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Front Cover: A Young Californio woman, poised and regal, represents a short-live and romanticized era in California History. See Donald J. Hagerty’s article on the library’s Maynard Dixon mural, pages 14-23.

Back Cover: One of the many details from Dixon’s great mural, “A Pageant of Traditions.” It depicts an Aztec leader.

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Pony Express Historian
Joe Nardone’s Gifts from the Trail

By M. Patricia Morris
One hundred fifty-eight years ago, on April 3, 1860 at 7:15 P.M., the first Pony Express rider mounted his horse and set out westbound from St. Joseph, Missouri, to begin the mission of this new enterprise to transport mail by the fastest means possible via a central route across America. It just happened, I scheduled an interview with Pony Express Historian Joe Nardone in the State Library’s California History Room on April 4, 2018. Did we miss the auspicious date by one day, the day when the first Pony Express rider would have headed east from Sacramento?

As one who has made a quest of finding the truth about the history of this nineteen-month period in which the Pony Express existed, Nardone set the record straight with amazing precision telling me that on April 3rd, 1860, at 3:45 p.m., the Pony Express rider in San Francisco arrives the mail, rides from that office to the river steamer, The New World, and comes up the river to Sacramento. The steamer gets here at 2 o’clock in the morning of April 4th. On April 4th, Hamilton (the rider) gets the mail and takes off.

There you have it, our meeting took place on April 4, 2018, the 158th anniversary of the first Pony Express rider’s departure on horseback eastbound from Sacramento.
Joe Nardone’s study of the Pony Express began not long after his retirement in 1982. He was looking to write about one of America’s western trails or a branch of one of the trails when a National Park Service employee and friend asked him a question about accuracy of the 1,966 mile length of the Pony Express Trail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento. It was a question that piqued his curiosity and set in motion his 36-year fascination with the “Pony.” He has traveled the trail by seven different modes of transportation: horseback, airplane, hiking, 4-wheel drive, mountain bicycle, dual-sport motorcycle and recreational vehicle. He has participated in the marking of Pony Express stations along the trail and mapped every Pony Express mile. Over the years, Joe visited, in his words, “every repository you can think of from coast to coast. Going through their archives and reading all their newspapers in print in the 1860s.” It is the California State Library, though, where most of his research has taken place. He came to the Library for its extensive materials covering 1860–1861, and in particular its California newspaper resources.

A GIFT FOR ALL TO SEE

Unlike so many days spent in the rare book room or at a microfilm reader, Joe Nardone was not in the in the California History Section’s Rare Materials Reading Room this day to conduct research, but to talk about a major gift he is making to the State Library. When complete, the donation will include statues, artifacts, books, maps, and pamphlets, all illustrative of Pony Express history.

Why did he choose the State Library as a repository for the donation? Mr. Nardone replied that it was his relationship with former Principal Librarian for Special Collections and current Foundation Executive Director Gary Kurutz. Kurutz came down to Joe’s home in Southern California, and they talked about what the Library might like to have. “Can we do this, Joe?” Gary asked. Joe said, “We’ll figure out how to make it happen.”

When visitors step into the California History Section’s Rare Materials Read-
ing Room now, they will be able to see the physical objects he is presenting to the Library. They will be housed in and on two display cases. The cases are being constructed by Burnett & Sons, a Sacramento company that is a historic entity in itself, having been in business since 1869. The books, pamphlets, maps, and other ephemera will be incorporated into the State Library’s collections and known as the Joe Nardone Memorial Pony Express Research Collection.

THE THREE STATUES
Prominently on view will be three statues, all depicting Pony Express riders in the saddle, in full motion, with the intent expressed on their faces of moving the mail as fast as the horses can carry it. Pointing to the largest of the three statues, Nardone said, “That one knocked my socks off.” The statue is about three feet high and weighs nearly 200 pounds. It was produced by internationally renowned sculptor Avard T. Fairbanks. During his career, Fairbanks created more than 100 public monuments portraying historic figures and events. Four of his statues are in the U.S. Capitol building in Washington D.C.2

Bill Harrah of hotel and casino fame hired Fairbanks to sculpt two larger-than-life Pony Express statues. One is situated outside Harrah’s in Stateline, Nevada. The other is at Harrah’s in North Kansas City, Missouri. Nardone arranged with the Fairbanks family to create the one-half scale replica that now resides in the California State Library.

The middle-sized statue will be familiar to anyone who has spent time walking the streets of Old Sacramento. Thomas Holland, an artist who also happened to be a polo player, created the original to honor the stopping point for the Pony Express in Sacramento. Fifteen feet in height, he based the rider’s clothing on a description in Mark Twain’s Roughing It.1

Nardone purchased this replica in an antique store in Sacramento. Holland made twenty-five of these statues. He interviewed Mr. Holland, who lived in Southern California, before he died. “A really nice guy,” Nardone said. He asked the artist why the rider wasn’t carrying a gun to which Holland replied, “Well, our governor who is now President Reagan, said, “The riders rode so fast, they didn’t need one.”

Nardone found the third and smallest of the trio in an antique store in St. Joseph. Since this statue was made by a company that specializes in bookends, it was thought to be a bookend replica. “Everyone collects something,” Mr. Nardone observed. The little statue was never intended to be a bookend. This horse and rider represents a larger-than-life Pony Express statue located in the civic center of St. Joseph, Missouri. The artist, sculptor Hermon Atkins MacNeil, was commissioned to create it to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the Pony Express. It was dedicated in St. Joseph on April 20, 1940.

AN EDUCATIONAL MOMENT
The Pony Express, though brief, still stirs excitement in the American imagination. Many myths about the venture have been repeated so often they are believed to be true. During Joe Nardone’s many years of study, he has made it a point to discern fact from fiction. Before we continue to talk about his wonderful gift, let’s pause here for an educational moment.

