest of Sacramento, the locations of these venues are poorly documented and little-known. Bands like the Night Hawks also played in nearby Japanese farm communities like Florin and Walnut Grove, shocking and delighting Nisei farm kids with their big-city sounds. Young women like Elizabeth Murata, saxophone player for the Night Hawks, were a small but active part of this musical community. Betty Inada's mother played samisen and performed traditional Japanese dances, and while she may have frowned on her daughter's choice of music, she shared her love of performance. Betty joined the Los Angeles vaudeville troupe of Fanchon & Marco, but her real ambition was singing, not dancing in a chorus line or performing acrobatics as part of a stereotypical "Oriental" stage act. But there was little room in the United States for a Japanese lead vocalist, even in the radical world of jazz.



Betty may have been inspired to look beyond American shores by a fellow Sacramentan, Agnes Miyakawa, who followed the example of Josephine Baker and moved to Paris, singing "Madame Butterfly" at the National Opera Comique Theater in 1931. In early 1933, Betty's friend Fumiko Kawabata moved from Los Angeles to Japan to sing in Tokyo clubs. Having a friend already in Japan helped Betty ease her parents' fears about moving so far away, and on June 9, 1933 she headed for Japan at age 19, despite the fact that she could barely speak Japanese.

Betty's inexperience with Japanese language and culture, and competition from many other Nisei in Japan also seeking stardom, a phenomenon called bata-kusai (literally "reeking butter"), made her start in Japan difficult, but she found a way to set herself apart. Due to the limits of 1930s microphones, Tokyo jazz singers often used a megaphone to be heard over the orchestra. Not wanting to hide her beauty behind a megaphone, Betty developed a vocal style more like shouting than singing. Soon she made her mark on the Tokyo jazz scene and secured a recording contract with Columbia Records of Japan. Betty's bold, brash stage performances shocked even urbane Tokyo audiences. After a hula performance at the Columbia Record Company's All-Star Cast Show, she was visited by the Tokyo Vice Squad and charged with public indecency, who accused her of perform-

ing a shiri furi dansu ("butt shaking dance.") She managed to explain the significance of traditional Hawaiian dancing to the vice officers, who dropped the charge.

In June of 1934, Betty returned to California as a star of the Ginza club circuit. After three months at Paramount Studios in Los Angeles, she had a farewell party in Sacramento on November 7. Upon her return to Japan, she sang and danced in her first movie, Odoriko Nikki ("A Dancer's Journal") followed by her starring role in Hodo no Sasayaki, "Whispering Sidewalks." This musical feature film told a semi-fictionalized story of Betty's experiences in Japan, as an American who comes to Tokyo to seek her fortune, overcoming adversity before achieving fame. This role secured Betty her place as the most popular female jazz singer of prewar Japan.

During World War II, Betty remained in Japan, teaming with top vocalist Kazuko "Dick" Miné in 1940. Together they toured Japan and performed for Japanese troops and civilians in China and the Sakhalin Peninsula. After the war they sang with the Stardusters, a Tokyo big band. She recorded and performed in Japan through the 1950s, gradually abandoning the brashness of her wild youth for a more mature, dignified style. She briefly returned to Sacramento in 1958 to open a Japanese restaurant. By that year, there was little left of Sacramento's old Japantown, demolished by the redevelopment project that created Capitol Mall. Betty moved to Los Angeles where she married Cecil Silva and opened a hamburger stand, later working at a photo studio. She returned to Tokyo in 1979 and 1991, both times to sing at events honoring her old stage partner Dick Miné.

Betty died in November of 2001, after being interviewed in 1993 for George Yoshida's book on Japanese jazz, *Reminiscing in Swingtime*. In that book, she was quoted: "I have no regrets. I did what I wanted to do in my own small way." A copy of *Whispering Sidewalks* still exists at the UC Berkeley Pacific Film Archive, shown at the 2008 San Francisco International

### SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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#### GOLDEN NUGGETS

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## MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR UPCOMING SCHS EVENTS

James Scott and Tom Tully, from special collections at the Sacramento Public Library, will present **A History of Mather Field**, and introduce their newly released Arcadia book **Tuesday, January 24, 2012, 7:00 PM**. Two interesting footnotes: The majority of America's military navigators were trained at Mather from the fall of 1941 until April 1993 and many images included in the book are the works of world-renowned Sacramento artist Wayne Thiebaud.

