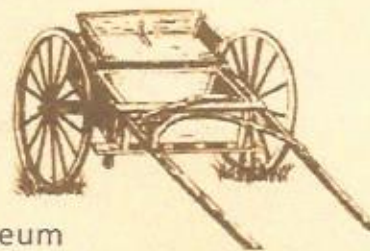


Second Issue 2018 ~ April-June
Next Issue July 2018

THE MAIL CART



Newsletter of the Simi Valley Historical Society and Museum

President's Message

Well, we did it. We moved the house. Thanks to everyone who helped with this process directly or indirectly. And again, a big thanks to Larry Powell for the donation. The moving process was extraordinary to witness. The house moved quickly in two separate hauls. Those trying to walk along with the house during the move quickly found themselves at a brisk walk, followed by a full sprint, followed by the tail-lights of the trailer fading into the distance. A very happy birthday to Larry Powell and Pat Havens. The house was uprooted, loaded onto the trailers and began moving on Larry's birthday. Then, shortly after midnight, on Pat's birthday, the house began moving along the quiet route and arrived at the park on Pat's birthday. The move went perfectly with no problems what so ever. Thanks to the RSRPD for a perfectly executed and amazing-to-watch effort.

Joe Wade-
President, Simi Valley Historical Society





HISTORY POLICE

Sometimes it is necessary, and in the public's best interest, to HALT the misperceptions that bubble up from time to time about Simi Valley's history. If certain inaccuracies are not corrected immediately, they will erode away at our community's foundation. O.K...maybe not, but we thought we'd set some things straight anyway...just for the record.

In this exciting edition we will talk **MORE** about 'Colony Houses.' Twelve pre-fab 'kit' houses that were shipped to Simi in 1888 by an investor group in Chicago looking to develop Simi Valley. The group was called 'The California Mutual Benefit Colony of Chicago,' soon shortened to 'The Colony.' These houses formed the nucleus of earliest neighborhood in Simi Valley. All but two of the Colony Houses were located in the townsite laid out by the Colony (south of LA Ave and west of First St.). The other two were located near the current intersection of Cochran and Erringer and near Madera and the railroad tracks. **THE TERM 'COLONY' REFERS TO THE INVESTOR GROUP, AND HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE COLONIAL ERA.**

WERE THE COLONY HOUSES SEARS KITS? No...the Colony Houses were partially built kit houses, but they were manufactured by T.W. Harvey Lumber in Chicago, Illinois. They were sent to Simi in 1888, this pre-dates the Sears houses by 20 years.

I HEARD THAT THE COLONY HOUSES WHICH WERE SHIPPED TO SIMI CAME 'AROUND THE HORN' OF SOUTH AMERICA? DID THEY? No...they did not. They were shipped from Chicago, Illinois by rail to Saticoy, which was at that time the closest rail point, and then brought to Simi from there by wagon. Frank Bither hauled them by wagon to Simi from Saticoy.

WEREN'T THERE 13 COLONY HOUSES? The records that we have seen only show the existence of 12 colony houses.

DIDN'T THEY ALL BURN DOWN? No...there are only **TWO** left. And **BOTH** of them are at Strathearn Historical Park & Museum! The Haigh/Talley House was moved to the park in 1970. The Printz/Powell House was moved to the park in 2018, and is awaiting restoration.

IS IT TRUE THAT SIMI VALLEY WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED 'SIMIOPOLIS?' Yes! It was! The investor group in Chicago called Simi 'Simiopolis' when they were promoting Simi Valley as a place to live. It was only called 'Simiopolis' for about 6 months.

"PRESIDENT'S AWARD"



This quarter I would like to recognize Carolyn Valdez. Although Carolyn is employed jointly by the RSRPD and the Historical Society, her efforts beyond her job descriptor are the most exceptional. Carolyn volunteers many hours on a regular basis to support our organization and the efforts of the Historical Society. She is deeply engaged in every event, every meeting, every rental, our web-site, our social media outreach, etc... There is nothing she doesn't do. She was recently studying an ancient form of Pitman shorthand to be able to read a journal that was donated to the society. Even when she is not actively working for or representing either organization, she is thinking about, living and breathing local history as well as coming up with ways to improve both the SVHS and the RSRPD. Thanks Carolyn for all you do!!

Mark Your Calendars:

*October 28, 2018 - Dia de los Muertos
Celebration*

*November 2, 2018 -
Annual Membership Dinner Meeting at
Rancho Santa Susana Community Center*

*December 2018 - Date to be determined:
Holiday Open House*



Story Tellers Needed!