The common belief is that Pony Express riders leaped on their steeds and galloped the 10 or 15 miles to the next station where they changed horses. Indeed all three of the young men portrayed in the statues are going, in a phrase I heard Mr. Nardone use for one of them “hell bent for leather.” But did they always ride at horse-race speeds? Not according to Nardone. “They were riding maybe 4 to 5 miles an hour, maybe 7 in the daytime when they can see. At nighttime, probably 4. You only have to do 6 miles an hour to do the trip in 10 or 11 days.” If they did that, they would meet the goal of the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company, the parent organization of the Pony Express.

MOCHILA & SADDLE
One of the two cases planned for the California History Room will house a life-size saddle and mochila. A mochila is the distinctive pack Pony Express riders used to carry mail. It could be easily thrown

Joe Nardone is showing the construction and uses of this replicated Pony Express saddle and mochila (Mo-Chee-La), the saddle cover made for transporting mail.
across a saddle and featured four cantinas, or pockets where riders inserted the letters, telegrams, and waybills. Looking at the three statues in the Library, you will see all of them are equipped with a mochila.

“There is not an original mochila in the world,” Nardone said. The gift mochila and saddle he is donating to the Library are replicas. He has had ten reproductions made of them. The Autry Museum of the American West acquired one of the replicas, and the others were presented to museums along the Pony Express Trail.4 If there are no original Pony Express mochilas, how did Nardone achieve accuracy in the replicas? It’s quite a story?

“The earliest mochila that we have on record,” Nardone said, “is at the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming.3 In 1897, Cody hired a man to make a replica mochila for his Wild West Show.” The mochila in the possession of the Cody museum had the name of the mochila maker, Louis Hook, and SLC [Salt Lake City] printed on the back. With assistance from a friend who is a genealogist, Nardone learned that “not only was this saddle maker running his own business in 1880 in Salt Lake, but he was an apprentice saddle maker in 1860 in Salt Lake City when the Pony Express was getting underway. Why wouldn’t he have made it as similar as he could recall,” he said.

Nardone then contacted the Smithsonian Institution to find out who was the museum’s saddle maker. He was referred to an outfitter in Kearney, Nebraska, the Henderson Family. The father had passed away, but his son, Lyle Henderson had taken over the business. “In fact,” Nardone said, “his father had ridden in the 1960 centennial as a Pony Express rider.” Nardone obtained the dimensions. The leather had to be very flexible and they were able to obtain it from Australia. Nardone said, “Lyle totally duplicated the one that was at the Cody Museum.”

Nardone read a Pony Express rider’s memoir in which the writer talked about the front cantina being taller and narrower than the rear one for the rider’s legs. That is how the Hook mochila was made. You will see in looking at the mochila in the Library the differences in size between the front and rear cantinas.

Then on to the saddle. Henderson found a certified 1860 saddle tree which Nardone took to a saddle tree maker in El Paso, Texas, who put one together. They even used square nuts in the stirrups, because they didn’t have the hexagonal nuts then that they use today.

1858 RUSSELL, MAJORS, & WADDELL PONY EXPRESS BIBLE
What were these riders like who ventured across the wild American countryside to deliver the mail? It is known that the average age was over twenty-one according to the 1860 U.S. Census. They were expert riders and of good character, at least, that’s the kind of men the Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company strived to employ. Indeed, newly hired Pony Express riders were required to take an oath and sign it. Nardone said the oath simply stated, “You won’t swear, you won’t get drunk, and you will treat animals kindly.”

Among Joe Nardone’s gifts to the Library is an original “Pony Express Bible.” It is 5 7/8 inches high, 4 inches wide, and 2 1/8 inches thick, and exceedingly rare. Two thousand of these Bibles were ordered from the American Bible Society in New York. Today, there are only twenty-two of them known to be in existence. The scroll work on the leather covers as well as the lettering are in gold gilt. Printed on the spine are the words HOLY BIBLE and on the front cover:

PRESENTED BY
RUSSELL, MAJORS, & WADDELL
1858

If the Pony Express wasn’t started until 1860, why does this Bible have the date 1858 written on it? The three founders of the Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William B. Waddell were operating a very large freighting business. “They had a big contract with the federal government to supply all the western forts,” Nardone said. “Russell was the president. Waddell was in many ways the bookkeeper of the company. So Majors was the one who hired everyone, and he was a devout Christian.” In 1858–1859, Majors hired 5,000 men. He had each new employee take the oath described above, and then according to Nardone, “He would hand the men a Bible as a gift.”

However, it is Nardone’s feeling that few, if any, Pony Express riders got one when hired in 1860–1861. Majors conducted his business from his farm in Nebraska City, Nebraska, 150 miles north of the Pony Express Trail, and his original order of Bibles was insufficient to give copies to everyone of the company’s newly hired men. Majors did order 300 more Bibles in 1860 that were received in 1861. “But it is a totally different Bible in size, in text, and in style,” Nardone said.6

In his opinion, Nardone believes Bibles like the one now on view in the State Library’s California History Room should have been called the “Alexander Majors Transportation Bible.” Whatever it is called, this Bible speaks to the nature of the company that distributed it and calls to mind powerful associations with the history of the period.

EDUCATIONAL MOMENT
There was so much to learn from this interview, this seems to be a good time to pause again for an educational moment. More often than not, one reads that the Pony Express started in St. Joseph, Missouri, and ended in Sacramento, California. From Mr. Nardone’s studies, his conclusion is that San Francisco was the true terminus. “Eighty percent of the Pony Express mail,” he said, “was coming into and out of San Francisco.” When the Pony Express rider got off his horse in Sacramento or the train
from Folsom, then an agent continued with the mail on a steamer to San Francisco. “Twenty other times,” Nardone said, “when this 2 P.M. river steamer was missed, they continued by horse to San Francisco via Benicia, Martinez, and Oakland.”

