CO-PRESIDENTS’ MESSAGE

In Pennsylvania, Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow and thus predicted there would be six more weeks of winter. The end of January and beginning of February brought to Walnut Creek that little blip of springtime tempting us with warmer weather to come. Was Phil just teasing us?

It was a year ago today our fair city and state began the Shelter in Place orders. Just recently Contra Costa County moved into the red tier, allowing more businesses to open indoors with limited capacity. More and more people are getting vaccinated every day and the case rate continues to drop. Fingers crossed many more of us will be vaccinated by the end of spring.

The Walnut Creek Historical Society continues to carry on despite the loss of revenue from our weddings and events in 2020. Despite being in a holding pattern, Jackie continues to hold tours for potential brides, with 19 weddings booked for 2021. A Fundraising Committee was formed to brainstorm and plan for some fun events this year. Despite having to cancel our Garden Party Tea and Vintage Fashion Show, we are planning on holding a Classic Car Show with 100 Years of Ford in June, a Summer Market and Barn Sale in August and possibly a Fall Event. Stay tuned there will be more details to come!

Mark your calendars! The City of Walnut Creek is holding another Community Food Drive on Saturday, April 17. This event was so successful last year that the City decided to do it again with our food banks in dire need. The historical society will have a table at the Shadelands Ranch Museum accepting food donations from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Please stop by for contactless drop off of your food donations. When you do stop by, please be sure to check out our new landscaping in the front and side of the house. Tony, our landscaper has been busy putting in new irrigation and plants that will definitely spruce up our beautiful grounds. There might be six more weeks of winter but the City of Walnut Creek and the historical society are gearing up for spring now!

By Teresa Wenzel and Andrea Baldacci

WE ARE GOING PAPERLESS!!

In an effort to reduce printing and postage costs the WCHS will no longer be mailing out the Quarterly Newsletter, effective July 1st. We understand this is a big change but a necessary one during these trying times. We will be emailing the newsletter to those members whose email addresses we have on file.

To confirm or provide your email address please contact us at wchistorysrn@gmail.com.

The Quarterly will also be posted on our website at www.wchistory.org on the following dates:

January 1 (Winter) • April 1 (Spring) • July 1 (Summer) • October 1 (Fall)

Thank you, WCHS
The Walnut Creek Historical Society
Presents

100 Years of Ford
Sunday, June 6, 2021
10 AM - 3 PM
Outdoor Event • Free Entry
Fabulous Cars • Live Music • Awards
Great Eats • Raffle

Virtual Annual Dinner
Monday, June 14, 2021
6 PM
Email wchistorysrm@gmail by Friday, June 11
to receive Zoom login information

Join us for a historic cocktail, in the comfort of your home, as we “zoom” through the presentation.

Gin Rickey
Originally made with bourbon, the Rickey was created in the 1880s when a bartender added a lime to Colonel Joe Rickey’s regular morning bourbon and soda (or so the story goes). Swapping out bourbon for gin made the Gin Rickey one of the most popular drinks in the early 1900s.

Ingredients
4 parts soda water
1 1/2 parts gin, preferably Plymouth Gin
1/2 part lime juice

Pour the liquid ingredients into a highball glass over cubed or hand-cut ice. Garnish with the lime wheel.

Pisco Punch
Invented at San Francisco’s legendary Bank Exchange bar in the late 1800s, Pisco Punch became a very popular drink during the Gold Rush.

Ingredients
3 parts Pisco
2 parts pineapple juice
1 part lime juice (or lemon)
1 part simple syrup
3-4 drops gum Arabic (if available)

Mix all ingredients thoroughly in a shaker with ice. Pour into a punch or tall glass and garnish with pineapple.

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.
2021 Board of Directors

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SUMMER MARKET AND BARN SALE
AUGUST 15, 2021
9AM – 4PM

WCHS is excited to be hosting a Summer Market and Barn Sale at The Shadelands Ranch Museum.

The Summer Market will be a one-stop shopping experience for everyone. We will have up to 50 vendors offering everything from locally-produced products to artisanal foods along with various businesses and services. Come spend the day with us.

With the museum closed our hard-working staff has been cleaning, organizing and cataloging our extensive collection. At the same time we have found some wonderful vintage items that don't quite fit the historical time frame of the house. As a result we have decided to offer these items for sale. We don't offer items for sale very often so don't miss out.

If, like us, you have been “COVID” cleaning and looking for a place to donate your gently-used, vintage items, please consider us. We will be accepting donations for The Barn Sale until July 31. We will gladly accept small furniture, vintage house décor and pre-1970s clothing. Please call 925-935-7871 to schedule your drop-off. Thank you in advance for your support.