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**Mead Kibbey** has "seldom, if ever passed up on opportunity to champion Alfred A. Hart as an artist whose life and work should be better known today." Mead will share his obsession and Hart's photography of the Central Pacific Railroad on **February 27<sup>th</sup>**, at 7 pm, during the February Meeting of SCHS, at the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Avenue, Sacramento.

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**March** is the month when the Sacramento County Historical Society recognizes achievements for the prior year in history education, historical preservation, publications, and the occasional individual or organization. This year we're shaking it up a bit, and adding some entertainment by the Harley White Orchestra, possibly dancing, and a unique presentation of never before seen photographs of the **Zanzibar Club**, an African-American jazz club on M Street that featured musical greats Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Dinah Washington. The photographs were discovered by collector Keith Burns, who is working with noted historian Clarence Caesar to create a book and possible new media documentary on black jazz in the region. This year's event will be at the Dante Club on **March 27<sup>th</sup>**, 2330 Fair Oaks Blvd from 5:30 to 10:30 pm.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Melanie Smith** is a teacher, writer, choreographer, and actor who has directed a wide range of equity, college and community theater productions. She will facilitate a panel discussion with other theater folk on the History of Sacramento Theater, on **April 24<sup>th</sup>**. The conversation will cover the beginnings of theater during the Gold Rush, lecture circuits by Mark Twain and others, to the grand palaces in the county that housed Vaudeville and Burlesque to more modern times. Event will be held at the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Center Building at 7 pm .

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We have so many options for May and June, we're not yet decided what programs to select. Ideas include possible daytime walking tours, collaborating with the Sacramento Public Library on a series of talks about Sacramento in the thirties, or a Delta boat tour. We'd like your input for programs for the rest of the year. If you know of interesting speakers or activities that our members would enjoy email us at:

[editor@sachistoricalsociety.org](mailto:editor@sachistoricalsociety.org), call 916-443-6265 or drop us a line at P.O. Box 160065, Sacramento, CA 95816-0065.

SACRAMENTO  
COUNTY  
**Historical  
Society**

### ***Don't Forget to Vote!***

*Two of the Sacramento County Historical Society board members, Bill Burg and Illa Collin, are up for re-election this year. Enclosed in this newsletter is a ballot. Please mark it and return by January 24, 2012 to the Sacramento County Historical Society, P.O. Box 160065, Sacramento, California 95816-0065. We also have a vacancy. If you, or someone you know would like to serve on the board, include their name as a write-in candidate. We'll notify the membership of the results in our February newsletter.*

*William Burg is currently Vice-President, Past President and Secretary of SCHS. He has written three books and several dozen articles on Sacramento history, and works as a historian for California State Parks.*

*Illa Collin, Recording Secretary, is the longest serving County Supervisor in Sac County history. She appreciates the unique history of California and Sacramento region.*



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Please deliver by January 17, 2012

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

## OUT & ABOUT

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
January 16, 2012	Monday 6:30 - 8:30 pm	<b>Sacramento Streetcars.</b> William Burg will share photos, stories and artifacts explaining the history of Sacramento's streetcars and interurban electric railroads at the January meeting of the Elk Grove Historical Society.	Elk Grove Farm Bureau, 8970 Elk Grove Blvd. #A, Elk Grove, 916-264-2920
January 17, 2012	Tuesday 6:00 pm	<b>Riverboats of Northern California.</b> Historian Paul C. Trimple presents an exciting program about the subject of his new book, <i>Riverboats of Northern California</i> , by Arcadia Publishing.	Jean Harvie Community Center, 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove.
February 19, 2012	7:00 pm	<b>Sacramento's Breweries.</b> As a prelude to Sacramento Beer Week 2012, historian Ed Carroll (author of the SCHS-published <i>Sacramento's Breweries</i> ) will discuss local brewery history as part of Time Tested Books and <i>Midtown Monthly</i> Magazine's "Living Library" series. See <a href="http://www.midtownmonthly.net">http://www.midtownmonthly.net</a> for more details.	Time Tested Books 1114 21st Street Sacramento, CA 95811
March 3, 2012	8 am to 3 pm	<b>Sacramento County History Day</b> , part of a year-long program encouraging students to study all aspects of history. This year's theme is Revolution, Reaction, Reform.	Rosemont High School 9594 Keifer Blvd, Sacramento. Contact: Craig Irish, <a href="mailto:cirish@scoe.net">cirish@scoe.net</a> . 916-228-2660.