“It cost a lot to send mail by the Pony Express. They were mostly businesses that were participating,” Nardone said. He knew of only one personal letter sent to a wife, and that letter was from a rich businessman who could afford it. Though the price was reduced over time, when the Pony Express first started the cost of a half ounce letter in an envelope was five dollars. “It was like spending eighty-five dollars today,” Nardone said.

**STAMPS**

Letters require postage. Philatelists will be especially delighted to see eight stamps in the newly installed Pony Express display cases. But what is this? They are all Wells, Fargo & Co. Pony Express stamps. In addition to the stamps in the case, there is a Wells, Fargo & Co. non-denominated, franked envelope. How did Wells, Fargo become involved with the Pony Express? The answer is in the looming American Civil War, a change in the awarding of U.S. government mail contracts, and the fact that Wells, Fargo & Co. was in both the banking and express businesses.

While the Pony Express had transported mail across a central transcontinental route, the Overland Mail Company had carried mail by stagecoach since 1857 via a southern route from St. Louis, Missouri, through Texas to Fort Yuma, to Los Angeles, and up to San Francisco. The southern route was now at risk from the upcoming war. The Civil War, in fact began on April 21, 1861. In March 1861, Russell, Majors, and Waddell, lost the new government mail-delivery contract when Congress awarded the Overland Mail Company $1 million to move its operation to the central route. “As of July 1, 1861.” Nardone explained that the Overland Mail Company “was to operate a daily stagecoach in both directions and a pony express twice a week both ways until the telegraph line was finished.”
A day after this contract was signed, according to Nardone, the Overland Mail Company made an offer to William Russell to subcontract a portion of the line. Russell, Majors, and Waddell would continue to deliver mail between the Missouri River and Salt Lake City, Utah. This portion represented over sixty percent of the route. It should be noted that according to Joe Nardone, “The Overland Mail Company had two big powerful members on their board: Mr. Wells and Mr. Fargo.”

Wells, Fargo & Co. began issuing Pony Express stamps in April of 1861. The set of five stamps donated by Mr. Nardone were issued in two time periods: two stamps in the first and three stamps in the second. These stamps were used only on mail heading east to St. Joseph, Missouri, and later to Atchison, Kansas. Different colors were used to distinguish the different amounts. Britton and Rey, the highly-regarded San Francisco lithography company, designed them. In addition, there was another type of stamp used on westbound mail called a “garter stamp.”

Wells, Fargo & Co. issued three more stamps for a Pony Express route it had established between Placerville, California, and Virginia City, Nevada Territory. The route, which was in operation from 1862–1865, had no connection with the “Transcontinental Pony Express” except for the name “Pony Express.” Mr. Nardone’s gift includes the three stamps — a 10 cent brown stamp and two 25 cent stamps, one blue and one red, from this Virginia City line.

MEDALLIONS AND BELT BUCKLES
Rounding out the display, you will find two limited-edition belt buckles and nine medallions. They attest to the romance and fascination this brief but colorful period in American history evokes even today. The belt buckles were made by none other than Tom Holland, the sculptor mentioned earlier who created the statue of the Pony Express rider in Old Sacramento. Indeed, the buckles sport the image of this statue on them. One is in silver, and the other in bronze.

In 1902, for example, Wells, Fargo & Co. issued a silver medallion in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the company’s founding. It was the first medallion to display a Pony Express rider and scene. One of these medallions can be seen in the case along with the even rarer presentation box.

The first reenactment of the Pony Express took place from August 31, 1923 to September 9, 1923. Wells Fargo was also involved in this event. Gold medals went to the members of the winning team. Bronze replicas were presented to new depositors. Nardone said, “If you opened up a savings account in a bank, they gave you one of these medallions.” Mr. Nardone donated two bronze medals. The
medals were designed by renowned artist Maynard Dixon. Nardone observed, “He is one of our favorite artists right here in the Library.” Indeed Maynard Dixon painted the dramatic mural that stretches the length of the Library’s Gillis Hall, as well as four mural panels that reside on the second floor of the Library & Courts Building.

There are four medallions in the exhibit from the 1935 Pony Express Diamond Jubilee issued by the American Pioneer Trails Association. At this re-ride of the Pony Express trail, they gave dignitaries a medal in 10 karat gold. Nardone said, “There were only fifteen of them.” He was able to acquire the one now seen in the display case along with two medals produced in “nickel-silver,” which have the appearance of being made of silver, without actually having any silver in them. There is also a 1947 medal that corrects a minor error, removing a line under an “s” in the 1935 issue.

Included in the exhibit are two U.S. Mint medallions created for the Pony Express Centennial in 1960. One of them, 2 1/4” in diameter, the Founders Medal cast in silver, features Russell, Majors, and Waddell, the men who initiated the Pony Express. The other U.S. Mint medal — labeled “Riders Medallion” — is a bronze medallion of the same size awarded to riders who participated in the National Pony Express Centennial Association Reenactment.

ONE PLACE FOR PONY EXPRESS RESEARCH

In addition to the physical items we have described, Joe Nardone recently brought twelve boxes of books, pamphlets, maps and other ephemera from his personal library to Sacramento. Six of these boxes of materials will be added to the Library’s already extensive Pony Express collection. “What I wanted was one place where historians could go and do all their research on this subject, instead of what I did going to every repository you can think of from coast to coast, going through their archives and reading all their newspapers in print in the 1860s, and making Xerox copies of articles.”

