

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May-June 2019, vol. 29-30

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**Sacramento Historical Society Presents Bill George**  
**Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad United the World**

**Tuesday, May 28 7:00 PM (Doors Open 6:30)**  
**Columbus Hall, 5961 Newman Court, Sacramento**

Join us for the showing of a special film by historian and filmmaker Bill George, marking the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. The documentary tells the amazing story of how Sacramento astonished the world and created the world's greatest railroad.

In his latest documentary, Bill George traces the footsteps of the great people who defied the odds and led the way in the greatest achievement of the 19th Century, the Transcontinental Railroad.

Connecting America by rail was long a dream of American leaders. But the very thought of scaling mountains,

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Chinese railroad workers

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**Sacramento Historical Society Presents William Burg**  
**Wicked Sacramento!**

**Tuesday, June 25 7:00 PM (Doors Open 6:30)**  
**Columbus Hall, 5961 Newman Court, Sacramento**

*Wicked Sacramento*, the latest book by historian William Burg, former member of the SHS Board and past President, is a crime story. In the first half of the twentieth century, Sacramento's civic leaders went to enormous lengths to eliminate wickedness from its waterfront neighborhood, known as "the lower part of town," "the tenderloin," and later "the West End." This neighborhood included buildings dating back to the Gold Rush, and a diverse, multiracial population. A social movement called the Progressives led this effort, but concealed within their social reform agenda was a crime of its own: racism.

Burg's presentation in June will focus on three individuals, all well-known in Sacramento during their lifetimes, who coincidentally share the author's home state of Illinois: Cherry de Saint Maurice, Grant Cross, and Ancil Hoffman.



Cherry de Saint Maurice

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## Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad United the World *(continued from page 1)*

crossing deserts and thousands of miles seemed like madness to many. Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Judah, Leland Stanford and Chinese workers joined together to build what no one else had ever done-“Nothing Like it in the World.”



Leland Stanford

The film will take you to the original construction sites, and explain the cultural, political and economic changes the transcontinental railroad wrought. It is no exaggeration that the railroad changed America and world commerce forever.

About Bill George: A journalist and author, Bill George has produced five documentaries on California History, winning many awards and speaking to thousands of people about California history. As a journalist he covered many of the greatest events of the last century. He is descended from a long line of forgotten Irish immigrant ditch diggers and maids who fled the Emerald Isle and achieved a better life in America.



Top: Central Pacific Railroad  
Bottom: Chinese workers at a trestle, viewed from an overlook

RSVP for this documentary film screening and conversation with the film maker.

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## Wicked Sacramento! *(continued from page 1)*

Cherry de Saint Maurice owned the Cherry Club, a parlor house located in Sacramento’s Tenderloin, a quasi-legal zone of brothels, cribs, and dance halls along L Street, roughly the location of today’s Golden 1 Center and Downtown Commons. The Cherry Club was patronized by Sacramento’s elites, businessmen, and legislators. Cherry’s success as a businesswoman, whose investments included the Oak Hall nightclub on Riverside Road and suburban real estate in North Sacramento, was limited by the notoriety of her profession. She came into conflict with civic reformers who sought to limit human trafficking, often called “white slavery,” including notorious eugenics advocate Charles M. Goethe. Cherry’s death in 1913 helped justify new laws regulating sex work in the Tenderloin, with mixed results.

Grant Cross, better known as Skewball, whose pursuits included athletics, gambling, bartending and restaurants, and

politics, was a well-known member of Sacramento’s small African American community. With his friend William Snow, Cross organized social clubs including the West End Club, serving social and political functions for the Black community as groups like the Sutter Club did for whites. Cross also hosted dances in Sacramento at the dawn of the Jazz Age. This drew official ire, as the exciting new music called “jazz” attracted white women to his events in an era when interracial dancing was forbidden. Cross resisted the intolerance of his era with tenacity, creativity, and humor, drawing both admiration and criticism.

Ancil Hoffman’s name is familiar to Sacramentans for the park named in his honor, his role as County Supervisor, and for his management of champion boxers Max and Buddy Baer, but his life included multiple careers. Despite his small size, he became a local



Ancil Hoffman in his boxing days

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## Meet the SHS Board and Officers: President Bill George

Bill George is a life-long history lover. He grew up in Chicago, and, like many an Illinois boy, was fascinated by Abraham Lincoln.

Bill worked his way through college by driving a tour bus, pointing out the magnificent Civil War monuments along Michigan Avenue. As a journalism student at the University of Missouri, Bill produced a film on the 30th anniversary of Winston Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech delivered at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri.

