It is time to dust off your steins, dirndls, and lederhosen for an afternoon of fun Oktoberfest activities in the beautiful Shadelands Ranch Museum Biergarten!

Sunday, October 17  12 PM – 5 PM

Live Music by Alpine Sound!
Delicious authentic German beer!
Cuisine by Ludwig's German Table from San Jose!
Tickets $80/person  21 and over
Purchase tickets at eventbrite.com
For more information go to wchistory.org
Leaves, acorns, and pumpkins, oh my! Autumn has finally arrived at Shadelands Ranch Museum! The word “Autumn” is derived from the Latin word “autumnus”, with the root of the word having connotations regarding “the passing of the year”. How appropriate because it has been an extraordinary year for the Walnut Creek Historical Society!

The WCHS has weathered the “COVID storm” financially, thanks to the creativity, ingenuity, adaptability, and generosity of our Staff, Board, and devoted friends of the WCHS community. The successes of the Matching Fundraising Program, the First Annual Shadelands Classic Car Show, The Barn Sale, and Summer Market kept our society financially afloat despite the unexpected revenue losses due to the cancellations of weddings and events in 2020.

The Walnut Creek Historical Society was especially excited to celebrate our combined Membership Appreciation Event and Annual Dinner on our beautiful grounds on July 26. The weather couldn’t have been better with the Double Treble duo from the Diablo Symphony kicking off the event. Over 80 guests mingled and enjoyed a delicious dinner catered by Back Forty Texas BBQ, a Shadelands Secret Recipe Sangria, and fabulous wines generously donated by our very own board member Mark Brown. The house was open for our guests to enjoy Moira Anwar’s “100 Years of Fashion” display. Two video presentations were also available; “Then and Now” by Suzanne Hudson and “The Ide Family and Shadelands Ranch” by Alex Wood ran throughout the evening for everyone to enjoy.

Congratulations and much gratitude to our WCHS staff, Jackie Byrd, Moira Anwar, Christine Baltzey, Andrew Land, Farah Anwar, Aynsley Byrd and Zac Byrd for making our 2021 “Welcome Back Home to Shadelands“ party such a great event for our Walnut Creek Historical Society members and guests. We were especially honored to have our current Mayor of Walnut Creek, Kevin Wilk, and two former Walnut Creek Mayors, Cindy Silva and Loella Haskew attend our celebration.

Keeping with tradition, the Mary Penniman Award recipients were recognized for their successful work on the 2020 “Tea for Two” committee. The award was given to Judy Caponigro, Karen Majors, Pricilla Tudor, and Barbara Baum. The committee received a standing ovation and flowers to celebrate their contributions and volunteer work on this successful pivot. Their names are now engraved on the Mary Penniman Award perpetual plaque which will be proudly displayed in the foyer of The Shadelands Ranch Museum.
The Walnut Creek Historical Society sincerely appreciates its strong partnership with The City of Walnut Creek. The grounds have never looked better thanks to the efforts of the many city employees who work tirelessly to maintain and beautify our Shadelands Ranch Museum and grounds. The needed maintenance on the grounds has been completed and the new landscaping looks fresh and fantastic! Our Board has enjoyed working with Walnut Creek City Employees Heather Ballenger, Director of Public Works and Emyln Struthers, Administrative Analyst II during the negotiation of our new lease agreement. The new lease will carry us through June of 2026. A big thank you to everyone involved for making this process surprisingly effortless.

We are now seeing and hearing about everything pumpkin. The Walnut Creek Historical Society is not the exception. Pumpkins are now available at our annual Shadelands Pumpkin Patch! Bring your little ones to the patch early for a great selection of pumpkins, corn stalks, and other fun fall decorations! Be sure to stop by and say hi to our furry favorites from the petting zoo!