A TELLING QUESTION AND A LASTING LEGACY

Journalist and media producer Kit Tyler was in the room with us filming during the interview. Mr. Tyler had previously asked a question, and in reply Nardone said, “nobody has ever really asked me and that made me think.” The question was “after all this time you put in the Pony what do you want people to think of you? What are you trying to leave?”

“What my goal is and has been is to straighten out this adventure,” Nardone said, “because I find it more romantic, more rewarding, more fun than what people used to think it was.” During our two-hour interview, he recounted many stories about errors he had discovered and corrected in his research with the energy and engagement of one who was just starting out. Unfortunately, there was only space to include a fraction of them. He stressed that he is not a revisionist. “I’m talking a good story,” he said “but I have to back it up with the facts.”

Thus, Joe Nardone has provided for patrons and public visitors an exhibit for their delight of Pony Express artifacts and memorabilia. He has expanded the State Library’s Pony Express resources, so that Pony Express historians will not have to go farther to find all the information they require on the subject. No doubt, Mr. Nardone’s greatest contribution is discovering and sharing the facts about the Pony Express story.

IS THIS THE END OF THE PONY EXPRESS TRAIL FOR JOE NARDONE?

No. It’s not the end! There is something very exciting on the horizon. Joe Nardone has hired Folsom, California artist Stephen W. Ward to create a series of Pony Express paintings. Together, they are working on a pictorial history of the Pony Express in 115 paintings and are aiming to publish it in 2022. The paintings will be printed in the order of the history of the Pony Express. When you open the book, an illustration will be on the right side and Joe Nardone’s story of the individual painting will be on the other side with a map indicating where the incident took place. It will be filled with anecdotal stories correcting “the little errors” Nardone has found in his years of study. Reflecting his insistence on accuracy, he even consulted with an astronomer at the Fleishmann Planetarium on the University of Nevada campus in Reno who showed him how to access sun, moon, and star charts, so that even a comet, an aurora borealis, and the stars above will be depicted as they were when the Pony Express rider was coming through.

ENDNOTES

1 To find out more about Joe Nardone and his research discoveries relating to the Pony Express see “Joe Nardone’s Long Ride on the Trail of the Pony Express,” by M. Patricia Morris, CSLF Bulletin, No. 87, 2007, pp. 2–9.

2 This website provides biographical information about sculptor Avard T. Fairbanks: www.fairbanksartbooks.com/AboutAvard.html.

3 This information came from an obituary in the Los Angeles Times for Mr. Holland published on January 21, 2004. See articles.latimes.com/jan/21/local/me-passings21.


5 The Buffalo Bill Center of the West is a complex of five museums located in Cody, Wyoming, one of which is the Buffalo Bill Museum.

6 Only two of the 300 Bibles Alexander Majors ordered in 1860 are known to exist: One is at the Alexander Majors Historical Museum, Kansas City, Missouri. The other is at the Alexander Majors Old Freighters Museum, Nebraska City, Nebraska.
Cutler Mail Chutes

Rare, Beautiful, and Still in Use after a Century

By Laura Kellen
If you visit the first floor of the California State Library and Courts Building (914 Capitol Mall) or the Foundation office (1225 8th Street), you will find a strange sight to behold. Near the elevators, an elegant box is mounted seamlessly to the wall. A glass chute rises from the top, disappearing into the ceiling. What is it? Where does it go?

These boxes would have been familiar to any city dweller in the early twentieth century. They were called Cutler mail chutes, named after their designer, and they were a popular building feature during the golden age of skyscrapers.

Cutler chutes are distinctive in their appearance. The chute is designed to run the length of a building from top to bottom with a mail drop on each floor. Letters could be dropped into a special slot, no matter what floor you worked on. Gravity would do the rest! Letters would collect in the receiving box at the bottom, ready for the postman. The box itself was a work of art: made of metal (usually bronze), textured, with decorative scrollwork or topped with a brass eagle.

Mail chutes were popular because of their time-saving features. Having a mail chute accessible on each floor kept employees from having to leave the office to find a post office box. It also was a time-saving device for the postman, who could collect hundreds of letters from one convenient location. This was important, as the United States Post Office Department (USPOD) was rapidly growing in size, with more mail being collected each year. By 1900, USPOD was handling over seven billion pieces of first-class mail a year, and by the mid 1920s, they were approaching twenty seven billion pieces a year.

The mail chute was invented by James Cutler in 1883, who received patent #284,951 for his unique mailing system. The patent specified that the mailboxes must be made of metal, operate on hinges, have an elastic cushion at the base to prevent damage to the mail, and be marked as a “US Letter Box.” The mail chute also had to be accessible from each floor, and the chute itself had to be made of at least three-quarters glass so that USPOD workers could detect, identify, and unplug clogs in the chute.

Cutler’s mail chutes were popular in railways, public offices, government buildings, and skyscrapers. The USPOD, which regulated and oversaw the boxes, also allowed them to be placed in apartment buildings with more than fifty residences and hotels that were in excess of five floors. Cutler worked with a team of architects to customize the design of the mail chutes for the grandest skyscrapers and hotels of his time. Cutler’s mail chutes became so popular that large buildings installed several as a matter of prestige and efficiency. Philadelphia City Hall had seven, McGraw-Hill had four, and the Waldorf-Astoria had three.

Over time, as mailrooms increased in popularity, mail chutes faded into obscurity. The National Fire Protection’s code banned them in new construction after 1997, citing them as fire hazards. Due to the design, the chutes could quickly spread smoke throughout a building. Most Cutler chutes have been permanently sealed. For example, the mail chute at the California State Library and Courts Building was removed from floors two to five in the recent restoration, leaving the Cutler box on the first floor operating as a simple mail drop.