Would you like to teach people about the interesting history of our community and tell stories to illustrate how life was lived a long time ago? Get Involved at Strathearn Historical Park and Museum and the Simi Valley Historical Society! We are looking for story tellers that enjoy learning and teaching our history!

At Strathearn Historical Park & Museum volunteer hours are flexible, and there are various activities and programs available to satisfy a broad spectrum of interests. The basic commitment is one day a month, but most of our volunteers sign up to do much more. Come and join a wonderful group of people who are dedicated to preserving as well as sharing Simi Valley's history.

If you are interested please call Bruce Matzen 805-582-9336 or email the Strathearn Visitors Center at simimuseum@sbcglobal.net

Bruce Matzen
Docent Training Chair



MECHANICAL RESTORATION

The Strathearn Workshop has three new volunteers, including two who are also volunteer docents.

The new Volunteers are Danny Greenstreet, Steve Demski, and Ed Weigand. I appreciate their knowledge, skills and experiences that they bring to our talented and willing Restoration Team.

Work is progressing on the 1934 Cat 22 tractor, and 1940s Gordon West Model A engine air compressor. The windmill project is nearing completion. The windmill's painting and lettering should be finished within the next week with mechanical assembly following soon thereafter. Resetting the windmill on the tower will follow once the final assembly of the unit is complete. Our windmill is a Dempster vintage 1920s. Parts and support for this manufacturer quite limited.

With the arrival at Strathearn Park of our last Colony House, we will be needing to restore and repair items that will be put into this historic building, many of which we already have here at the Park. We soon will have a repair area next to the mechanical shop that can be used for conservancy and refurbishment of various items at the park.

This dedicated area for upholstery, woodworking, artwork, painting, and so on, will be a useful space for our volunteers who may be interested in undertaking these types of projects.

We meet on Monday mornings in our workshop around 8:30 am and stay until 12:00 noon, sometimes later, if needed. We are always looking for volunteers, and we have many projects that need attention. So please come on down and meet everyone and have a cup of coffee, we could use your help.

All the best for a great summer and hope to see you soon.

Richard Johnson
Mechanical Restoration Director

The Last of Simiopolis

Imagine yourself as part of a thriving family in Chicago. You have acquired some of the new necessities of life, such as electric lights, gas, running water, plumbing, good roads. And good public schools.

Perhaps you had your milk delivered from one of the dairies on the outskirts of town, being happy to no longer have to milk the family cow and take care of all aspects of preparing the milk products for use at the family table.

Maybe your husband is a doctor, and successful enough that he is thinking of investing in land somewhere else.

Like California! Recent reports from there, that tell of the new possibilities, have got you dreaming.

Well, lo and behold! A fine-sounding advertisement has reached your eyes and ears. Simi Land and Water Co. offers great bargain prices on land! Excellent prospects with wonderful soil, water easy to get, great climate, and many other niceties, practically yours just for the asking.

A group of doctors in the Chicago region got to talking. They listened to someone who had actually been there. Someone like Charles G. Austin, who must have visited at a wonderful time of year, to hear his description. His projections for the future were unbelievable.

Soon the doctors formed an investment group that they called California Mutual Benefit Colony of Chicago. Someone was acquainted with T.W. Harvey Co. Mr. Harvey was becoming famous for his patented-ready-to-put-together houses.

Someone had quickly assembled the most amazing reports to stimulate interest. A prospectus was printed. Soon the newly formed group of investors (immigrants-to-be) had drawn up their agreement and made a deal with Simi Land and Water Company.

The prospectus spurred their imaginations, showing what had already been accomplished in all of Ventura County and neighboring areas, such as drawings of the luscious fruits that could be raised here. There was a map that showed how easily one should be able to access Los Angeles, only 35 miles away, or Ventura which was 30 miles. Knowing that retired Civil War soldiers would likely be interested, the map also showed how convenient it would be to go to the Old Soldiers Home in L.A.

Simi Rancho.

96,000-Acres-96,000

Finest LAND

SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA,

ESTABLISHED IN
San Bernardino Co.

Tracts of land from \$10 to \$100 per Acre. Good investment or
speculation. Persons seeking investments in California, or those
looking for homes or hotels, should call on us at once.

