



**McHENRY
MUSEUM**
& HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MM&HS Museum Monthly

A Publication of the McHenry Museum & Historical Society

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Society Spotlight: Christopher Nunes, volunteer



Christopher Nunes contacted the MM&HS via our website on April 27, 2022. He has earnestly volunteered for us ever since.

Christopher is a married father of two boys and the activities director at Valley Skilled Nursing Home and Riverview Post Acute.

In such a short time with our organization, Christopher has quickly assumed many responsibilities. He began as a volunteer in the 'Stanislaus Selections' in-museum gift shop and bookstore. He then joined the MM&HS board of directors, and also became a docent.

Christopher Nunes

Currently, he is an executive board member of the MM&HS, serving as secretary. He is also the secretary of the docents committee. In addition, Christopher volunteers at our the various intra-county locations where our McHenry McMobile Museum visits. He continues to delight us with his genuine compassion, his love of country music, and his referential renditions from movies of the Golden Age of Hollywood.

Knoll's illustrated children's books have local focus

'Stanislaus Selections', MM&HS' in-museum gift shop and bookstore, is now carrying two children's books from local award-winning and gifted artist, Linda Knoll.

Over in the Valley (\$10 paperback, \$15 hardcover) is based on the lyrical tune of the traditional children's song, *Over in the Meadow*. In her work, Knoll delivers a focus on the animals which inhabit the San Joaquin Valley. The book doubles as a counting book, and the animals featured increase by one for each page.

Patient for Pumpkins (\$15.95 paperback) is set in the Modesto Farmer's Market, and tells the the year-long tale of how a pumpkin grows. Other bountiful produce which is grown in Stanislaus County is featured as the story's young protagonist awaits pumpkin harvest time in the fall.

Linda is an elementary school art teacher in Modesto. Both of these works are as educational as they are beautifully illustrated, and make quintessential books for any young local reader.

'Stanislaus Selections' is open Fri - Sun, 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Linda Knoll:
artist, author,
and educator

Early Mexican heritage in the land which became Stanislaus County dates to more than 200 years ago

by David Seymour and Keith Highiet

While there is no majority group of people with any singular ethnographic heritage in Stanislaus County today, people with Mexican ancestry do constitute its largest minority group. Mexican identity is rooted in a mixture of mainly European (mostly Spanish) and indigenous population lineages. Spain claimed the region as early as 1519. Mexican identity was first declared in 1810.

Spain lost control of the region officially in 1821 when Mexico won its war of independence. Mexico created its own states within its new national territory. A large Mexican state called Alta California incorporated much of what are now the southwestern states of the United States. The land of now-Stanislaus County was part of Alta California.

The pre-Mexican Spanish people who actually first set foot in the area of now-Stanislaus County dates to at least 1780. It was at this time that Spanish Catholic missionaries and soldiers traveled along a trail which came to be called the **El Camino Viejo** ("The Old Road" in Spanish). This trail took Spanish missionaries and soldiers back and forth from Los Angeles in southern California to the Bay Area in northern California. It was used to help them expand their mission-building system along the Alta California (what is today just 'California') coast. This trail cut through the Diablo Mountains located in western Stanislaus County. There were five (5) creeks along the trail in the county which were used as places for the travelers to resupply themselves with fresh water. All of the names are translated from Spanish except the word 'Orestimba', which translates from Yokutsan (the Yokuts were the indigenous people to the county):

- Arroyo del Ospital (Hospital Creek)
- Arroyo de La Puerta (Creek of the Door)
- Arroyo Salada Grande (Big Salt Creek)
- Arroyita Salada (Little Salt Creek)
- Arroyo Orestimba (Meetingplace Creek)



Gabriel Moraga

In 1806, explorer Gabriel Moraga (1765-1823), and his group of Spanish soldiers and Catholic missionary priests came to do a more complete exploration of Stanislaus County. They were looking for a place to build a Spanish Catholic mission. They did not find the area suitable for mission-building, but they did start rounding up local Yokuts in the area to convert them to Christianity as Catholics. The Spanish had the Yokuts work at the nearby missions along the northern California coast. The closest mission was Mission San José.

Story continues on following pages

By 1810, the formation of what would become a Mexican identity began to emerge. Those who had descended from a combination of Spanish and indigenous people here now felt the need to free themselves from the rule of the Spanish Empire. José Bernardo Maximiliano Gutiérrez de Lara (1774-1841) went to the small town of Dolores Hidalgo (located in what is now the central part of Mexico) and asked the local Roman Catholic priest, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811), to initiate an effort seeking freedom from Spain. On September 16, 1810, Costilla gave a speech known as 'The Cry of Dolores', and thus the movement toward independence from Spain began. After almost eleven years of fighting, Mexico gained independence from Spain, and the war officially ended with a signed treaty on August 24, 1821. September 16th, though (going back to 1810), continues to be the ceremonial commemoration date for celebrating Mexico's Independence Day.