EDITOR’S NOTE
Laura Kellen is a reference librarian in the State Library’s Information Services Section. In addition, she generously trains guide dogs for the visually impaired. As a hobby, she enjoys hunting for historical items at yard sales and swap meets.
For boxes that still have operating chutes, clogs have become a serious problem. When a chute clogs, a letter-box mechanic from the USPOD must attempt to unclog the chute by inserting a long metal tool from above, or by dropping a weight down the slot. It is not uncommon for office workers to stick brooms down the chute in an attempt to dislodge the mail.

Clogs can become dramatic events, either due to the amount that is clogged or the age of mail. For example, a large mail clog occurred at the fifty-story McGraw-Hill Building in New York. Forty thousand pieces of mail created a forty-foot backup in the chute. It took two weeks before the clog was resolved, and a section of the building had to be demolished to remove the mail. After the clog was resolved, the McGraw-Hill Building sealed off its chutes.

Another interesting example is of a mail chute in a Michigan Veterans hospital that was unclogged in 1995. The chutes released twenty-one letters that had been trapped between the fourth and fifth floors for more than fifty years. As a result, a woman in Brooksville, Florida, received a letter from her husband, who had died nineteen years prior! Similarly, another widow received two letters from her deceased husband, who had been recovering in the hospital during World War II. The first letter was written to
her. The second letter was addressed to a girlfriend with whom he had been having an affair at the time!

The Cutler mail chute, as it appears today, is a living, operational piece of history. The chute itself is typically sealed or covered up, but the box remains in its original form. The only modern feature you will find on a Cutler receiving box is a colorful USPOD sticker, displaying the daily pickup schedule. Cutler mail chutes can still be found all across the country: New York City, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and even Sacramento.

**SOURCES CONSULTED**


In late 1927, the artist Maynard Dixon received the news he had been awarded the contract for a major mural in the new Library and Courts Building across from the State Capitol in Sacramento, the largest mural commission awarded up to that time in California. The mural would be placed on the large south wall of the Library’s James L. Gillis third floor reading room. The building’s architect, Charles Peter Weeks, had admired Dixon’s work and urged him to pursue the bid for the commission. By now, Dixon was an accomplished and widely admired muralist. He created his first mural in 1907 for the Southern Pacific Railroad’s passenger station in Tucson, Arizona. In 1914–1915,
Dixon painted four large murals for Anita Baldwin’s Anoakia, her home in Arcadia, California. They are now installed on the second floor of the Stanley J. Mosk Library and Courts Building.

The 1920s saw Dixon embarking on major mural projects. The first were mining scenes in 1921 for the dining room of the S.S. Silver State passenger ship. This was followed the next year by a similar one for the S.S. Sierra, a sister vessel. In 1924, he designed and painted Sunol Water Temple for the offices of San Francisco’s Spring Valley Water Company. Acclaimed designer Kem Weber hired Dixon in 1925 to create two large mural hangers with Hopi mythology motifs for the entrance of the Barker Brothers Building in Los
The union of native peoples and the Spanish produced the mestizos who became the working class of Mexico.

Angeles. In 1926, Weeks commissioned Dixon and fellow artist Frank Van Sloun to create a mural, Room of the Dons, located in San Francisco’s Mark Hopkins Hotel (now the Intercontinental Mark Hopkins). Another mural installed in the auditorium of Oakland Technical High School in June 1927 became his largest project at that time. The mural, titled California Pais del Sol, spanned the proscenium arch and measured sixty-eight by ten feet. This was followed in 1928 by the Spirit of India designed to grace the foyer of Oakland’s West Coast Theater. Once again, Weeks served as the principal architect for this building’s design. Dixon started his work on the State Library mural by making several trips to Sacramento from his San Francisco studio to study the reading room wall and the surroundings, creating small pencil sketches as thoughts for the design emerged. A thoughtful, thorough planner Dixon wanted to produce a mural that could exist in harmony with the expansive space in the room. Of paramount importance was the wall itself, and that it be part of the mural decoration, and that the wall has “breathing space.”

A lot of dogma has been peddled around of late concerning mural painting—about significant form, volume, dynamics, golden section, space division, space-filling and God knows what. Nothing is apparently ever said about the WALL. My own dogma, here offered, is that the wall itself is essentially an element of mural design, since it is the wall that brings the decoration into existence (hence MURAL painting) the painter can do no less than respect it; that he should put his painting on the wall without crowding or obscuring it, planning open areas of it as integral parts of his design.4

There were other considerations, among them Dixon’s concern for the quality and color of surface materials adjoining the mural space and the quality and direction of light. Another issue was the general color and movement of the design as it related to the theme, in other words, the decorative value. The character of the design itself should possess clarity and continuity, along with spacing rhythm. Finally, the design should have surface quality, be unobtrusive and lie down on the wall. “And so,” he declared, “not only will the integrity of the wall be taken care of, but you stand a reasonable chance of convincing the generally skeptical architect—who is harassed by the necessity of being scholar, artist, engineer, diplomat, financier and even politician—that you are a worthy friend and brother.”3

Dixon avoided ancient symbolism and allegory themes then popular in American mural painting and selected the epic story of California for the mural, which became A Pageant of Traditions. Charles Weeks had suggested the name, but like most titles, it offers little information about the mural’s purpose or the images in it.4 Although the mural space would span seventeen by seventy feet, it was virtually separated in half...
A jaunty gold rush miner celebrates his good fortune, followed by progress as nattily-dressed business entrepreneurs march closely behind.
by the large entrance door to the reading room. In effect, Dixon would paint two murals. After reviewing his series of small preliminary pencil sketches in late spring of 1928, Dixon envisioned the mural’s left panel would embrace the contributions of Native Americans, Spanish, and Mexican participants to California’s history while the right panel documents the American migration to California, a multi-voiced, epic telling of the state’s beginnings. He began work on the mural in July, traveling daily to Sacramento from his Montgomery Street studio on the train or staying for extended periods in a small room at a local hotel, completing the mural in early November. Slowly the mural and its message began to emerge.