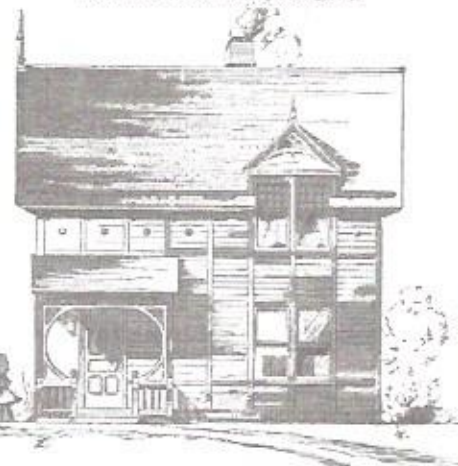
**SIMI
LAND AND WATER
COMPANY,**

19 WEST FIRST STREET,
LOS ANGELES, CAL.

H. W. PASTERNAK, Secretary

They laid out what they had to offer, with land available not only in their five-block square village, but larger strips that were laid out eastward, all the way to Erringer Road, on both sides of the Simi Arroyo. Other large plots were laid out north of their little village (and north of the Simi Arroyo) with grandiose names of streets – that were never used!

READY-MADE HOUSE DEPARTMENT
 The T. W. Harvey Lumber Co.
 22d and Morgan Sts., CHICAGO, ILL.
 MANUFACTURERS OF **FRAME BUILDINGS**
 Superior in BEAUTY, WARMTH, DURABILITY and WORK-
 MANSHIP to houses built by Contractors.



Cheaper and Easier to Erect than any other practical house. This 2 story house erected in suburbs of Chicago, \$850; same house built by contractor, \$1000

Our Specialty—Cottages in quantities of 10, 25, 50, 100 or more. COST FROM \$300 UP.

We Build Homes Complete. Write for Catalogue.

Houses in Process of Erection can be seen in Suburbs.

They arranged with the Harvey Lumber Company for twelve identical, ready-made, partially-assembled two-story houses with steep roofs (like snow country). Each had a porch across the front. Two bedrooms upstairs, a parlor, dining area, whatever passed for a kitchen. Eventually, their owners would add lean-tos or other rooms at the backs of the houses.

Now these doctors' wives no doubt had become accustomed to running water, indoor bathrooms, electric or gas lights, nice yards, delivery of milk, even a plentitude of groceries. These had long since been common in Chicago.

The shock must have been horrendous, when they were driven to view their property.

Now, think of just getting here, right here, to a Colony House identical to this one, which you had agreed to buy on paper.

By the way, Bessie Printz told Pat Havens (in an interview dated January 24, 1978), that her parents, Charles and Rosa Arabella Printz, watched the Colony Houses being loaded onto railroad cars in Chicago for their trip to California.

On November 28, 1888, the twelve houses were shipped by rail to Saticoy, the closest rail point. The first colonists left Chicago a week later.

They had been led to believe their houses would have been put together, and some landscaping done when they arrived. [Never mind that would have taken a major miracle, if you come to think of it. Where would enough carpenters have been found in this no man's land?]



Rosa Printz in front of the Colony House that served as the post office from 1904 - 1941

The passengers were brought to San Fernando by train. Then came the problem of getting over the Santa Susana mountains. The only inlet was the old Stagecoach Road, and that was a nightmare of non-construction (though it had handled the main line of the Coastal Stage from 1864 till 1875). It was the most frightening ride of a lifetime, on a par with the wildest ride you can think of, in today's safety-regulated amusement parks! Some passengers preferred to get out and walk, especially up the Devil's Slide, which was a lighter load for the team anyhow.



The Simi Hotel once stood where the current Simi High's west parking lot is now

After that, they were ready for a night or two at the Simi Hotel, which was a large three-story hotel that must have looked like Sleeping Beauty's Castle, when they saw it in the distance. It had been completed just a year before, to provide shelter for clients of Simi Land and Water Company, while showing them the lands. Fifteen rooms, a large dining room, and one inadequate bathroom on the third floor.

The only road was one long thread the length of the valley, which we still know as Los Angeles Avenue. Likely it was in the tracks and wheel ruts of El Camino Real, that had connected the string of missions and pueblos going back to Spanish Days. Other roads were practically non-existent.

The only store was Honest John Sawtelle's at Third and Pacific, which was meager to say the least. His sign boasted that you could buy a square meal for 20 cents. That was ham and eggs, no matter when you came! Shopping conveniently for groceries was a long time in the future, though eventually there were three or four stores in Simi and one or two in Santa Susana.

Now, there was a young man named Charles Albert Havens and his wife Annie Littleford Havens, who had sold out his farming interests and moved to town (Chicago). He got a job as bill collector for some of those doctors, so he heard all about the colony. They decided to come west, which they did in mid-1889. Rather than buying land in the colony, they bought acreage at the north end of Erringer Road. That saga is just now ending, 128 years later!



Honest John Sawtelle's Store - #21 on the walking tour route. This was the first store built in Simi. It was built in the mid-1880s on the corner of Third and Los Angeles. Because of high transportation costs the items he sold cost more than double what they would have cost at cities already served by the railroad.

