

# The Branch Line

Newsletter of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley in the Depot

Fall/Winter 2023

## Celebrate Holidays in the Valley at the Museum November 24 - December 31, 2023

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley celebrates the 2023 holiday season with "Holidays in the Valley: Holidays Come in All Sizes". This exhibit opens on the day after Thanksgiving and closes on New Year's Eve.

This year's exhibit features an N-Scale operating layout of the historic San Ramon Branch Line. This layout will show trains running from scale models of the Bay Point rail yard through the cities of Concord, Oakley, Walnut Creek, Alamo, Danville, Osage, and ending in San Ramon.

The museum's baggage room will have a children's playhouse and a place that you can write and leave your letters for Santa. The museum will also exhibit a scale holiday town, Father Christmas, an operating scale Ferris wheel and carousel, a collection of Christmas and holiday books and did we mention the treasure hunt?

Mark the museum as a must visit during the holidays. See the exhibit and shop the museum store for unique gifts.

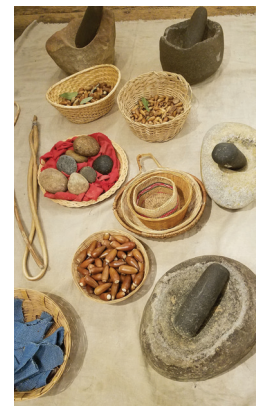


## California's First Peoples Exhibit September 12-November 7, 2023

Step into the captivating world of Native American history as you explore a curated collection that showcases the intricate tapestry of their lifestyle, and art forms. From the vast landscapes to the vibrant traditions, "First Peoples of California" invites visitors to experience the rich heritage that has shaped our community.

Learn about who lived in the San Ramon Valley beginning around 5000 years ago. How did they get here? What was their life like? What did they eat? How were they housed? These interesting topics and much more will be explored.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley welcomes visitors of all ages to experience the captivating world of the first residents of our community. Whether you're a history enthusiast, or simply curious about the rich tapestry of our area's heritage, this exhibit promises a memorable and enlightening experience for all.



# Around the Museum

## Museum of the San Ramon Valley's Virtual Programs

Held on the third Thursday of the month at 11:30, the Museum's free virtual program will end the year with some very unique and interesting programs.

- October: we will hear about the famous Escape from Alcatraz, one of the Bay Area's most interesting unsolved mysteries.
- November: Kent Long will tell us about the The Moraga Adobe
- December: a fascinating presentation on N scale railroads.

The 2024 virtual program season kicks off by welcoming back Dublin historian and virtual program contributor, Steve Minniear, for a program on the history of the Alameda County Sheriffs Department. Steve has presented some excellent programs including the history of Highway 680.

We continue to plan 2024 programs, sharing informative and entertaining content and are always looking for interesting topics and programs.

All of our past programs are recorded for later viewing, accessible on our website. To view our past programs go to our website [MuseumSRV.org](http://MuseumSRV.org).

## Totally Trains, Totally Popular

June 24-August 27, 2023



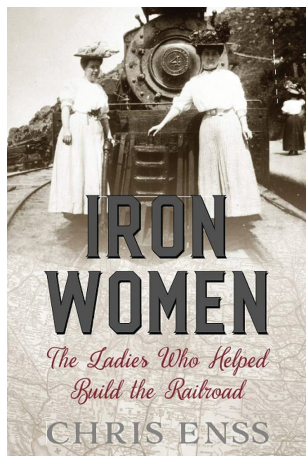
Trains travelled through the museum this summer and again drew lots of visitors. Bob and Cheryl Miranda led the effort with great support from volunteers and a crew of engineers. There were 2811 visitors and 120 \$20 family passes sold. The last week was busiest with the final week-end drawing well over 100 people each day.

This year featured a new element, railroad postal delivery. The south end of the freight room had a stamp display and a popular hands-on opportunity for kids to create stamps. And there were many other postal features.



## From the Store

The Museum Store is pleased to offer a new book, *IRON WOMEN*. The author, Chris Enss chronicles the lives of the ladies who became part of the enduring success of the transcontinental railroad and the role that historic endeavor played in connecting east to west in the expansion of the new country. Familiar names, Helen Hunt Jackson (Ramona) and Lily Langtry mingle with less well-known ones to weave the tale of one of the most ambitious undertakings of the nineteenth century.



If you are a railroad buff, or just looking for a great read, we're sure you'll enjoy *Iron Women*.

The store also has a fantastic selection of books that cover many aspects to life and history of the San Ramon Valley.