Bill worked as a television photographer and reporter in Iowa, and produced a five-part series called "Iowa in the Civil War" eight years before Ken Burns' "Civil War" aired on PBS. In 1982, Bill was hired to work at KCRA-TV in Sacramento. Following the overland route from Iowa in the dead of winter, Bill crossed Donner Summit and got his first view of the Sacramento Valley, a welcome site after so many desolate miles.

At KCRA, Bill served as a producer of special projects, and produced a show with legendary anchorman Stan Atkinson on the Vietnam War which raised funding for the California Veterans Vietnam Memo-

rial in California's Capitol Park. Bill transitioned to public relations, working in the public and private sectors including a stint as Global Marketing Communications Director at Ford Motor Company.

Bill has produced five documentary films on California history, including "The Hidden Wonder of the World" about the Transcontinental Railroad from Sacramento to Donner Summit. He also wrote "Rails, Tales and Trails," a companion guide to the film. In 2014 he produced the documentary film, "Newcastle, Gem of the Foothills." In 2015, he produced "Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain" about the Chinese experience in California from 1849-1875.

He followed that up with "Beyond a Miracle," about the rise of California agriculture, and, in 2018, he produced "The Short, Sweet History of California Strawberries" which also aired on PBS. His latest film is "Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad" which explains how Sacramento played a crucial role in connecting the nation by rail. Bill is working to raise awareness of the Sacramento region's amazing contribution to the nation's history.



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### Wicked Sacramento! *(continued from page 2)*

boxing legend, transitioning from boxer to fight promoter, trainer, and manager. He also owned multiple restaurants, saloons, and nightclubs, and the L Street Arena, a legendary palace of pugilism that was also used for sumo wrestling tournaments and jazz performances. Prior to managing the Baer brothers, he became manager of George Washington Lee, promoting him as a contender for the bantamweight championship of the world in an age when Chinese-American boxers were dismissed as novelty acts. During Prohibition, Hoffman was investigated and arrested for serving alcohol, but charges never stuck, in part due to the political influence of his customers and friends.

*Wicked Sacramento* includes stories of these three Sacramentans, and many others, from the early 1900s through the 1950s. Their lives intersected with the West End, a Sacramento neighborhood that no longer exists after repeated campaigns demanding its removal. Copies of the book will be available for sale before and after the presentation.



RSVP today for this eye-opening program.



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[sachistoricalsociety.org](http://sachistoricalsociety.org)

**2018-19 Board of Directors**

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**GOLDEN NUGGETS**

Published bimonthly, September to June  
 Newsletter Editor: Jenan Saunders

**OUT & ABOUT**

DATE	TIME	EVENT	LOCATION & OTHER INFO
May 24-26	Fri 1-7 PM  Sa & Su 10 AM to 10 PM	<b><i>Old Sacramento Waterfront Days</i></b>  This heritage celebration takes place on Front Street, The Embarcadero, and the 1849 Scene all along the wonderful Sacramento River with various activities taking place throughout the district, all free to experience and enjoy.	Old Sacramento <a href="http://oldsacramento.com">oldsacramento.com</a> Free
May 28	7 PM  Doors open 6:30 PM	<b><i>Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad the United the World</i></b>  Award-winning filmmaker Bill George debuts his latest film, <i>Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad</i> , which tells the story of how that railroad began in Sacramento.	Columbus Hall 5961 Newman Ct, Sacramento <a href="http://www.sachistoricalsociety.org">www.sachistoricalsociety.org</a> Members free, Non-members \$5
Jun 25	7 PM  Doors open 6:30 PM	<b><i>Wicked Sacramento!</i></b>  Join historian William Burg this June as he shares the long-hidden stories of criminals and crusaders from Sacramento's past in his latest book, <i>Wicked Sacramento!</i>	Columbus Hall 5961 Newman Ct, Sacramento <a href="http://www.sachistoricalsociety.org">www.sachistoricalsociety.org</a> Members free, Non-members \$5
Jun 27	7 PM	<b><i>Gold Spike Lecture Series: The Transcontinental as a Business Venture and How it Shaped the American West</i></b>  With characteristic originality, range, and authority, Richard White shows the transcontinental railroads to be pivotal actors in the making of modern America.	Sacramento History Museum 101 I St, Sacramento <a href="http://www.sachistorymuseum.org">www.sachistorymuseum.org</a> Members \$7, Non-members \$14