The missionaries and soldiers who continued to come to now-Stanislaus County were considered to be Mexican rather than Spanish from that time forward. They continued their same operations as they had through 1833 when the Mexican government passed a law to secularize and end the Mission system. The battles between the missionaries and soldiers with the Yokuts in Stanislaus County (most famously with the county's namesake, Chief Estanislao), has been previously documented in McHenry Museum & Historical Society's Stanislaus Stepping Stones publications in 1976, 2009, and 2015.

Since at least the 1820s, Mexican men from the state of Sonora in Mexico came to Stanislaus County (and all over California) to drive wild horses from here. The men who broke and drove the horses were known as "mesteñeros" (mustang runners), and they brought them back to Sonora (Mexico), which needed more horses for work-life there. Some of the mesteñeros had their expertise rooted in the tradition of "vaqueros" (livestock herders), the foundational cowboy of North America. The vaquero tradition had been imported to Mexico from the Spanish conquest of the preceding 300 years. Spain's cultural impact imparted the vaquero tradition along with "rancho" (ranch) settlement community life.



Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla

The mesteñeros developed routes to get the herds of horses from throughout Alta California down to Sonora and other parts of Mexico. The route which cut through the Diablo Mountains range in eastern Stanislaus County was called the "La Vereda del Monte" (Spanish for "The Mountain Trail"). This was the northern part of the larger "La Vereda Caballo" (Spanish for "The Horse Trail"), which was an 800-mile trail that traversed south to now-Southern California, eastward to now-Arizona, and then south again into what remains Mexico today.

La Vereda del Monte was well established and regularly traveled by at least the 1840s. It's most northern point was near the now-city of Brentwood in Contra Costa County. The fifth station headed southward was in now-Stanislaus County, and it was called the "Estación Quinto" (Spanish for "Fifth Station"). This spot along the route was in the Adobe Valley (also called Adobe Canyon), which had a brush corral that held captured horses. Horses were herded from the areas of Stanislaus County's Arroyita de la Puerta (Del Puerto Creek), Arroyo Salado Grande (now, Salado Creek), and Arroyita Salado, or Saladillo (Little Salado Creek). These three rivers flow eastward as tributaries to the San Joaquin River in Stanislaus County. The horses were brought into the Adobe Valley (canyon), and connected to the horse drive eastward in the San Antonio Valley (in now-Santa Clara County).

When Mexico controlled now-Stanislaus County, its government gave out land grants to some of Alta California's (the Mexican state which included now-California) most politically-connected residents. The land grants were called ranchos. There were five ranchos given out in the area of Stanislaus County:

1. **Rancho Pescadero:** 35,000 acres given in 1843 to Valentin Higuera (1809-1879) and Rafael Feliz (1789-1850). The town of Grayson is now located in this area. Feliz sold out to Higuera in 1848. Higuera sold the land soon after during the Gold Rush.

2. **Rancho del Rio Estanislao:** 49,000 acres given in 1843 to Salomón Maria Simeon Pico (1821-1860) and José Castro (1808-1860). The town of Knights Ferry is now located in this area.

Salomón Pico was a cousin to Pío Pico (1801-1894), the last Mexican governor of Alta California. José Castro had been a temporary governor of the Mexican state of Alta California from 1835 to 1836. Pico and Castro left their rancho during the Mexican-American War of 1846 – 1848 to fight for Mexico. Early in the war, Castro led Mexico in its loss to United States citizens in the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846, which created the initial California Republic. Pico was also captured in Castro's company.

Upon returning to their rancho after the war, the land was becoming overrun with gold rush settlers. The rancho was lost. In revenge for his losses, Salomon Pico became a 'bandito' (bandit; outlaw), and saw action along the now-Central California coast. Castro went on to become the Mexican governor of Baja California from 1853 - 1860.



Graphic from 1950 Stanislaus County Sourcebook, authored by Joseph Burton Vasché



William Tecumseh Sherman

3. **Rancho Orestimba y Las Garzas:** 27,000 acres given in 1844 to Sebastian Nunez (lifespan unknown). The city of Newman is now located in this area.

