



# The GILMAN RANCH FLYER

Issue No. 2

Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum

Winter 1999

## VIEWS FROM BENEATH THE OLIVE TREES



friendly climate.

Those of us who enjoy the Gilman Ranch of today do so because of the aura of history and excitement which were embroidered into its beginning years. Its chosen location reveals the wisdom of early owners: located with an endless view of the San Gorgonio Pass, a reliable gravity-fed water source, good tillable ground and a

Establishing land titles in the early days was largely a matter of sorting out records from former Spanish land grants to off-the-record simple trades. It was not until after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican War in 1848 that the vast southwest was opened up for settlement. The discovery of gold the following year spurred the westward movement, and government surveyors took over the monumental task of plotting it all out in checkerboard fashion.

That same westward movement brought the need for transportation through the Pass. There were soon at least seven regularly traveled wagon and stagecoach trails throughout Southern California. The Bradshaw Trail stage route ran through the foothills north of Banning, and the Gilman Ranch's small adobe became a busy stage stop. Because of its location, one could see the stagecoach as it came around the bend of the foothills, as well as any other wagons or horsemen traveling through the lower section of the pass. On a pleasant, sunny day one can enjoy an imaginative view from beneath the aging olive trees of today.

Eventually transportation became not only a demand, but also a means of opportunity. The government surveys had included right-of-way land ownership for the benefit of building the Southern Pacific Railroad, which was begun in 1853. Its progress through the Pass could be observed daily from the ranch, and the first train was seen coming through in 1876, from Los Angeles to Indio and on to Yuma. It was a great event and folks came from miles around by horseback and buckboard to watch the "Iron Horse" go by, another view from beneath the olive trees.

As the town of Banning began and grew, dirt streets came into view, and early-model autos competed with horse-drawn wagons and carriages. There were vintage automobile races at the racetrack west of "downtown," toward the eucalyptus grove. The famous coast-to-coast flight of two biplanes took place in 1911 with great fanfare. The advent of automobile travel brought about the eventual construction and paving of Highway 60 through the Pass from Southern California towns, where it joined with Highway 111 to the

fledgling town of Palm Springs and on to Indio. On weekends one could see a steady stream of cars on their way to the glitz and glamor of the movie star haven.

During the Great Depression an influx of labor families became part of the transportation corridor, traveling by dilapidated autos, seeking work in the fruit orchards. Single men left families behind and became "boxcar tenants," sometimes dropping off in town for any jobs they could find, merely for a meal. Whenever the train could be seen, as it rumbled up the grade to Beaumont, one would expect a knock at the kitchen door.

As time went on, wartime military convoys and troop trains slowed along their way to take advantage of the coffee and doughnuts handed out by patriotic ladies of the town. Following WWII the amount of travel so increased that the need for the I-10 Freeway resulted in frantic construction along the railroad route. Its completion gave the Gilman Ranch yet another view, but far different from the still-visible Bradshaw Trail. The olive trees of the Gilman Ranch have viewed a tableau of history and progress in the San Gorgonio Pass. ★

—Frances Park

## WE'RE IN THE QUEUE!

Sometime during the 1960s, Clarence Weinland, son of William Henry Weinland, prominent Moravian Missionary who ministered to the Southern California Indians for more than 40 years beginning in 1890, gathered up all of his father's surviving papers and ephemera that he thought of historical significance, and with posterity in mind, deposited them for safekeeping with the Huntington Library in San Gabriel. At the time he also gave to the Huntington similar material concerning the Gilman family that had belonged to Marian (Gilman) and Harry Hunt, and all this material has remained there, seldom used and pretty much forgotten, until recently. During this last year, Virginia Sisk, great granddaughter of James Marshall Gilman; Linda Pillow, Site interpreter for the Gilman Historic Ranch; and Cate Whitmore, Curator of History for the Riverside County Parks Department, have been working with the Huntington to bring the majority of the information contained in the Gilman portion of the Weinland collection back home to the ranch. Virginia received an E-mail on January 19 from the Huntington Library stating that "the paperwork has been forwarded on to the appropriate individuals, and the order is now in the microfilming queue." We're in the queue!

This means that sometime later this year we will have at the museum microfilm of over 1500 pieces of Gilman memorabilia, including letters, maps, deeds, and diaries that can



be viewed by researchers and the curious alike. Note the word *viewed*. For microfilm to be of any use to anyone it must be viewed through a *viewer*. The Gilman Historic Ranch does not have a *viewer*. We're not sure we can get the county to spring for one, so any information leading to the arrest and confiscation of one of these puppies, preferably before the microfilm arrives, would be greatly appreciated. ★

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## AN EVENT TO CELEBRATE THE SEASON...