For Dixon, the mural would incorporate key values in the founding mythology of California: faith, courage, dreams, determination, adventurism, and hard work. The mural had to be realistic and include familiar symbols drawn from history that allowed viewers to believe in the authenticity of the images. Both figure groupings move upward toward the peaked entrance door where he placed three open books representing Science, Philosophy, and Art encircled by golden halos. In a talk to

A young Californio woman, poised and regal, represents a short-lived and romantized era in California history.

As they might have looked in the 1700s, Dixon created the image of a caballero, a skilled rider often serving as leaders in exploring expeditions and the founding of settlements.
Library staff on November 1, 1928, Dixon remarked, “This being a library, an institution of human wisdom and knowledge, I had to put a literary classic in the middle. I just did the best I could with the space; the architect gave me a difficult problem by putting that peaked arrangement over the door. I could not have one big figure at the top. I had to split my idea and I had to have a center. We had to glorify volumes in some way, so the easiest thing was to just put a big volume in the middle and then the two smaller ones.” Dixon left the volumes blank for the imagination of viewers to decide what they meant.

On the left side, Dixon designed the symbolic figure of Beauty swathed in billowing clouds and smoke, which he thought reflective of California’s arts and cultures through history. Just above the right of the door, he created another heroic figure, Power, partially obscured by wheels of machinery showing the influence of modern technology and industry. Arranged in a loose chronological order, although not strictly so, each grouping commences with the 1500s and ends with the 1920s following California’s march through time. The groups on the left are echoed by the design of the figures on the right. Overall, his design reflects a keen insight into the balance needed to achieve success in large-scale mural art. His long career in commercial art illustrating books and magazines and his work designing poster and outdoor advertising billboards between 1916 and 1921 served him well, with their simplified, sculpturally rendered images and draftsmanship giving strength to his later murals. Dixon’s organized and structured painting technique would endow *A Pageant of Traditions* with both ancient and contemporary rhythms.

Dixon carefully chose his iconic figures to represent California’s historical progress and pioneering ambitions. Looming large in the background of the left panel are three figures astride horses. The first horseman represents Dixon’s idea of what upper class and military Aztec leaders wore brightly colored clothing, their bodies adorned with feathers, gold and pendants denoting their rank.
When the Spanish arrived in Mexico, some of their soldiers were equipped with metal breastplates and uniquely appearing helmets which became the popular image of the Conquistador.
until 1833. The Franciscans constructed twenty-one missions from San Diego to Sonoma whose purpose was to evangelize Native Americans and transform them into colonial citizens. In front, trudge a rather somber looking mission-era Indian convert carrying a basket of fruits and vegetables accompanied by a small boy who looks around with wonder and astonishment. The posture of the man seems to reflect Dixon’s subtle criticism of the impact of the missions on California Indians. Before them stride a proud Californio and his female companion wearing a billowing white dress with a crimson shawl, and who looks out of the mural with fierce pride. Slightly behind her is another older, white-bearded Californio wrapped in a colorful serape. The Californios were persons of Spanish or Mexican descent who were born in California. They are products of a short-lived pastoral life that had its heyday between 1834 and 1849 before being submerged by the arrival of the Gold Rush. An era of large ranchos, bullfights, dances, horse races, and families whose names have remained on the land, their life has been vividly documented in such classic books such as Richard Henry Dana’s Two Years Before the Mast and Gertrude Atherton’s the Splendid Idle Forties. Behind them is another Californio with one hand raised as if in homage and astride his burro, the utility vehicle of those days. The procession concludes with a 1920s era Hispanic laborer and his spouse who gaze expectantly toward the future.

On the right panel, Dixon again used mounted horsemen for dramatic effect. The first represents a Revolutionary War officer in full uniform signifying the emergence of a new nation—the United States of America and the start of westward expansion culminating in the popular idea of Manifest Destiny during the 1840s. Next is a Plains Indian chieftain with feathered regalia. But why include a Plains Indian in a mural celebrating California? Dixon probably struggled in trying to select an

Hardened frontiersmen, intrepid Jesuit missionaries probed the remote regions of New Spain, serving as mapmakers and geographers as they founded missions in northern Mexico and into the Southwest.
appropriate representative image of an indigenous Californian that people could readily identify. But Dixon knew that of all the North American groups, Plains Indians came to represent to the American public what an iconic Indian should look like and thus made the choice for inclusion, acknowledging the historical inaccuracy. The figure carries a hide shield, on it the image of a Thunderbird, a mythological creature revered by indigenous people. Not coincidentally, Dixon adopted the image in the middle 1890s, modified it, and used it as an adjunct signature on his drawings and paintings. The figure leading the group is Dixon’s interpretation of a mountain man in the manner of Kit Carson or Jedediah Smith. In an impromptu talk to library workers, Dixon observed, “That old mountain chap is the most essentially American figure we have ever developed. I do not think there has ever been a type that meant America as much as that one type.” Tough as nails, self-reliant and living beyond the outer fringes of society, mountain men ranged throughout the trackless parts of the American West and California, discovering passes and routes which were then followed by government explorers, wagon trains, and eventually the railroads.