4. **Rancho Del Puerto:** 13,000 acres given in 1844 to Mariano (1810-c.1852) and Pedro Hernández (1820-1893). The city of Patterson is now located in this area. The Hernandez brothers were born at the San Francisco Presidio to Mexican immigrant parents and settled in San Jose. Mariano was known to have had at least some criminal history, and he had been accused of rustling (stealing cattle, horses or sheep) by his peers. It is believed Pedro left his brother at the rancho and returned to San Jose where he worked as a butcher. Mariano purchased his brother's interest and sold the land in 1845.

5. **Rancho Thompson:** 36,000 acres given in 1845 to Alpheus Basil Thompson (1797-1869). The city of Oakdale is now located in this area. This rancho was the only one of the five in now-Stanislaus County which was not owned by a person who held distinct Mexican ancestry.

At one time, one of the co-owners of this rancho was William Tecumseh Sherman (1820-1891). In 1848, he wrote the memo notification that gold had been discovered by James Marshall at Sutter's Fort, setting off the California Gold Rush of 1849. Sherman then became the famous heroic military general in the U.S.'s Union Army during the American Civil War in the 1860s.

Another co-owner of this rancho included Henry Wager Halleck (1815-1872), who was known as “Old Brains” and the top military general for the U.S. Army from 1862 – 1864. Yet another co-owner included notable California attorney and financier, Frederick Billings (1823-1890), who helped draft the California Land Act of 1851. This law was passed to deal with the rancho system statewide as inherited from the prior Mexican government’s designations. The men were all connected through employment at Halleck, Peachy & Billings, the San Francisco law firm which handled more than half of the rancho land claims in California.

Mexico and America went to war in 1846 over control of what became the southwest states of the United States. By 1848, Mexico had lost the land which is now Stanislaus County to the U.S. When this happened, the Mexican rancho owners were still allowed to keep their land, but they had to provide proof of the ownership to the U.S. government to do so. It was difficult, costly, and time consuming to get this done. In the end, most of the rancho landowners lost their land.

From the late 1840s through the early 1850s, the Mexican ‘banditos’ (bandits) were outlaws who came to prominent notoriety in California. Some banditos had originally worked as *mesteñeros* (mustang runners). When California gold was discovered in 1848, the *mesteñeros* immediately headed for the Sierra Nevada hills as new miners. Just east of Stanislaus County, the nearest large early gold strike and settlement emerged in 1848 as settled by these men and their families. They named their new settlement ‘Sonora’ after the state in Mexico from where they had originated. The city of still-Sonora, California quickly rose to prominence as the “queen of the southern mines”.

The Mexican miners and their families did not fare well amongst the incoming influx American gold rush settlers, who had the U.S. law and other stronger societal organizations aiding their efforts. Some of the Mexican people returned to their practice of working as *mesteñeros*, but this in part came to be seen as horse-stealing by the newly arrived Americans. Other conflicts arose, and the concept of the region’s bandito (bandit) was born. They were seen as men who worked beyond the scope of the law.



Joaquin Murrieta

Illustration from Frank Latta's *Joaquin Murrieta and his Horse Gangs*

With a 2023 historical lens, the banditos (also frequently spelled ‘bandidos’) are today seen as a combination of men who opposed American conquest of the now-American Southwest, victims of discrimination, and feared criminals who robbed and murdered victims.

A number of famous banditos passed through the Diablo Mountains of eastern Stanislaus County. As part of their escape routes, they traveled and hid out at sites along La Verada del Monte, the already-established mountain route which many of them had come to know well before as *mesteñeros* (mustang runners):

Joaquin Murrieta (1829-1853) was the most famous of all California banditos. He had mined for gold up the Stanislaus River in the Mother Lode area of the Sierra foothills, and was a leader of the Five Joaquins Gang. Historian Frank Latta (1892-1983) of Newman, California, extensively researched Murrieta, and described him as six foot three inches tall, with blonde hair, and blue eyes. This was based on Latta’s interviews with family members and descriptions given by news reporters. This is contrary to many of the later depictions of Murrieta in popular culture, which gave him darker features in appearance. At times compared to Robin Hood, at least some of the legendary stories about Murrieta are now known to be fiction. Murrieta is believed to be a leading inspiration for the creation of ‘Zorro’, the fictional character created in 1919 by author Johnston McCulley. Zorro was recently portayed as Murrieta by Antonio Banderas in a 1998 Hollywood blockbuster film and its 2005 sequel.