If you are looking for some adult fun this October… The Walnut Creek Historical Society invites our members and friends to enjoy a little taste of Germany on the beautiful grounds of the Shadelands Ranch Museum for Oktoberfest on Sunday, June 17, 2021 from 12-5pm. All proceeds benefit The Walnut Creek Historical Society! It’s time to dust off your steins, dirndls, and lederhosen and enjoy a day of authentic German cuisine, imported German beers, music by Alpine Sound, contests, games and more!! The famous Ludwig’s German Table of San Jose, which was recently featured in The East Bay Times as one of the “Best Bay Area Beer Gardens” will be serving up authentic German cuisine. Tickets for this fabulous community event are available on Eventbrite and through the WCHS website. Prost!

This year the Holiday Tea Committee made the very difficult decision to cancel the Holiday Teas for the second year in a row due to the current COVID CCC Health restrictions. However, we are so excited to announce that we are moving forward with our longstanding community favorite; The Shadelands Holiday Craft Fair! Nov 27 through December 12 from 10am to 4pm the museum will be decorated for the season and ready to delight our guests with wonderful holiday crafts and goodies. Be sure and stop by for a fabulous holiday shopping experience and possibly a surprise visit from Santa! Stay tuned, details to follow!

Lastly, on behalf of our Walnut Creek Historical Society Board, we would like to thank our members and the community for their continued support! We wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season and a healthy, happy 2022!!

We look forward to seeing you soon!

Andrea Baldacci  Teresa Wenzel
Between 1850 and the early years of the 20th century, the hardest working delivery vessels of the Bay Area were flat-bottomed scow schooners. Over 400 of these craft were constructed around the Bay. The basic "scow" design was adapted to local conditions, resulting in a craft uniquely suited to San Francisco Bay. Similar vessels adapted to local needs were to be found in New England and on the shores of the Great Lakes.

Able to navigate the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta region’s shallow creeks, sloughs and channels, the scows’ strong, sturdy hulls could rest safely and securely on the bottom – providing a flat, stable platform for loading and unloading. Their squared bows and sterns not only maximized cargo space, but also make scows cheap and easy to build. Typically constructed of inexpensive Douglas fir, their design was so simple that most scows were built "by eye" – without plans of any kind.

Nicknamed "hay scows," it was common to see dozens of these small craft crowding San Francisco's Hay Wharf each day of the April-October season. But scows hauled much more than hay. Until the 1870s, they carried Mt. Diablo coal to San Francisco; later, scows distributed English and Australian coal upriver.

After the 1906 earthquake, the small boats freighted tons of still-warm brick from East and South Bay kilns to rebuild the City. Oregon lumber was always a common upriver cargo, and the boats hauled potatoes, onions and grain from the inland valleys to the Bay. Scows also transported gravel, sand, salt and fertilizer.

The last sailing scow schooner was built in 1906, and by the 1920s most scows had been rigged down to one mast. Gasoline engines doomed these hearty sailing vessels. Some continued to work as barges or oyster shell dredges – or bordellos???

Yes, expanding on the tradition of the “drownding parties,” some scows found their way to the East Bay as “floating palaces.” The scows were outfitted with a bar, a dance hall and at least six rooms. A gentleman could purchase a drink, a dance and the company of a lady for a fee. Scows with names such as Wanda's Scow, Lillie's Scow and Old Lady Miller's Scow were to be found tied up near Martinez, near Pittsburg, near Antioch and in the Carquinez Straight near Crockett. The bordellos were left alone by local law enforcement, who responded only to serious crimes there or multiple complaints.

The scows’ days as “the tule red-light district” were numbered, however. The Red Light Abatement Act, a vice law, became effective in California on November 3, 1914. The law was aimed at curtailing or eliminating prostitution and gave local jurisdictions the ability to shut down houses of “ill fame” – floating or otherwise. In some cases, the boats and buildings could be sold to pay the cost of prosecutions.

The first prosecution under that law in our part of the East Bay was in Concord. The Concord Transcript recorded the take down: “It was Constable Orville Stow of Walnut Creek who invaded the suspicious place inhabited by a Mrs. Lillie Johnson and a young woman companion and brought them forthwith before Justice George O. Duncan.”

By late 1916 the effort to stamp out “a nuisance which should be enjoined, abated, and prevented” – as the law described prostitution – was well underway. The scows’ days as party barges – and more – came to an end.