Keep the Museum Store in mind for your holiday gifts, from toy trains, wooly sheep, old fashion games, and other stocking stuffers for kids of all ages.





## Back to School Under the Stars Gala

The July 15, 2023 Back to School Under the Stars Gala celebrating the Class of 1946 was a huge success! KTVU Fox 2 Sports Anchor/Reporter, Joe Fonzi, hosted the event and led an exciting game of 1946-themed trivia. Music filled the air with Jazz Room musicians, Poet Laureate and delicious food was prepared by Sunrise Bistro.



Guest MC, Joe Fonzi

We were honored to have former Tassajara School students in attendance, reminiscing on the hot days of summer.

Thank you to all of the sponsors, donors, and auction participants, the Museum raised over \$50,000 to support the Museum financially and help continue the stewardship of the Museum's mission.

The Gala committee met for months planning the event, especially Renee Morgan who chaired the auction, Mary Frandsen who facilitated the raffle, and our gala chairperson, Candace Andersen. Thanks also to the National Charity League for helping to check in attendees and special guests.

This is such a fun event and a great committee. We invite volunteers and the community to get involved to showcase their talents and connections!



Class of 1946



Tassajara School Alumni



Beautiful evening



Poet Laureate, Elaine Betts

## New Model for the First Peoples Exhibit by Vivienne Wong

The First Peoples Exhibit has a new model. It is a handcrafted Plank House of the Yurok, Hupa, Shasta, Tolowa, Karok and other tribes who inhabited forested areas of California. From fallen trunks of cedar, fir or pine, the natives split the trunks into planks, using deer or elk antlers as wedges. At the site of the new house, they dug a shallow cellar. Plank walls were set around the perimeter and topped by a sloped roof.

The model, built by Richard Mangum, shows a double view of the structure: you can see the front of the house and, walking around the model, look into the inside of the house. From the outside the building appears low. The round door is at ground level. Enter the house, you step down a short ladder into the cellar and find plenty of headroom. Richard uses a figure to demonstrate the interior space.

The Plank House joins two other house models built by Geoffrey Bishop: the Tule House and the Bark House. The Tule House represents the houses built by the Miwok and Ohlone of the Tri-valley area, who utilized the tule reeds abundant in the marshlands of the vicinity. The Bark House is made from old-growth redwoods or cedar trees and is built by Wintu, Mono, Coastal Miwok, Sierra Miwok and other groups located in northern California.

The three types of houses, superbly detailed, are wonderful exhibit models and excellent teaching tools. When visitors and 4th grade classes come to the Museum, they see that the First Peoples built different kinds of shelters using the natural material available in their region.



Tule House



Bark House



Plank House Exterior



Plank House Interior

## Don Wood Remembered



Long-time Museum supporter and contributor, Don Wood, passed away on August 6, 2023 at the age of 87. He was the 4th generation in the Wood family to be a rancher and farmer on the Wood Ranch in Danville, established by his ancestors in 1862. Don's family currently lives on and farms the land, continuing the family's 161-year California legacy.

Don was a kind, loving, smart, caring, hardworking, and practical man, who took great pride in his children and grandchildren. Don attended Danville Elementary and graduated from San Ramon Valley High School in 1953, which his family helped establish in 1910. He also graduated from U.C. Davis.

Don raised cattle and sheep, farmed hay, grain, nut, and fruit orchards on the ranch which extended over much of the Sycamore Valley along Camino Tassajara. He donated his time, energy, knowledge, and skills to preserve the San Ramon Valley's rich and unique historical agricultural legacy. In 2002, he wrote "Random Recollections of Things I've Seen or Been Told", an agricultural history of the area. He also produced ranching and agricultural exhibits for the Museum of the San Ramon Valley, provided oral histories, participated in and led hands-on programs for children and adults in the community. He was a kind gentleman whose demeanor and unassuming knowledge endeared him to all he met.

In addition, Don's contributions and donations include:

- Collected ranch equipment and vehicles from Wood family and other ranchers
- Restored white cream separator and other Wood family items
- Wooden hay press, video demonstration In Tassajara Valley, 2003
- Created and restored for Museum: Prune dipper kettle and pulley, irons with Mexican rancho brands, many items for changing exhibits (including Geo Groom-made cultivator), barn walls used in exhibits
- Agriculture information and exhibits
- Acorn collecting and drying
- Never said "no" and wanted displays to look useable, not rusted
- Donated electric railway station sign (Oakland, Antioch & Eastern)
- Generous loans: camping lamp, cream separator, print shop equipment, George Wood's diary for Mt. Diablo State Park local history, much for Cowboys and Cattlemen exhibit, framed 19th c. photographs of Wood family, railroad papers from 1890, Christmas ornaments

## Volunteer Corner

by Lynne Call



I'd like to thank the student volunteers who worked over the summer and the individuals who are able to continue working during the school year.