Please note: We are unable to accept large furniture, electronics or any item requiring electricity.

We look forward to seeing you on August 15!

DONATIONS APPRECIATED!!

The Walnut Creek Historical Society welcomes gifts of funds, stock, property and bequests in Wills and Trusts or in honor or memory of a loved one. All gifts are tax deductible and will be acknowledged personally in our newsletter unless you request otherwise.

Please make checks payable to the Walnut Creek Historical Society, 2660 Ygnacio Valley Road, Walnut Creek, CA 94598.
SAGA of SULPHUR SPRINGS RANCH (Part 1)

What do the namesake of Ygnacio Valley, a rotten egg smell, a one-legged Canadian gambler, a horse named King Heather and Clark Gable have to do with Walnut Creek’s development? They each made at least a cameo in the history of the 255-acre piece of land where Heather Farm Park, St. John Vianney Church, John Muir Hospital and numerous Walnut Creek residences currently exist.

It is a fascinating exercise to trace history. You pick a starting point and go back in time to see what happened before and then go forward to see what has happened since. Heather Farm Park, Walnut Creek’s wonderful 102-acre recreational facility, was the starting point for my inquiry. I had learned some interesting facts about it while preparing an article for the Conference of California Historical Societies and thought to expand on them and share them with the Walnut Creek Historical Society family.

Little did I imagine that there was so much history waiting to be mined. We will travel back in time to 1834, when Doña Juana Sanchez de Pacheco applied to the Mexican government for title to the 17,734 acres that would include present day Walnut Creek. Then we will narrow our focus to one particular parcel of the land grant and trace it to current time, meeting interesting characters and hearing their stories along the way.

Early Times

Those who have taken our docent tour of the Penniman Family home know that the Walnut Creek story started with that grant of 17,734 acres by the Mexican government to Doña Juana in recognition for her late husband’s service to Mexico. Miguel Antonio Pacheco had come to California with his parents as part of the 1775 De Anza Expedition. He had served as a corporal at the San Francisco Presidio. Miguel and Doña Juana had 12 children. Upon Doña Juana’s death the land grant was divided among 13 immediate family members under an order signed by President Andrew Johnson.

During her lifetime, Doña Juana employed her grandson, Ygnacio Sibrian, as her mayordomo to oversee her land grant. She sold him 1,000 acres of the grant for $4,000 and he later inherited 255 acres from his mother, María Rosa Pacheco, Doña Juana’s daughter who married José María Sibrian at Mission Santa Clara in 1819. It is this 255-acre parcel which we will trace through time.

Sulphur Springs Ranch

Today many people smell the odor of rotten eggs as they crest Ygnacio Valley Road near John Muir Hospital and St. John Vianney Church. The smell comes from a subterranean sulphur spring that flows near a pepper tree at the edge of St. John Vianney’s parking lot.

Ygnacio Sibrian built his home near that sulphur spring on the 255-acre parcel. He named his property Sulphur Springs Ranch. From the summit of the hill he would look down on a forest of giant oak trees where cattle grazed in the fall. The view of “Ygnacio’s Valley” was a pleasure to him. He lived his life quietly as “Don Ygnacio,” a man of warm hospitality and loyal friendships. He often found himself in need of funds to defend against claimants for the land his grandmother had been granted and he subsequently purchased and inherited. He sold off a portion of his 1,000 purchased acres whenever money was needed, never touching his Sulphur Springs Ranch acreage.
Spa Days

Don Ygnacio would offer friends water from the sulphur spring and it was suggested that the mineral water had curative power. In 1868, a friend, Dr. Rowan, asked if he might use the spring water to treat his patients. Ygnacio agreed and Dr. Rowan built pools into which he ran the mineral water. He also built a hotel. For seven years all went well, so well that in 1874 Ygnacio accepted an offer from Dr. Rowan to further develop four acres for the enterprise.

Don Ygnacio found himself short of funds again in 1871. Normally he would have sold some of the purchased acreage; however, by this time there was none left to sell. He would never sell Sulphur Springs Ranch. Instead he took out a mortgage on the ranch, borrowing from his father-in-law.

Foreclosure on the Ranch

In 1875 disaster struck the spa operations. A fire destroyed the baths and the hotel. Dr. Rowan was able to rebuild the baths but not the hotel. It is thought that Don Ygnacio’s home was damaged as well, because he borrowed again from his father-in-law, taking out a second mortgage. For two years Don Ygnacio did not meet the obligation of his mortgages. His father-in-law asked for satisfaction of the debt and sold the mortgages to a German immigrant living in Concord, John Denkinger, after Don Ygnacio was unable to meet his obligation.