If you would like to see a scow schooner that managed to maintain her virtue, the lovingly restored scow Alma (built 1891) is docked in San Francisco. The ship is part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park's fleet of historic vessels at Hyde Street Pier. Alma sails every season on San Francisco Bay and participates in the Master Mariners Regatta each May. Alma was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1988.

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<td>![Annie L. (built 1900; scow schooner), with load of hay. At the Hay Wharf, 3rd and Channel Streets, San Francisco, CA, undated](Photo: NPS)</td>
<td>Although scow schooners and their masters were sturdy and hardworking, they also found time to relax. Scow owners traditionally sailed their boats to Paradise Cove in Marin County for family picnics in the spring. And the wide-decked craft were so often rented out for evenings of dancing (and drinking) on the Bay that schooner men had a special name for such excursions – they called them &quot;drownding parties.&quot;</td>
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Continued from Page 4

Alma (built 1891; scow schooner), port quarter view, under way. On San Francisco Bay, CA, undated (Photo: NPS)

So take your grandchildren for a sail on Alma. Let them haul the sails and explain to them how the waterways were the roads of early California and scows were the early pick-up trucks. Save the bordello story for when they are older.

Adapted by Suzanne Hudson, Docent - National Park Service Visitor Center at Hyde Street Pier from “Alma History” (National Park Service) and Days Gone By in Contra Costa County volume 2 (Nilda Rego)

Looking for something to do during the Pandemic? How about a historic walk along an old railroad line?

In the 1800’s, ranching in Walnut Creek became farming, with wheat, grapes, pears, walnuts, apricots and almonds grown in abundance. Transportation to markets beyond Contra Costa was necessary, and farmers who knew the benefits of the railroad for moving crops to bigger, more profitable markets were willing to donate land for a Southern Pacific right of way. The first train ran in June 1891 and stopped in Concord, Walnut Creek, Danville and San Ramon.

By the turn of the century the train was not only transporting fruit and nuts, but was also the main way for people to travel around the Bay Area. It took 2 1/2 hours to reach San Francisco from Walnut Creek and passengers paid $1.50 for a ticket.

In time the need for the railroad diminished as trucks, cars, and buses began to transport goods and East Bay residents. The train stopped operating in 1978 and the rails were removed, leaving the beginnings of a recreational trail. Contra Costa County received 18 million dollars from the state of California, transportation grants to purchase the right of way along the old railroad line.

Today East Bay Regional Park District maintains the Iron Horse Trail. Over a million pedestrians and horseback and bike riders use the paved, wheelchair accessible trail yearly. Dogs on a leash are welcome.

There are many places to enter the trail. In Walnut Creek a good place to start is at Walden Park, 2698 Oak Road. If you walk through the park you’ll find several scenic, shady directions to continue onto the trail. You can also reach the Iron Horse Trail from Heather Farm Park. The trail has information boards and brochures with maps, and www ebparks org also has trail maps. Don’t miss the bridges at Treat Boulevard and Ygnacio Valley Road; if you haven’t walked, run or biked on these Walnut Creek landmarks it’s a great experience.

The Iron Horse Trail has continued to evolve and expand. When complete it will be over 50 miles long, from Suisun Bay to Alameda. The Pandemic will be a memory, but the trail will always be available.

Lee Culver
Mat Roy Thompson, given name Leroy Thompson was born in Dunlap, Iowa in 1874, but grew up in Tacoma Washington. He graduated from high school at 16; his first year of college was spent at Rose Polytechnic Institute of Technology in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1890 where he studied engineering. The following year Stanford University opened, and Mat Roy enrolled as a sophomore, one of only 11 upper class men. There were 559 students in that first class, only 130 were women; Stanford was among a very few private co-educational universities at that time. Our own Bessie Penniman was one of those 130 trailblazing women.

Mat Roy (who, as did Bessie, I will refer to as Roy) and Bessie’s paths crossed, and the pair began attending social events together including the first football game between Stanford and UC Berkeley. Herbert Hoover, who became the 31st president, was the student manager of both the baseball and football teams and one of the instigators of the inaugural Big Game which became a legendary rivalry. Stanford won that first game by the way. Soon Roy and Bessie began going steady and then became engaged. There are very few references to her engagement in the letters Bessie wrote home during her Stanford years, but many letters admonishing her from Carrie, her mother, to behave like a lady. I only found one letter in which Carrie refers to the engagement.