Every year the park is closed during the months of December, January, and February. At this time we clean, repair, paint, and ready the park for the next season. The fun begins with the reopening of the park on March 1.

To celebrate this year's reopening, a special event—Ranch Day—is planned for March 21. The public is invited to a family fun-filled day featuring blacksmithing, weaving, and quilting demonstrations; crafts for children; and special performances by the Ramona Pageant cast.

Some of the things that I'm most pleased with over the months are the increasing numbers of reservations for school programs, the opportunity to be guest speaker to the Banning Woman's Club, and the Palm Desert Library Lecture Series.

From the very beginning we've wanted to bring you a newsletter not only about what is going on at the Gilman Ranch, but about the history of the Gilman family, Banning, San Geronio Pass, the Cahuilla Indians, the Bradshaw Trail and the knowledge of the plants and animals of the area. We invite your ideas on articles of interest to you.

I hope spring brings you wondrous discoveries. ★

—Linda Pillow  
Site Interpreter

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## THE LETTERS

*Dear Sister Mattie.*

And so a letter begins. Virginia "Ginnie" Sisk and her husband have just finished transcribing approximately 130 Gilman family letters given to Ginnie by her Aunt Marian Hunt. The letters were written between 1822 and 1915 by various members of the family including James Marshall Gilman and his wife, "Mattie," several of their parents and siblings, and assorted aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. Transcribing the letters entailed deciphering all sorts of handwriting, peering through a magnifying glass to interpret faded or illegible images, and working with symbols, words, and expressions no longer in use. As much work as they have done, a large part of their task remains ahead of them. All the transcriptions need to be proofread against the original letters. Notes need to be made to go with each letter describing who the

writers and recipients were in relation to the family and where the letters originated. Within certain letters references to people, events, or places sometimes need to be researched using such resources as libraries, public records, and the Internet. That data will be recorded and placed with the letters. When all this has been done, everything will be placed in protective sleeves and organized into binders which will then be donated to the Gilman Historic Ranch Museum.

Apart from the letters that contain descriptions of specific events and experiences, the collection as a whole relates to the reader the feelings and emotions of these people within their time. The sadness of parents having their sons and daughters a continent away with the possibility that their children will never be "home" again. The loneliness and homesickness associated with pioneering, which especially affected the women whose men settled them in remote regions. How important it was to receive mail—again, especially for the women who often pleaded in their letters for others to send them answering letters and photographs. How everyone's life was changed when the final spike was driven against the rails connecting the eastern and western railroads. Family and friends could, with relative ease and affordability, visit once again—across a continent. ★



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## HISTORY LESSONS

Steve Lech, a local (Riverside) amateur historian, will be presenting a class entitled "Early History of Riverside County" at Riverside Community College this spring. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic, Steve welcomes anyone interested in our county's history. The class, sponsored by RCC Community Services, is designated CAP 31531 and will be offered on Wednesdays, April 7, 14, and 21, from 7pm to 9pm. Cost for the three sessions is \$45 with a \$5 material (maps & handouts) fee payable at the first class meeting. To sign up for the course, or get additional information about it, call 909-222-8090. If you have any questions for Steve, you can E-mail him at [tracydl@pe.net](mailto:tracydl@pe.net). ★

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## NATIVE PLANT GARDEN

Early in the 1980s, Gilman Ranch Hands Phil Coombs and George Barker had an idea for a native plant garden at the Gilman Ranch that would be dedicated to French Gilman, a botanist of some fame. In 1991 Kammeyer & Associates were contracted to develop a landscaping plan including layout, irrigation, identification of plants, and planting details.

With other projects on the Ranch Hands calendar, they waited until the fall of 1997 to initiate this project. At that time Ranch Hand Bill Deans was determined to kick off Phase I of the project, one-third of the total plan—approximately three-quarters of an acre.

Beginning in January of 1998 on barren ground, it was first necessary to put in place the underground watering system which included 2400 feet of both high- and low-pressure PVC



lines, riser outlets to all trees, many faucets, and built-in filter and flush units.

In February flower beds were prepared and trees, shrubs, and flowers were planted. The Ranch Hand volunteers continued through 1998 planting, mulching, and watering, at the same time completing 670 feet of walkway. The all-weather five-foot-wide walk was constructed using five inches of decomposed granite over a plastic underlayment.

Planted to date are seven varieties of trees and 11 varieties of plants and shrubs—all native to the San Geronio Pass area. The trees are:

- Big Leaf Maple
- Incense Cedar
- Desert Willow
- California Sycamore
- Valley Oak
- Native Sumac
- Red Oak

The plants and shrubs are:

- California Lilac
- Douglas Iris
- Scarlet Bugler
- Cleveland Sage
- Autumn Sage
- Desert Grape
- Native Rosemary
- Desert Mallow
- Michelmas Daisy
- Fuchsia Flowering Gooseberry
- Chaparrel Currant

Currently it is planned to add four more types of trees and six more plant and shrub varieties in February, March, and April.

