



NEWS

This Member newsletter is a bi-monthly publication of the SHARPSTEEN MUSEUM ASSOCIATION, a non-profit organization.

VOL. 39, NO. 2 ■ Feb/Mar 2021

Message from the President:

Unprecedented challenges shared by RLSM

Recently, the Museum received a letter from Gerry R. Working, Board Chair of the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum in St Helena, a part of which I would like to share with you.

“This year our local community - and many others - has faced a series of unprecedented challenges. From the impacts of the global pandemic to the local devastation caused by the recent wildfires we have all felt the pressures and strains of living in the wake of this changed world. However, in spite of all of this we, as a community, both locally and globally, have seen great teamwork, support and adaptability as we collectively navigate the road ahead.”

Last March, the Mu-

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REMINISCENCE, PART 5

Landscaping the diorama

by Ruth Durbin

“The original stage coach which now sits in all its glory, was at that time a ‘basket case’ stuck among all sorts of debris in the old Brannan Stable which still stands on Grant Street. Bob and I fought our way through spider webs and vermin to the “remains.” Bob measured and photographed and I sketched. From this I drew the scale plans for a reasonable facsimile.

We constructed two of the vehicles, one for the stable diorama and another for the toll house project. Steve Della Maggiora, who was a very apt student while working with Kendall O’Connor, did the magnificent background of the team of horses.

The “Toll House” was interesting to do as my husband Bob’s grandmother was a Mills College classmate of Molly



Molly Patton shoo-ing sheep from the Toll House porch.

Patton who ruled over the comings and goings through the toll gate for years.

As a small child, Bob accompanied his grandmother on several visits to the toll station. Despite Molly’s exclusive schooling, she could swear like a “trooper”. Bob learned his first swear words from Molly. No herder sneaked a single animal through the gate without paying. She is depicted in the diorama shoving sheep

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In 1993, Ruth Durbin compiled all of her memories of constructing the miniature displays with her husband Bob, and of working with Ben and other artists on the museum in the 1970’s.

We present the final installment of her story “Reminiscence” along with photos from the archives

MESSAGE

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seum was preparing for “After the Fire”, a presentation by the Board from the Gold Nugget Museum located in Paradise, California. But unfortunately, we had to cancel this presentation and close the Museum as the result of a stay-at-home order because of the ongoing pandemic. Now, a year later the Museum remains closed. I’m looking forward to a new presentation entitled “After the Pandemic”.

Over this time of the Museum closure, our board members have continued to do their jobs to set up a new exhibit, run a membership drive and prepare safety materials for our expected opening. We encourage you to continue supporting the Sharpsteen Museum by renewing your membership and/or giving a donation.

Happy New Year to you and may it be a better year for you and your family. Stay safe, wear a mask, wash your hands, stay six feet apart and get vaccinated. We look forward to reopening and welcoming you back as soon as it is safe to do so.

—Alan Rogers



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except Thanksgiving and Christmas.

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MISSION STATEMENT:

The Museum's mission is to preserve and to provide for public exhibitions and study of the history of the community of Calistoga and the upper Napa Valley.

Membership

Nov. 1 to Dec. 31, 2020

In Memorium

**John Martin
(The Commodore)
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General Donations

**Chateau Montelena
Barbara Nechis
Alan Rogers
& Dina Corcoran
Doug & Lamar Webb**



The dollhouse that started it all (above) is on display at the museum.

DIORAMA

Continued from page 1

away from the porch.

The Train-and-Chinatown diorama was surprisingly difficult for a strange reason. After working on all the neat, precise buildings previously constructed, making ramshackle, scrappy ones required a great deal of thought. Changing the very small, modern miniature train figures into Chinese and period people was trying, also.

I was so drained by the time the large diorama

and three smaller ones were completed and glassed in that I thought I never wanted to see the Museum again!

After a short rest, Bob and I decided we wanted to donate something to the Museum.

Since our work on it began with my dollhouse, what could be more appropriate than an elaborate Victorian dollhouse.”

And that’s how Ruth and Bob’s famous and gorgeous Victorian Dollhouse came to be on display in the Museum.



Ruth Durbin works on a diorama (above) with Kendall O'Connor, lead artist on the diorama.

KENDALL O'CONNOR

"He painted the diorama when it was in a freezing cold room of cinder blocks. Later he painted the HUGE picture of five horses from the stage view in our backyard using scaffolding to reach the top. And finally, he painted the blacksmith that used to be seen by what was a country store on the back right leading into the old house."



Kendall O'Connor, lead artist on the diorama, and his wife Mary Alice with Bernice and Ben Sharpsteen.

Correction

We received the following correspondence from JP O'Connor, daughter of Disney Artist Kendall O'Connor regarding his role in the development of the museum dioramas:

December 30, 2020

"Hello and greetings of the season. I was delighted to get my copy of your newsletter recently and interested as always to see how the Museum continues to fulfill its mission & Ben's dream.

In the lovely article by Ruth Durbin on "Landscaping the diorama" there is a photo that says "Ruth and Ben discuss landscaping for the diorama." Unfortunately, the caption incorrectly identified the man in the photo as Ben when it actually is my father, Kendall O'Connor, who was the lead artist on the diorama with Steve DellaMaggiora as his assistant/apprentice.

My Mom, Mary Alice, and/or I were up with Dad much of the time he was in Calistoga painting...and, in fact, there used to be a whole display on my father and his role in the museum for years. He painted the diorama when it was in a freezing cold room of cinder blocks. Later he painted the HUGE picture of five horses from

the stage view in our backyard using scaffolding to reach the top. And finally, he painted the blacksmith that used to be seen by what was a country store on the back right leading into the old house. I am not sure how things have been moved around, so don't know where these other works might be. As mentioned in Ruth's story, Dad was a very early Disney Legend having worked at the Studio from 1935 — Little Mermaid in 1989 and creating educational materials in the early 1990s.

I remember Ruth and her beautiful work. For accuracy for Ben's family and other supporters, I hope you will be kind enough to print a correction in the next edition.

Thanking you in advance and sharing that I continue to be very excited to see how all this has grown.

Warmest wishes for a Happy & Healthy New Year to all."

JP O'Connor
Burbank, CA

We would like to express our sincere apologies to the O'Connor family for the incorrect captioning of the photo published in our last newsletter. Above is the photo of Ruth and Kendall with the correct caption.

Thollander exhibit ready, waiting for doors to reopen

Our newest exhibit, “A Retrospective of Earl Thollander – Recording Life Through Art” remains waiting for the day when the Sharpsteen can reopen its doors and welcome you all in once again.

This family exhibit, spearheaded by Lauren Thollander, has virtually taken months to complete. To get final approval, we asked Lauren to bring her mother-in-law Janet to view the five display cases filled with their shared memories. Luckily for us, Janet gave us the Thumbs-up we were hoping for.

An announcement of reopening dates and times will be announced on our web site. Please keep checking for updated information. www.sharpsteenmuseum.org

Remain safe, we WILL see you very soon.



Janet Thollander waits for the doors to open on the museum’s newest exhibit, A Restrospective of Earl Thollander - Recording Life Through Art.

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