We have a new Greeter and a new Docent starting this month--welcome Barbara and Gina.

As always, we can use volunteers with scheduled Greeter/Docent spots, but there are many opportunities that come up as a one-time or occasional basis. Feel free to email me at [Lynne223@Yahoo.com](mailto:Lynne223@Yahoo.com) and I can send you a listing of all of our offerings.





# Swimming and Immersions in San Ramon Creek

by Beverly Lane

James Dale Smith was a boy of five when his family moved to Danville in 1850. A bright button, Smith attended most of the early schools in the valley, becoming a teacher and then Headmaster of Livermore College. While in his seventies and recovering from a badly broken back, he wrote an extraordinary series of newspaper columns about his early memories called "Looking Back to the Days When the Gringo First Came." One recalled activities in the San Ramon Creek.



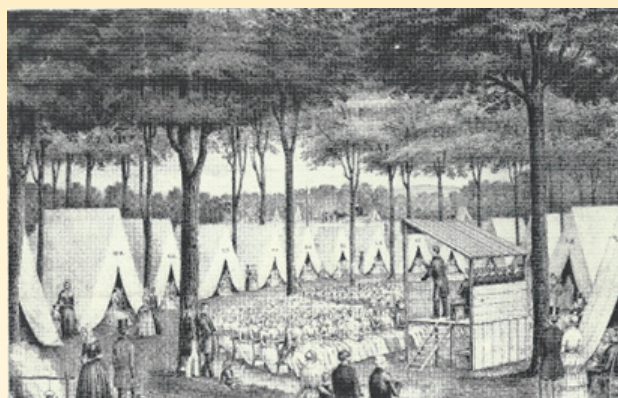
"In the early days, when I was quite a lad, in the San Ramon Valley in the San Ramon creek, there were three fine swimming holes, one near where the town of Danville is now located at the bend of the creek...It was about 50 yards long, 40 feet wide and from eight to 10 feet deep, a running stream."

The second, much patronized by schoolboys near an early school, was located midway between Danville and Alamo, just west of the Alamo cemetery. He wrote that it was the best, fully 100 yards long with varying depths from two to ten or more feet.

"The third swimming hole was north of Alamo about two miles. It was wider and longer, but not so deep, and the water did not flow so rapidly and the depth was more gradual."

The Creek was used for baptisms In the 1850s when Mary Ann Jones of Alamo and others planned several religious camp meetings. These revivals were held west of the cemetery and drew up to 500 people from long distances. Bret Harte tutored four boys in Tassajara Valley in 1856 and probably brought his charges to a revival. He wrote a short story, "An Apostle of the Tules," which detailed such a camp meeting.

Smith reported that converts were brought to be baptized in the creek, washed of their sins "I saw many young women baptized in my old swimming hole but never saw a man or boy baptized -- to be washed clean of their sins, they were usually sent to jail to repent."



Camp meeting drawing, Courtesy of the Library of Congress

"The local church members employed Mack, a negro cook, who lived near Alamo to prepare barbecued meats for all, also coffee. The local people would bring bread, cakes and pies, and a table was prepared for any not otherwise prepared for, so none might go hungry."

"I heard some wonderful exhorters at different times--they painted the fiery pit with the living coals ready to consume the sinner, in fervid and glowing terms. In later years I attended a negro camp meeting in Oakland and heard some wonderful preaching and singing....but the religious fervor did not compare with those I had attended" by San Ramon Creek.

Thanks to Smith's recollections, we know about these early Creek activities. And indeed, a Cumberland Presbyterian church was built north of today's El Portal -- just what Mary Ann Jones had planned.

## Sources:

Drummond, G. B., editor, *Recollections, Early Live in the San Ramon Valley as related by James Dale Smith* Headmaster, Livermore College, 1995; Bret Harte, *An Apostle of the Tules*





**The  
Branch Line**

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley in the Depot

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### MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday - Friday 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Saturday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Sunday 12:00 - 3:00 pm



# THANK YOU



## RECENT DONATIONS TO THE MUSEUM

Tools & household items

Branding irons & leathers

Maps & park brochures

Branding irons

Spikes, Indian materials

Book on SRV geology

Railroad memorabilia

Books, bedspread

Kitchen items

Joan Kurtz

Owen & Jackie Schafer

Claude Bendix

Bill & Ginny Fereira

Diane Filner

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