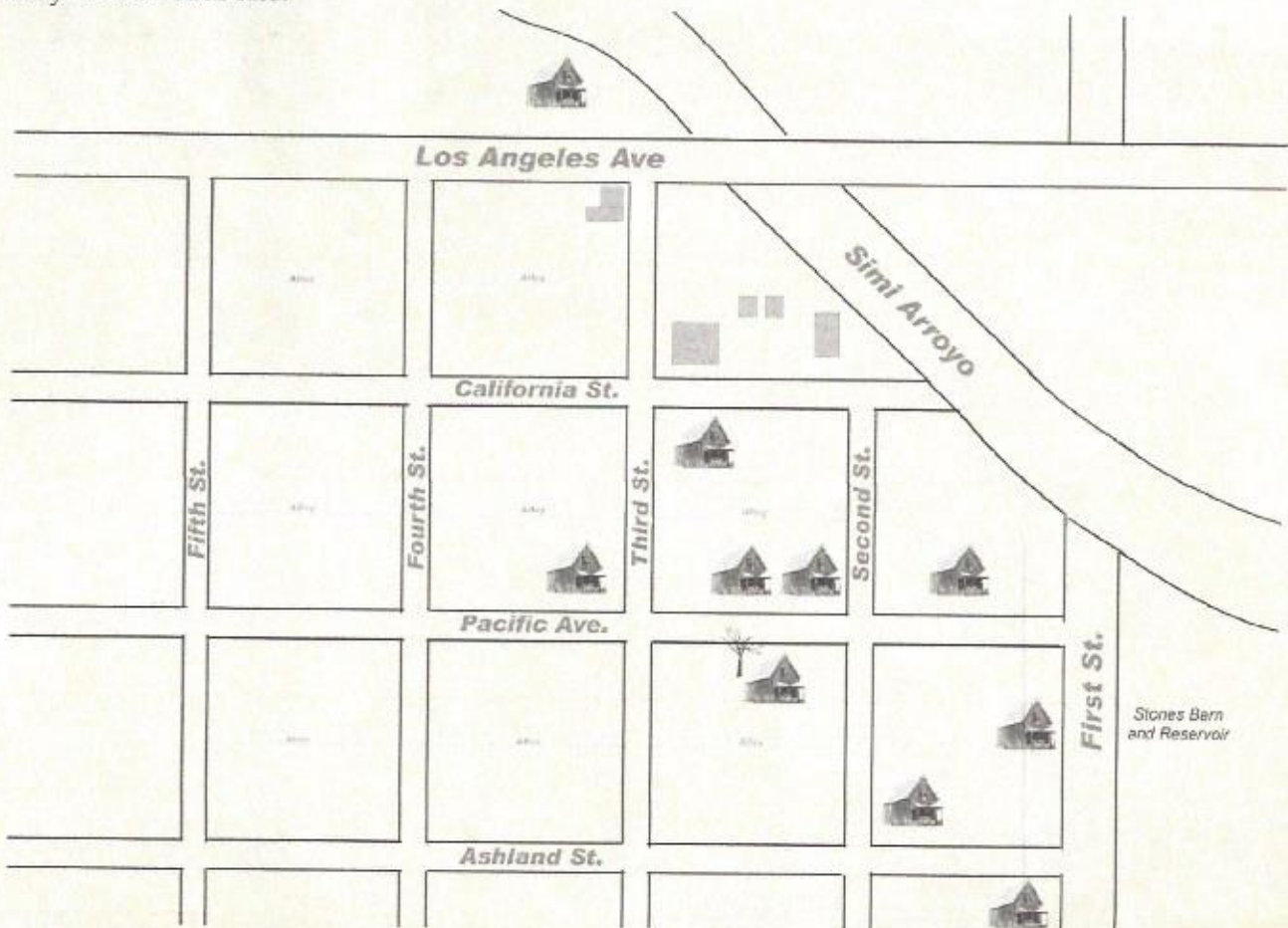
But at first, Chas. A. and Annie and their two small daughters lived in one of the colony houses, which they expected to be built and landscaped. To make matters worse, their trunks arrived at irregular intervals, with the first being their best things! So, Annie had to turn a "duster" into a house dress so she could get her house set up. And if they shipped furniture from Chicago, how long did it take to be brought here, thinking again of that stage road. Maybe it came via Saticoy.

Before long, the Havens family moved to a simple house on their property at the north end of Erringer Road (near Alamo).

