



NEWS

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

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Ben's story about his life in Calistoga was tied to his grandparents buying property north of town

PART ONE

SHARPSTEEN MUSEUM STORY TOLD IN BEN SHARPSTEEN'S OWN WORDS

In about 1978, museum member W.S. Fullerton (or "Bud" as we knew him) conducted a lengthy interview and recorded it on tape. It is the only record in Ben Sharpsteen's own voice telling how it all came about. It was later transcribed and included in the booklet "About Ben" which is available in the museum bookstore. This interview will be printed in this and future newsletters as space allows.

To adequately explain everything that has gone on within me, within my mind in the evolution of this undertaking, I'll have to start way back in the summer of 1903. That was exactly 75 years ago at a time when I was 7 years old. My grandmother on my paternal side owned two or three hundred acres of land up here in the upper part of the Napa Valley, roughly speaking 3 miles beyond the city of Calistoga.

How she came into possession of that land-- it was not agricultural land particularly-- is a different story. My father had a family of five children and we resided in Alameda, California. He was a practicing attorney in San Francisco and he saw the advantages of taking his family up here for the summer during school vacation. On that premise we all came up here.

Very vivid in my memory is the time we landed here in Calistoga and waited at the railroad depot for somebody to pick us up. I was greatly impressed with



Ben and Bernice Sharpsteen in front of Ben's studio in Calistoga, circa 1960s or early '70s.

everything. We finally arrived at our destination, the place we would spend this and each succeeding summer up to and including 1915 when I was about 20 years old. My mother and father were very considerate and very generous with our friends. She invited other children up to spend time with us so we had a succession of happy vacation periods.

During these times we managed to get around in spite of the fact that automobiles were not common in those days. The only travel would be by foot or wagon, but we managed to get around and see various sites such as the Petrified Forest, which was quite close by Mark West Springs, and other places.

Most important of all was the fact that my mother and father both had been raised in San Francisco. My father first came to the Brannan Hot Springs when he

IN HIS OWN WORDS

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was 11 years old and that



Ben

well. One of the places of interest to us was right in the heart of Calistoga, the old Hot Springs Resort which had been built by Brannan in the 1860's. There were then about a half dozen of the old Brannan buildings still existing, a number of the old cottages in a row being done in a unique,

was in 1874. He described the place quite accurately, which I remember very

distinct gingerbread architecture. They naturally stood out, each one with a palm tree standing beside it. They were the object of curiosity and questioning. About the grounds were numerous hot springs, puddles of water, so to speak, boiling water in them all of the time, and the promise that if you dropped an egg in it, it would become hard cooked in a matter of a few minutes.

Listening to my parents describe their experiences as children aroused considerable curiosity in myself which I have never forgotten. Principally I always remembered the succession of summers which became very dear to me and as I have a great deal of loyalty and sentimental instinct within myself, I have cherished those things.

As life went on I naturally pursued other fields, but circumstances worked out that I became involved with the family property here in Calistoga, so much so that my wife and I found it necessary to purchase the property from my mother and father who had acquired it in earlier years.

The family always maintained some sort of ramshackle building



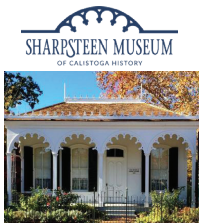
Ben's family shown here with "Petrified Charlie" (an actor) at Petrified Forest, Calistoga in the early 1900s.

on the place, just for the gathering of the clan you might, say, mostly in the summertime. Having acquired the property, it became more of a responsibility and we were forced to come up more often just to see that things were in order, and we developed a home of our own up here. As the years progressed it occurred to me that perhaps we would like to live here. Retirement comes to people, adjustments have to be made, and we decided we would like to

live here in Calistoga.

In doing so, through an old acquaintance, we were made aware of an historical society that was in the county. It was spearheaded by Ivy Loeber of St. Helena. Ivy Loeber was a dedicated woman, a great crusader in the cause of preserving heritage. We became members of the society perhaps 25 years ago and began to learn of more things of interest about the Calistoga area.

TO BE CONTINUED



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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.

Letter from the Board of Directors

March 13th marked the one year anniversary of the Sharpsteen's COVID closure.

The good news is, as we write this column, Napa County has gone into the Red Tier allowing restaurants limited indoor seating @ 25% capacity, increased indoor retail, and indoor museum visitation.

If the red tier holds steady with no new surges, we have tentatively planned to reopen on Friday, April 16. Safety for our docents, members, and visitors is our main

priority so keep your fingers crossed and continue to check our website @ www.sharpsteenmuseum.org and our Facebook page for updates.

Our new temporary hours will be Fri.-Sun only, hours 12-3 p.m. Masks will be mandatory for the time being. The Museum is fully stocked with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, gloves, spare masks and plexi-glass screens have been set up on the sales counters.

The Gift Shoppe and Book Store have been

reorganized, fully stocked, and are ready to go for your purchasing pleasure.

With our new fiscal year beginning June 1st, we have included the ballots in this newsletter for you to vote for the Board of Directors for both the Association and the Foundation. Please try to have these returned no later than May 10. Results will be published in the June 1 newsletter.

Letters to the membership will be going out



soon as a reminder for annual renewal dues. If you

prefer to renew online, please use our website and follow the prompts.

This past year seems to have gone by so fast and we understand there have been many struggles to overcome, this has not been an easy time for anyone. Please remain positive, find a reason to laugh every day, appreciate your blessings and above all else stay safe!

We celebrate research success looking for past

Periodically and more often than not we receive messages through our website asking for historical information from descendants of local families, history of properties recently purchased, old stores downtown, past students of Calistoga High School, and "where was my grandma in 1934?" You name it, we get it.

The Sharpsteen is not an historical society, nor

do we have a committee for research but we always do our best to answer. First is relying on the historical books we carry in our bookstore, looking up addresses, finding family names, backtracking to come forward. From there we take advantage of the internet. (Be aware, internet information is not always accurate, you must continue your research.)

Twice in the last month

we were able to give those answers, as well as supply links for further research.

Suzy from Oregon was looking for information regarding her grandmother who had been crowned during high school years "Queen" of a long past annual Vintage Festival. G'ma Lurline Clark had been chosen the representative of Calistoga. She was ultimately so crowned. Lurline's Cal-

istoga High School Class would have been 1934 or so. Our museum does not keep archival information that would have answered Suzy's questions, but after some research, my gosh, we found Lurline and the date of her crowning as well as other stories of this precious relative. After sharing the found information with Suzy, we were able to give her archival links to

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further her genealogical research.

Another request came from a couple from Florida who had recently purchased a 230-acre ranch at the top of Petrified Forest Rd. with a mile long driveway that begins just this side of the Napa County line crossing over into Sonoma County. The couple were looking for some history of the property but specifically of the name of the road: Rancho Juan Inez.

Who was Juan Inez?

We researched not only extensive Napa & Sonoma County records but records of all California Ranchos dating back to the early 1800's. Then, Hallelujah!, after deeper research using the Napa County newspaper archives we found the road name 'Rancho Juan y Inez'. The now infamous road was named for the original owners, Dr. John Humber and his wife Agnes. They had named their beloved property after themselves, John & Agnes.

MEMBERSHIP

January 1
to March 31, 2021

IN MEMORIAM

Gene Duffy

Mary Peterson

Lil Ticen

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