All costs for the Native Plant Garden are being funded by the Gilman Ranch Hands. In addition, thousands of volunteered hours have been given by the members. Remember this is only phase I. The Ranch Hands need your help—VOLUNTEER! ★

*(Editor's note—Bill Deans said he would be glad to supply the scientific names of the plants to anyone wanting them.)*



### THE GILMAN RANCH FLYER



*Established 1998*

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## THE GILMAN RANCH HANDS **TOOLSHEP**

This part of our newsletter is devoted to reporting the news of the Gilman Ranch Hands. It was by their vision and imagination that what remained of the original Gilman Ranch was saved from possible dilapidation and oblivion. It was through their industry that the buildings and grounds were restored and preserved. Here we would like to commemorate their devotion to and love of the past and report on their present projects and achievements.

**Shovels & Rakes**—The first phase of the Native Garden, which will be one of the major attractions of the Gilman Historic Ranch, is almost done. The garden was conceived, funded, and built and will be nurtured by the Ranch Hands. They have worked long and hard to bring this part of the project to its present near-complete state.

**Hammers & Nails**—Another project of the Ranch Hands is to have built a replica of the original Gilman ranch house which burned to the ground in 1977. It was a modest structure of unique Eastlake design. Plans have been drawn up, but funds are in doubt. Contributions have not kept up with the increase in the cost of construction, fees, and code restrictions which have caused the beginning estimate to almost double. We're sure the Ranch Hands will persevere, but help on this project would be greatly appreciated.

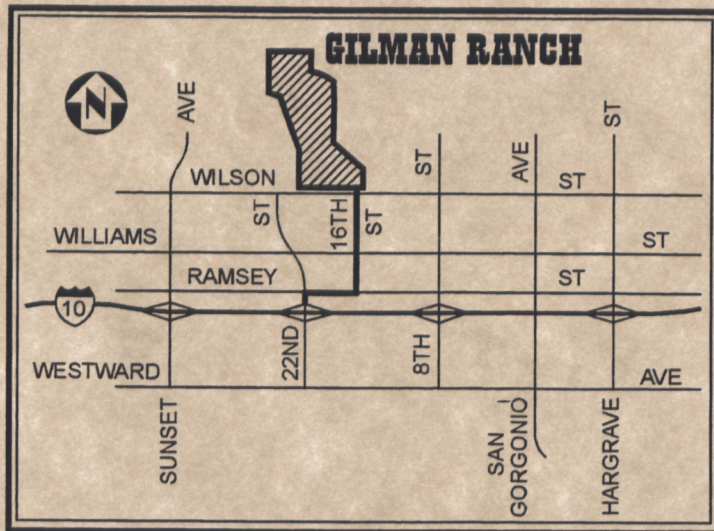
**Nuts & Bolts**—Presently the Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum is managed by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District, and the Ranch Hands help out as volunteers wherever they are needed—from cataloging museum artifacts to supplying docents at the various scheduled ranch programs and activities. A good part of the success of the present ranch project has to be attributed to the Gilman Ranch Hands.

**Rulers & Scribes**—Just as a ship without a captain can not sail, neither can an organization without leadership achieve its goals. Ranch Hands members number about 300, and to guide this unwieldy number are the following:

- ★ Chuck Chappell, President
- ★ Bob Knighton, Vice President
- ★ Joan Coombs, Secretary
- ★ Bonnie Ewing, Treasurer
- ★ Board of Directors—  
 Dorothy Bailey  
 Larry Bailey  
 Bill Deans  
 Luella O'dell  
 Frances Park  
 Mike Pickett

**Wax & String**—Ranch Hands are not all work and no play. In the summertime they meet once a month under the olive trees at the ranch for a potluck supper and entertainment. In the winter it's the Sizzler for food and a program. In January they put on a dinner featuring slow roasted beef that is to die for. Not all Ranch Hands work on projects. It's a social organization too—some people join to make new friends or be with old ones. All dues go towards their projects. If any of the above sounds like something you would enjoy, call Bonnie Ewing at 909-845-9502 and say, "I want to be a Gilman Ranch Hand."





The Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum is located at 16th and Wilson Streets in Banning, CA.



## GILMAN HISTORIC RANCH AND WAGON MUSEUM

16th and Wilson Streets ★ Banning, CA 92220

RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL PARK  AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

"To acquire, protect, develop, manage, and interpret for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of all people, a well-balanced system of areas of outstanding scenic, recreation, and historic importance."