At the lower right of this panel, Dixon commences his march of American history with the image of a New England pilgrim dressed in a distinctive linen shirt with a collar and long-sleeved padded doublet and a cloak draped over the shoulders. Slightly ahead is a later colonist confronted by two somber, if not skeptical, Eastern Woodland Indians. In a nod to symbolism again, Dixon has painted cornstalks next to them. Below and at the very bottom of the panel, he includes images of African-Americans, their strong and hardened bodies appearing to indicate the unshackling of chains and a rise to freedom. There were slightly less than a thousand African-Americans in California by 1849, but their ranks swelled as the Gold Rush gained momentum. Some were still slaves brought to California by their owners and would eventually gain freedom, but most who made the arduous journey were freemen. They became miners, storekeepers, entertainers, carpenters, barbers, and pursued other occupations as they slowly entered the fabric of California society. The next figure represents a Métis, someone of mixed European and indigenous American parentage whose origins began in Canada. They expanded throughout the American West and into California, working for the Hudson Bay Company and other fur trade outfits as trappers. Many helped discover new routes used by later explorers and settlers and served as interpreters in contacts with native tribes. The four figures in front of that image illustrate the rise of the mercantile class and the coming of the Industrial Age to California. Such individuals as Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker, along with others made their fortunes in mining-related activities and helped foster the rapid development of the state’s economy from an agrarian to an industrial one. They in turn are preceded by a jaunty ’49er with his red flannel shirt and gold pan, an immediately recognizable symbol of California. The Gold Rush frenzy attracted large numbers of people from the East and Midwest, but there were French, German, English, Chileans, Spanish, Mexicans, Chinese, Sandwich Islanders, as Hawaiians were then called, and countless others from around the world. They became ’49ers and the image he created serves as a representation for all of them. Finally, Dixon concluded his story of California with the figures of a modern day American workman, his wife and young son. They too look toward a promising future.

At first Dixon used little color in painting the mural, almost monochromatic, thinking he did not want to disturb people who came to study with flashy hues. But after working on the mural and seeing bright colors among the books and how lively the librarians were, he jazzed it up with more color as he completed the project in November 1928. Dixon employed the colors and tones of California’s varied landscapes, terra cotta and ochre of the earth, the blue of the sky, and the green-grays of plants. A dusty, almost hazy feeling that speaks to California’s special light blends the mural with the tonal character of the reading room.

For ninety years, A Pageant of Traditions has been part of the daily life of the Library staff and the patrons who use the library’s services. Beyond the historical themes and symbolism in the mural lies something else—Dixon’s goal to create a work of poetic color and form. Shortly after completing the mural he described his underlying philosophy: “In looking at this work, people come here, and they ask, what is the story, what does it mean, what is it all about? As a matter of cold fact, what the painter tries to do is to make a beautiful decorative pattern on this wall and the historical material he uses is only incidental—the painter is not supposed to be historical. Of course if he uses historical subject matter, he ought to be in the main correct, but that is just material which he uses to further his primary object which is to create a rhythmic pattern of form and color.” After completing the mural, Dixon presented his large palette to the California State Library as a gift. Only three of the drawings he used to create and guide the mural’s design have surfaced so far. The Library, via the Foundation, was able to acquire one of them several years ago, a pen and ink drawing of the beautiful Californio woman. Dixon would go on to create other notable murals before his death in November 1946. But of all his murals, A Pageant of Traditions is his greatest legacy and a treasure for all Californians. Through his combination of the Native American, Spanish and Mexican heritage joined with the American contributions and anchored by his aesthetic vision, Dixon illustrates the power of cultural exchanges on California’s storied origins.
For Maynard Dixon, the mountain men served as trailblazers for subsequent explorers, gold seekers and settlers becoming one of the most recognizable icons in American and California history. To represent Native Americans Dixon designed a Plains Indians chieftain resplendent in feathered regalia. Although not directly related to California history, the Plains Indians came to be to be viewed as the most iconic of native groups. Sometime in the 1890s he had adopted the thunderbird logo shown on the figures hide shield as a personal totem using it as an additional signature on his drawings and paintings for many years.

**SOURCES**


On Saturday, May 28, 2018, the Sutro Library had a fantastic turn-out to celebrate Adolph Sutro’s 188th birthday. The afternoon included stories, exhibits, and cupcakes. Amazing speakers covered different aspects of Sutro’s fascinating life and legacy with insight and humor. One of the highlights was Marc Shaffer, director of the film American Jerusalem. Shaffer’s film takes a look at the German Jewish pioneers who settled in San Francisco in the wake of the Gold Rush. Adolph Sutro’s emigration story frames the narrative which focuses on Jewish assimilation within the context of the Gold Rush, which allowed Jews to make inroads as never before.

The discussion concerning American Jerusalem was followed by an appearance of Adolph Sutro, portrayed by Allan Schwartz. Schwartz is a staple at San Francisco history-related events, and stayed true to character, rallying against the Southern Pacific Railroad, decrying “The Octopus must be stopped!” This reenactment of Mayor Sutro was followed by two San Francisco historians Marian Gregoire and Chelsea Sellin both of whom touched upon the strength and resilience of the women who made an impact on Sutro. Gregoire presented “Adolph Sutro: Tales of the Women Who Affected His Life,” while Sellin spoke on “The Forgotten History of the Sutro Family Women.”

This event was coordinated by Dvorah Lewis, Sutro’s genealogy and local history librarian and the planning goes all the way back to the Fall of 2017 when it was decided that the library would host a genealogy event for Sutro’s birthday. Dvorah started researching potential speakers, but was thrown several curve balls! The original two speakers had to cancel at the last minute. It was “like a scavenger hunt trying to find other speakers. And unfortunately, most who specialize in Adolph Sutro were unavailable; didn’t live in the Bay Area; or had passed away.” In the end Dvorah persevered and found great speakers who contributed to a truly successful event.