The Five Joaquins Gang was led by Joaquin Murrieta. The gang was a group of five men whose names all included 'Joaquin', and their families came from the Sonora territory of now-northern Mexico:

- Joaquin Murrieta
- Joaquin Ocomorenia (lifespan unknown)
- Joaquin Valenzuel (c 1820 - 1853 or 1858)
- Joaquin Botellier (lifespan unknown)
- Joaquin Carrillo (lifespan unknown)

They had made their way to the Sierra Nevada foothills as gold miners in 1848 (recall that Sonora, California got its name from the first gold miners to settle there, hailing from Sonora, Mexico). As the United States had won the Mexican-American War in 1848, and the Gold Rush had attracted people all over the world by 1849, they were pushed out of the areas in which they had initially settled in for their early search for gold. They were widely reported for stealing others' gold and horses, and for murdering Chinese immigrants and white settlers.

Manuel "Three-Fingered Jack" Garcia (lifespan unknown) was feared and famous for stealing and murdering. He got his nickname because he had lost a portion of his hand in a fight. He was an associate of Joaquin Murrieta and his gang, and considered the most dangerous bandito at the time.

The California Rangers were established by the state to take out Joaquin Murrieta and the Five Joaquins Gang in 1853. Led by Captain Harry Love (1810-1868), the rangers were largely successful in their efforts. These rangers were the precursor organization to California's subsequent police organizations.

In 1850, an excursion party consisting of hundreds of Mexican miners set up a camp near the now-town of Grayson. It was a typical site in the early days of the California Gold Rush as Mexican miners along with others from all over the world continued to seek fortune in the state. California's population had doubled in the two years from 1848 to 1850, and it joined the union as a state in 1850. California's statehood that year ushered in new legislation which targeted "foreign miners". With the purpose to rid the state of gold miners who had come from China, Mexico, Chile, and France (as was the case with the Frenchmen in now-Stanislaus County at French Bar [La Grange]), the foreign miners were charged a \$20 per month levying tax to mine in the state in 1850. If a foreigner refused to pay, they faced arrest. This was repealed in 1851 and was reissued as a \$4 per month tax in 1852.

In Mormon Gulch, a mining town-site in Tuolumne County, anti-Mexican sentiment led to a series of resolutions in the early 1850s demanding that all foreigners leave the state within fifteen days. There was a feeling amongst American settlers that the foreigners were making off with all of the local gold. Copycat resolutions were then passed elsewhere in the state, including in Sonora.

The legal decrees which came out of the anti-Mexican sentiment were enough to ultimately cause the population decrease of Mexican people in the state for the next seven decades. Stanislaus County was formed in 1854 as a carve-out of the western portion of Tuolumne County. It took until the 1920s for Stanislaus County to see any significant increase in Mexican immigration.



Sources use for this article include:

Rose Marie Beebe and Robert N. Senkewicz ed., *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California 1535-1846*, Norman, OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 2001;

Elias Funez, interviewed by David Seymour and Keith Highiet, August 28, 2023;

Frank Latta, *Joaquin Murieta and his Horse Gangs*, Bear State Books, 1980;

George Tinkham, *History of Stanislaus County*, Los Angeles, Historic Record Company, 1921.

A special thanks to Marco Moreno for additional consultation.

Lois Nish, a McHenry Museum original docent in 1972

The MM&HS had the pleasure recently to sit down with Mrs. Lois Nish, age 100! She was an original docent of the McHenry Museum when it opened in 1972. Mrs. Nish assisted us with our recent August 2023 article, *Stanislaus-specific seeds sowed subsequently blossomed into county-wide historic appreciation*. Her late husband, Ray Nish (1922-2010), was the managing editor of *The Modesto Bee* for almost a quarter of a century. Lois' family operated Riggerberg's Home Furnishings on Lander Avenue in Turlock from 1950-1970.

Lois has long had a passion for local history. She joined the McHenry Museum Society in 1972 and opened the museum building daily as Heidi Warner (1925-2008), the museum's spearheading founder, returned to school in order to better run the museum. One afternoon, Heidi returned to the museum from a Soroptimist Club meeting at which she had learned that the McHenry Mansion was going to be purchased by a law firm. Heidi asked Lois to call her husband, Ray, to see if *The Bee* could report on the uncertain fate of the historical building. Ray obliged, and brought a camera crew to document the current state of the place. Soon after, the Julio & Aileen Gallo purchased the building as a gift to the City of Modesto.

In 1976, Lois hosted a reunion of the McHenry Family at the McHenry Museum. She also wrote a history of the family based on interviews she conducted. In the mid-1980s she worked with fellow docent Marion Bradford (1920-2012) on incorporation of the McHenry Museum & Historical Society.



Lois Nish, August 2023



Lois Nish, assisting Heidi Warner for the 1976 McHenry Family reunion



Betty Cole and Joan Hart are the two other living original docents from the McHenry Museum's opening on July 4th, 1972. We will feature them in the coming months.