Roy did not return to Stanford for his junior year. He took a job in a sawmill in Tacoma instead. Whether the Panic of 1893 had any bearing on Roy’s dropping out of school is not known. Bessie and Roy continued to correspond, but with less frequency as time passed. Bessie transferred to Cornell University in the fall of 1893. There she met tall, handsome, and, I might add, very wealthy, Albert Johnson, another engineering student. She broke her engagement to Roy and accepted an engagement ring from Albert. Albert graduated in 1895 and went to work for his father. Bessie did not return to Cornell for her senior year. She stayed at Shadelands and spent her time sewing her trousseau and preparing for her wedding. During this time, she and Albert exchanged 100’s of love letters. They were married November 19, 1886.

Roy married a woman he met in Tacoma, Patience O’Hara, also in 1886. Bessie and Albert visited Roy and his wife and their, 3 children, in 1904 in Washington on their way to Alaska. This was the beginning of a relationship between Bessie and Roy’s 3rd son Mat. Patience and Roy ultimately had 6 children.

In the years preceding WWI Roy took a job with a nationwide government program appraising the value of railroad property. The job required extensive travel and many visits to Chicago where Albert and Bessie were living. Between 1919 and 1924 Roy visited the Johnsons frequently. Spending so much time away from home was hard on his marriage, and he and Patience became estranged.

When Roy’s work took him to Washington DC, he, and the Johnson’s lost touch. Roy’s son, Mat, sent a Christmas greeting to the Johnson’s in 1924. Albert responded with a telegram asking where he could find Roy. Upon receiving Roy’s contact information from Mat, Albert wrote Roy and offered him the job of overseeing the construction of the vacation home he was having built in Death Valley. In November 1925 Roy went to Death Valley to assess the job and ultimately quit his position as senior railroad assessor with the Interstate Commerce Commission to devote himself to finishing what became known as Scottie’s Castle.

Albert had designed a main house, a simple stucco box which he felt symbolized that everything he did was “on the square.” Bessie thought it was ugly and was delighted when Roy proposed a Spanish style hacienda to replace the “box” similar to the buildings on the Stanford campus. Albert apparently gave Roy free rein and had little involvement in the project from then on. Roy spent the next 6 years supervising construction of the “castle” and Johnson’s property at Lower Vine Ranch. He and Bessie worked closely together. Roy was paid $400 a month and sent half of his salary to Tacoma to support Patience and their children. In 1931 Patience and Roy were divorced. Shortly after Roy’s divorce, Albert halted construction in Death Valley due to financial difficulties brought on by the Depression and a land ownership dispute.

Out of a job and nearly broke Roy moved to Reno, connected with an old friend, Ivan Thaxton, and soon they were married. Roy wrote to Albert asking for work when construction on the “castle” resumed. Albert did hire him to complete some drawings for a guidebook of Scotty’s castle that Bessie was creating for tourists and to survey a plot of land in Santa Maria, CA. which he gratefully accepted. Roy’s signature appeared on only one of the drawings the printed brochure; it is customary for an artist to get credit for his work.
In 1947 Johnson tried to contact Roy to oversee the completion of the swimming pool but the two never connected. Roy managed to pick up government engineering contracts, moved to LA, and worked on the Los Angeles Colorado River Aqueduct then laid out a number of military bases. He died of natural causes at age 88.

**The Burning Question**

There has been much speculation about the nature of the relationship between Bessie and Roy? They corresponded throughout their lives. People have guessed that perhaps Bessie, who never had children, was unfilled and so dwelled on her past relationships, imagining what her life would have been like had she married Roy. Many believe that Roy never got over Bessie, his first love. Roy confessed his feelings for Bessie in a letter to his then wife Patience who said this about the letter:

“When [Roy] was living in Chicago working for the R.R. he was with the Johnsons a great deal. [He] wrote me at that time that ‘Bessie was the one love of his life, that if he didn’t see her for another 25 years, he would love her just as much.’ There were some other details about a pleaded for kiss, given or withheld, I’m not sure which. I have forgotten, but at any rate, Bessie acted the correctly virtuous role... but being human, probably quietly cherished the thought that she was his real love.”