When there were no payments forthcoming from Don Ygnacio, John Denkinger foreclosed. On November 9, 1877 Don Ygnacio placed his mark, an X, on the deed to Sulphur Springs Ranch and turned the property over to John Denkinger. In return he received the two canceled mortgage documents and $6,773.50. He moved to Concord and spent the rest of his life living with relatives there. Don Ygnacio died of “cystitis” on March 20, 1895 at age 72.

Elusive Profits from the Sulphur Springs

Mr. Denkinger refurbished the existing baths and reopened the spa on June 1, 1879. He named the enterprise “Bareges Sulphur Springs” after the village in the French Pyrenees that has warm, sulphurous springs made famous in the 17th century. But the business did not prove profitable and in 1882 the property was owned by R. Sanders. He did no better and shut the baths down.

The property was then owned by A. J. Gurnett of Concord, who did nothing with it. Upon his death the property was purchased from his estate by Margaret Ann Walker, widow of Walnut Creek pioneer rancher James T. Walker. She paid the estate $11,020 for the 255-acre parcel. She and her son Johnny kept horses at what was now referred to as “the Walker place.” However, like the owners before them, they were unable to make a go financially and sold it after ten years to Lizzie Louise Hart, Charles Edwin Hart and Ethel May Fifield of San Francisco. This trio held the land for three years and then sold it.

The next buyer, John W. Marchbank, reversed the hard luck fortunes of Sulphur Springs Ranch.

By Suzanne Hudson

Look for the SAGA of SULPHUR SPRINGS RANCH Part 2 in the Summer Quarterly
**James P. Howe’s Steamer Trunk Returns to Walnut Creek**
*Dateline: Christmas, 2020*

“Twas three weeks before Christmas when all thro’ the house,
Covid had quieted Shadelands, but for maybe a mouse.”

Then the phone rang.

The caller was Loren W. Rice of Palm Desert, California. He wanted to donate a steamer trunk to Walnut Creek Historical Society that once belonged to James P. Howe, a notable figure in Walnut Creek history. The claimed provenance was credible. Loren also assured the trunk came with a story. The hitch was physical transport had to occur before year’s end as Loren was downsizing to a smaller home.

By year’s end, following a 976 mile road trip to and from Palm Desert, the trunk was once again in Walnut Creek along with a story as good as advertised.

The trunk story in a moment, but first a little about James P. Howe.

James P. Howe

James Howe (1879-1970) was a Pulitzer Prize nominated writer and news correspondent with the Associated Press (AP), famed for his internationally syndicated news column, “Here’s Howe.” Son of a legendary Kansas newspaperman, Jim Howe covered the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire for the San Francisco Chronicle. He became a front line AP war correspondent in 1914. Over the years he was stationed in London, Paris, Warsaw, Berlin, Moscow, and Peking, covering battle fronts in Germany, Russia and Poland, as well as, serving in India and Japan. Jim Howe was the kind of newsman cub reporters dreamed of being and seasoned reporters wish they had been. He interviewed such notables as Stalin, Lenin, Chiang Kai-Shek, The Prince of Wales, George Bernard Shaw, Alexander Wolcott, movie and theatre personalities. He was a special friend of the chef at Buckingham Palace and was one of three newsmen to return home with Charles Lindberg from Paris in June, 1927 aboard the USS Memphis (CL-13).

In 1910 Jim Howe purchased approximately 7 acres at 2950 Walnut Boulevard in Walnut Creek naming it Gopher Gulch Ranch. In 1920 he married Mia, his interpreter in Germany. Gopher Gulch Ranch was a stopping off place until the two permanently settled there in 1935.

The last 35 years of Jim Howe’s life were as busy as the first 35. Hobbies and interests became his full-time job. A few included wine making, raising and smoking wild game, and cooking. These became the secret sauce for great entertaining at Gopher Gulch Ranch. He remained an active member of the San Francisco Press Club until his passing. The moniker of Renaissance man would be incomplete without including Jim Howe’s affinity for people.

**Final Years**

Fast forward to the mid 1960s: Two important people in the early days of John Muir Memorial Hospital in Walnut Creek were Dr. Marvin A. Epstein, M.D. (Chairman of the By-Laws Committee) and Ray F. Farwell (first Hospital Administrator). In 1966 Ray Farwell recruited Loren Rice as Assistant Hospital Administrator. That same year Jim’s beloved Mia passed away.