Special thanks go to volunteers Craig Kel-lither and Pat Munoz and most especially to the California State Library Foundation whose generosity made this event possible. The Sutro Library staff is so grateful!

Diana Kohnke is the Sutro Library’s Rare Book Curator.

San Francisco historian Allan Schwartz portrayed Adolph Sutro rallying against the Southern Pacific Railroad with the slogan “The Octopus must be stopped!”
Library Foundation supporter and Los Angeles area cultural historian Victoria Dailey has presented the Library with a splendid group of ten original holiday cards by noted artist Leon Gilmour (1907–1996). The exquisite wood engravings cover the years 1976 to 1985. Each is signed and titled in pencil by Gilmour and presented by both him and his wife Helen. The engravings depict attractive botanical subjects. Victoria has given the cards in memory of her former husband and business partner, the noted antiquarian bookseller William Dailey who was tragically killed in an accident in December 2017.

Born in 1907 in Latvia, Gilmour came to the United States in 1916, and after working at various odd jobs, made his way to Los Angeles. He enrolled at the Otis Art Institute where he met Paul Landacre who introduced him to the fine art of wood engraving. Thereafter, Gilmour flourished and taught art at the University of Southern California. In addition, this talented artist also worked as a designer, illustrator, and art director. His striking wood engravings attracted a national audience in museums and galleries and now have been added to the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Smithsonian Institution and San Jose Museum of Art among others.

Gary F. Kurutz is the Foundation’s executive director and Bulletin editor.
Mead Kibbey’s Generosity Continues

Demonstrating his continued benevolence, Mead Kibbey has recently donated 310 original stereographs documenting the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad over the High Sierra in the 1860s. The Foundation in 1995 published his superb book documenting the stereographs of the railroad by A. A. Hart. In 2014, this devoted researcher gave the Foundation the only known complete set of Hart stereographs numbering 364 items. This latest edition consists of views by others who published Hart views under their own name in an era before copyright was strictly enforced. A thorough researcher, Kibbey collected these views over several decades to document how others exploited Hart’s original work. Several of the same views carry the imprint of different photographers.

In addition to these rare stereographs, Kibbey donated two volumes of the Downieville Mountain Messenger covering the years 1863–1865. They include not only local news but also updates on the Civil War. The April 22, 1865 issue devoted its entire front page to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The editor at the time printed that page with black mourning borders. Kibbey has much fondness for this tiny town in Sierra County, so much so that he proudly serves as the newspaper’s foreign correspondent. The paper continues to this day and stands as California’s oldest weekly newspaper.

Two Illustrious Board Members Retire

At the April 27 board meeting, President Kenneth B. Noack, Jr. and the Foundation’s board of directors expressed its deep appreciation to retiring members Mead B. Kibbey and Donald J. Hagerty. Both were honored with resolutions thanking them for their many years of devoted service and donations to the Foundation for the benefit of the historical collections of the California State Library. The framed resolutions were beautifully created by Bulletin designer Angela Tannehill and decorated in gold leaf by Foundation Administrator Brittney Cook. Executive Director Gary Kurutz wrote the text and President Noack signed each resolution. The resolutions are reproduced herein.
The Mead B. Kibbey California State Library Foundation Fellowship Established

ELIGIBILITY FOR AWARDS

The California State Library Foundation has established a fellowship in honor of longtime benefactor, historian, and photographer Mead B. Kibbey. The fellowship is designed to support projects at the California State Library by formally enrolled college and university students, regardless of academic degree sought. Special consideration will be given to applicants from California State University, Sacramento, enrolled in courses offered by the Photography Department and/or associated with the Public History Program of that institution.

One Fellowship will be offered annually. The Kibbey Fellow must complete the project within twelve months of notification.

Projects will generally be in the area of the history and culture of the North American West, with preference given to areas of special interest to Mead B. Kibbey: the cultural and artistic landscapes of Sacramento and California, and the history and preservation of photography. The Fellowship especially encourages project proposals that will utilize the Special Collections of the California State Library that includes an outstanding collection of historical photographs. Upon completion of the project, the Kibbey Fellow must write an article on the project for the California State Library Foundation Bulletin and/or make a presentation at one of the regularly scheduled “A Night at the State Library” lectures sponsored by the California State Library Foundation.

SIZE OF AWARD

The Kibbey Fellowship is offered for short term research projects of two – four weeks. The Award is $3,000. The award may be used to defray travel expenses, living expenses, or research costs.

HOW TO APPLY

All awards are made by The California State Library Foundation Fellowship and Grant Committee. To apply for a Mead B. Kibbey California State Library Foundation Fellowship, please refer to application instructions located on the Foundation’s website at www.cslfdn.org and click on Kibbey Fellowship.

The Foundation has received two generous donations to the Mead B. Kibbey Fellowship from board members Marilyn Snider and Tom Vinson. The Foundation naturally welcomes contributions to this important fellowship program so that it will continue for many years to come. Please contact the Foundation offices or visit its website and click on “Join or Donate” and click on Mead B. Kibbey Fellowship Fund.

Katherine Weedman-Cox Elected to the Board of Directors

The Foundation’s Board of Directors enthusiastically elected Katherine Weedman-Cox to the board at the May meeting. Cox is vice-president and co-founder of Cox Black and White Lab, Inc. in Rancho Cordova. For many years, her company has been serving museums, archives, galleries, historic preservation organizations, genealogy groups, collectors and exhibitors by providing custom archival photographic services, using both traditional darkroom processes and digital technology. She is well connected to the greater Sacramento area community and has served on boards of local historical organizations and given many presentations on the preservation of historical photographs. She knows the State Library very well and will be enormously helpful in promoting our collections and helping with grant projects to preserve and digitize historical photographs and other images.
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