—Patience O’Hara, quote in *Scotty’s Castle Was Bessie’s Baby*

Was Roy’s acknowledgement of his feeling for Bessie the reason for his divorce from Patience or was it due to their long-time estrangement. Could Bessie have intentionally or unintentionally played a role in the dissolution of their marriage? Mat discussed the issue with Scotty’s castle personnel and concluded:

“...I am inclined to accept Mr. Earl’s [castle staff] observations as essentially true... I asked him if he thought Mrs. J had put Dad up to getting the divorce (it came at her [Patience] suddenly) he said he didn’t know, but that he wouldn’t put it past her...”

— Mat Thompson, Letter to Ralph E Thompson

Romantic or not, there was clearly a bond between Bessie and Roy. What was Albert’s reaction. Mat and his sister Patience stated that at times Albert showed hostility toward Roy. In a joint interview the two acknowledged:

“There seemed to be a bit [of] a rivalry or some time type of emotional condition between Albert Johnson and [Roy] Thompson, and it seemed that any time Mr. Johnson saw Roy Thompson’s signature on a drawing or document, he would erase it.”

—Shirley Harding, Interviewer/paraphraser, Thompson Family Joint Interview

Mat wondered whether Albert deliberately removed Roy’s signature from all the drawings but one in the tourist pamphlet. It is reported that Albert was violently opposed to Roy’s divorce from Patience and begged Roy to reconsider. Albert was very religious and may have objected to the divorce on moral grounds or did he perhaps have personal reasons for his objections? This question will forever remain unanswered.

Mat also was perplexed by Bessie's attitude toward him. He said:

“In 1920, I spent 6 weeks with my father whose office at that time was in Aurora, Illinois, not far from Chicago. Dad and I spent a few weekends with the Johnsons. Once when Bessie and I happened to be alone, she said to me with some feeling, ‘I almost feel like you were my own son.’”

—Mat Thompson, *Scotty’s Castle Was Bessie’s Baby*

Continued on page 8
Continued from Page 7

It is understandable that Bessie may have been fond of Mat and may have viewed him like a son. She was a devout Christian; whether her feelings for Roy were anything other than platonic we will never know, but it is highly unlikely that she would have been unfaithful to Albert. Although there has been much conjecture to the contrary, there is considerable evidence in the letters Bessie and Albert exchanged and comments from those close to them that they were devoted to each other. We have to resign ourselves to the fact much of Albert and Bessie’s relationship history will forever remain a mystery.

By Priscilla Tudor

References: For this piece I drew on information from the myriad of Penniman and Johnson letters in the WCHS files, “A History of Stanford - Stanford University”, and from an article on Mat Roy Thompson in Wikipedia which cites the following sources:

Bessie Johnson vertical file, Scotty's Castle Resource Library, NPS: DEVA.
Henderson, Randall. "He Built Scotty's Castle...", Desert Magazine, September, 1952; Pg 4-10.
Appendix A, Biographies of Significant Individuals Associated with Death Valley Ranch.
*Mat Roy Thompson* vertical file, Scotty's Castle Resource Library, NPS: DEVA.
Thompson, Mat. "Scotty's Castle was Bessie's Baby." *Mat Roy Thompson* vertical file, Scotty's Castle Resource Library, NPS: DEVA.
Section: Divorce
Section: Facts
Section: Finale
Section: Off Dead Center
Section: The String Bass and the Etchings


**LEAVE A LEGACY FOR THE WALNUT CREEK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Please consider naming the Walnut Creek Historical Society in your will, trust, or as the beneficiary of an insurance policy. The Walnut Creek Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. When you include a gift to the Walnut Creek Historical Society in your estate plan, you ensure your support will help the Society to continue its work to benefit our community in the future.
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Craft Faire

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Masks Required Indoors!

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events@wchistory.org wchistory.org
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