A list of the McHenry Museum's original docents:

Doris Anderson (1925-2004), Jane Barnett (1922-2005), Willodean Binna (1911-2000), Lois Camp (1936-2016), Jean Carrere (1910-2006), Ruth Fletcher (1901-1977), Herbert Florcken (1892-1989), Esther Gnesa (1927-2001), Dorothy Hansen (1924-1999), Gerda Hatch (1915-2008), Mable James (1908-1989), Pearl Johansen (1920-2001), Evelyn Joliff (1929-2018), Louise Lewis (1913-1993), Gertrude McDonald (1901-1989), Mildred Nelson (1910-2004), Lois Sanchez (1907-1985), Bette Belle Smith (1921-2009), Phyllis Snyder (1929-2023), Adah Stewart (1899-1979), Irma Whitehead (1905-1991), Phyllis Wiegman (1922-2014), and Ronald Wilson (1919-2004).

MM&HS News

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McMobile Museum, August 4th



Genealogical Society Presentation



Gavin Bruce

- On Friday, August 4th, the MM&HS McMobile Museum popped up at the Downtown Modesto 'DoMo' First Friday' street faire on 10th Street in front of Brenden Theaters. Thank you to Mike & Kim Cobleigh for allowing us to re-share local items. Thank you to Jennifer Aoyama, Christopher Nunes, and Naramsen Goriel for volunteering at the McMobile.
- We welcome new Patron sustaining members Kaye Barnes and Randy & Shara Woods.
- Our summer 2023 donor campaign continues! We emailed and USPS mailed out our annual appeal letter at the end of June. Join or renew as a donor member today at McHenryMuseum.org/support. Our Current total for membership stands at \$15,460.00
- On August 17th, MM&HS Executive Director, David Seymour spoke on the historical naming of Modesto's streets and about the Ellis Family to the Genealogical Society of Stanislaus County.
- MM&HS' Board of Directors met on August 22, 2023.
- On August 24th, MM&HS Executive Director, David Seymour, spoke to the Soroptimist Club of Modesto about the history of the MM&HS and the McHenry McMobile Museum.
- The McHenry Museum is displaying vintage hats in the temporary exhibition room. This display was composed by Wayne Mathes of the City of Modesto.
- On September 9th at 2:00 pm, MM&HS' *Second Saturday Fall 2023* lecture series commences. Gavin Bruce will talk about the violin (or fiddle), a familiar instrument that has been around for centuries. He will explore American fiddle music through tunes, songs, and stories, and describe how geography and history led to the development of a uniquely American style of music. An experienced performer locally, he will perform as part of his presentation.



1933



1953

Hispanic Chamber sponsors independence fiesta



1993

It Happened When...

- **90 years ago:** On September 16, 1933, *The Modesto Bee* reported that a new winery was in the works which would contain fifteen 10,000 gallon vats, as purchased by Ernest J. Gallo of Maze Blvd. The face of Stanislaus County would be forever changed as E&J Gallo Winery prepared to open its doors.
- **70 years ago:** In September of 1953, an ad ran announcing applications for employment at the new Lucky Store in McHenry Village. The market opened in October 1953, and the current tenant at the same site is now Sprouts.
- **30 years ago:** On September 16, 1993, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce sponsored activities for the 16th of September fiesta at the Tuolumne River Regional Park. The event drew between 7,000 - 10,000 people. 8



Get Involved Today!

The McHenry Museum & Historical Society (MM&HS) is the support organization of the McHenry Museum, your community museum. We bring Stanislaus County history to life!

- **Volunteer!**

Our docents volunteer in four-hour increments to greet and guide guests and visitors during the museum's open hours. Our acquisitions committee explores and evaluates items for the museum to obtain and retain. Volunteer staff runs our in-museum gift shop book store, *Stanislaus Selections*, and help at the intra-County destinations where our *McMobile Museum* visits. There are more behind-the-scenes opportunities to help as well! Email info@mchenrymuseum.org or send a message at McHenryMuseum.org/contact

- **Become a Sustaining Member!**

MM&HS members are invited to our annual Summer Social annual meeting, and our December Soup & Sandwich supper. Donors who give \$150 or more are recognized on our website for their contributions. Join now: McHenryMuseum.org/support

- **Get the Newsletter!**

Discover more ways to connect to local history regularly with our free, monthly newsletter, featuring fresh articles on local history: the *MM&HS Museum Monthly*. It's the one email you'll look forward to opening each month! And its free! McHenryMuseum.org/contact

**Your participation helps bring local history to life.
Get involved. Today!**