Dr. George Cutler was the first postmaster, in his Colony House at First St. and Ashland. In fact, he appears to have been the local manager of the colony. He became quite well known throughout the county, and managed to plan and carry out a Ventura County exhibit at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago! Two other postmasters, named Charles Parantau and Hester Moore, succeeded Dr. Cutler.

Below is a map that shows the location of the ten Colony Houses which formed 'Simiopolis,' Simi's first neighborhood. Two Colony House buyers chose to buy larger acreages and had their houses built on land away from Simiopolis. Charles G. Austin's was on Erringer Rd. (just above the freeway).

The Bott house was built on eighty acres that they farmed near the railroad, east of what is Madera Road today. The house had to be moved out of the way of the railroad when it went through. As you look at the map below of Simiopolis around 1890, you can see there were only the ten Colony Houses, the Sawtelle store and the Simi School and its outbuildings. Simiopolis truly was a rural site.



Gradually Simi became fairly well known. In January 1890, a magazine named *The Overland Monthly* had this to report from an eyewitness:

"Descending the ridge, we saw the surveyors of the new railroad. Turning down a dusty road, we passed a salt grass flat, on whose upper border there huddled a singular collection of buildings. These were the exact counterpart of one another, with steep roofs, walls cut up into sections and doors and windows set with painful lack of individuality. A few of these houses were deserted but the rest had newly made flower and grass plats, all watered in common from an artesian well. There was something uncanny about this lonely village, with its mathematical likenesses and precision and its utter absence of suburbs."



The Printz House before the addition of the enclosed porch

Many pioneer families lived in the various Colony Houses through the years.

This one, the Printz/Powell house, has had only two owners, the Printz family and Larry Powell. Actually, there was a Colony House next door, to the west, where the Printzes first lived. Unfortunately, it burned down, as most of them eventually did. Bessie recounted that she was playing upstairs with her dolls, and she accidentally knocked over a kerosene lamp, which caught the cur-

tains on fire. The house burned to the ground, and the only thing that was saved was a puppy under the porch. So they moved to this very house, where Bessie lived until 1983 when Larry Powell bought it.

Just one more thought about Bessie Printz: In May 1910, she was the queen of the drill squad of the M.W. of A.! That was the Modern Woodsmen of America, a lodge that had its local center in Simiopolis!

As the Valley of Simi became more well known, how to pronounce the name of Simi was a "never-ending pronunciation problem." On September 26, 1891, a young man named E.E. Dodds wrote home to his family, about his new job on a ranch here: Along one edge, he sought to educate his family, "That Simi is pronounced SeeMee with the accent on the Mee."

At the top of his letter he stated: "Direct letters to San Fernando, Los Angeles Calif. Care of Simi Hotel." And of course, this "never-ending problem is still with us today"!

One story that Jerry Haigh loved to tell: when there was enough rain, it settled into a slough, right around the corner here. Some guy would get his team mired in it. Now do you think everyone would put their heads and teams together to pull the man out??? No, they would bet whose team was the strongest.

The second winter was a very heavy rain year. No real roads, and no bridges. Someone told that there was a squirrel atop each fence post!

Postmistress Rosa Arabella Printz was very community minded. The post office was conducted right here from 1904 till 1941. She was also very much into the temperance movement. If a young man came in, she launched into a lecture about alcohol, while the man stood on one foot and then the other! Some were said to almost crawl across the porch to put a letter in the slot on the door, to avoid a "good talking-to" from Mrs. Printz.

When phones became available, the telephone central was located here as well! So, they knew everything that was going on! If you tried to call home, the operator was apt to say, "She is not at home, she is at Virginia's playing bridge."

We have quite a collection of poems, songs and tributes to our valley. Mildred Brigham was a local poet who wrote about life here and how strongly they felt to live here. She wrote a poem for Rose Printz when she retired from the post office.

To Mrs. Rosa Arabella Printz

'Twas many, many years ago,
You came to serve us here
To hand our friendly letters out,
Send others, far and near.
At first the task was rather light;
One mail sack, on the load
Of a daily, two-horse stage coach
Over a narrow mountain road.

As time passed by, the railroad came
And so our valley grew.
Strange people and new faces here
Made much more work for you.
And from then on, all down the years,
The mail sacks grew apace
But always at the window,
Your kindly, smiling face.

We appreciate the hours
You've put in late at night,
Arranging, typing, sorting
To get things out just right.
Hours spent in careful working,
With no time to read or play,
All this we do appreciate
And understand today.

You've been loyal to your duty,
Gave service full and free,
Thirty-seven years of working
For your home town, Simi.
Now this long contract is ending
Those exacting duties, too.
But—we'll miss you at the window
Your face, your voice, and YOU.



Rosa Printz at the first Pioneer Day in July 1932

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Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum

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