Mia’s passing was a turning point in Jim Howe’s life. His interests narrowed. Well into his 80s, attending funerals replaced hosting parties. His personal physician, Dr. Epstein, diagnosed him with cancer. The Howes had no children. Dr. Epstein discussed with Jim Howe the idea of a donation for Phase II of John Muir Hospital. In all likelihood, Gerry Lar Rieu, neighbor, good friend of the Howes, and Trustee of John Muir Hospital encouraged the idea. And so it was written.
Jim Howe died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on April 14, 1970. At his request, he was buried at Oak Grove Cemetery in Knight’s Ferry, Stanislaw County. But for a few specific collections, Jim Howe willed his property to John Muir Hospital. Gerry Lar Rieu was formally administrator of the Howe estate, but as a practical matter the task fell to Loren Rice.

**The Steamer Trunk**

Within 48 hours of Jim Howe’s passing, Loren Rice went to Gopher Gulch Ranch for an initial survey. He was announced by a small yapping dog and confronted by a formidable man with a rifle. The two were doing their jobs as live-in caretakers of Jim Howe’s property. Their names are no longer remembered.

After introductions Loren Rice proceeded to look things over. His overall impression of the home and grounds was “trashed.” Loren’s suspicion was that following Mia’s passing Jim Howe went Bohemian in lifestyle – didn’t care much about things. The steamer trunk was found in an upstairs room of the main house called the “Ego Room.” Loren called it such because he found this title made from letters cut out of newspaper and glued to a board within the room. There was a bed in the room, but Loren could not tell if it was Jim Howe’s bedroom or a guest bed room. At the time, the trunk was over flowing with menus from restaurants from around the world. These menus were specifically willed to his good friend, the legendary writer and food critic, Mary F. K. Fisher (1908-1992) of Glen Ellen, CA.

For the record, in addition to gifting his menu collection, Jim Howe specifically willed his extensive collection of cork screws to Brother Timothy (1910-2004) of the Christian Brothers in Napa, CA and his collection of rare Manchurian pigeon whistles to the Oriental Collection at U.C. Berkeley and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. A collection of his personal papers, manuscripts and letters are housed in the University of Kansas Library.

Loren Rice held an estate sale of Jim Howe’s personal property not specifically willed. Friends of Loren’s from Mill Valley purchased the trunk and used it in their home as a coffee table from approximately 1970 to 1990. They gave it to Loren, then living in Carmel, when they downsized about 1990. It was a coffee table there until he moved to Palm Desert in 2000, continuing in that function.

The trunk measures 51 inches long, 18 inches high, and 22 inches wide. On the exterior of the hinged lid is a metal tag bearing the manufacturer’s name, Rudolf and Rudolf of Berlin. It is reinforced with brass fittings and maple skids. The piece is a steamer trunk in design meant to rest upright with hanging clothes. Fragments of Far East shipping stickers remain. In all likelihood this was Jim Howe’s travel luggage during his storied career.

**Postscript**

Today Gopher Gulch Ranch with many of its original buildings is Howe Homestead Park, owned by the City of Walnut Creek and enjoyed by the public. That prospect was unlikely in 1970 when Jim Howe passed away. Development as single family housing was the path of least resistance. To be sure, Loren Rice, representing the interests of John Muir Hospital, received many offers along those lines. In 1972 he followed Ray Farwell as its second Hospital Administrator. As for Gopher Gulch Ranch, Loren Rice stalled. He realized its beauty and historical significance. He also appreciated that as a responsible community entity, the Hospital’s objective was not just money.

In June, 1974 Walnut Creek voters approved an Open Space bond measure providing $6.7 million to acquire approximately 2,500 acres of parks, open space and trail easements to be protected in and around Walnut Creek. The answer to Loren’s quandary had arrived.

Thank-you, Loren Rice!

By: J. H. LaBrie
Please check address, if there is a star next to your name it is time to renew your membership.

Please use Membership Renewal Form.

Check out our website at wchistory.org

The Walnut Creek Historical Society is hosting a food drop off station at the Shadelands Ranch Museum, 2660 Ygnacio Valley Road on Saturday, April 17th from 9am to 12pm. Contactless drop off will be provided!

Bring us a full grocery bag and we’ll give you a beautiful book about the history of Walnut Creek!

Help “fill the need for food” by participating in the Community Food Drive. It’s a simple way to help!

NO GLASS PLEASE!