



The GILMAN RANCH FLYER

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Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum

Winter 2000



JAMES MARSHALL GILMAN

By Richard Sisk

PART II

Despite his indecision as to whether the San Geronio area was the right place for him to buy property, James Marshall Gilman purchased Newton Noble's Pass-area ranch for \$2,000 in May of 1869. When James took possession of the 160-acre parcel, which included ample grazing land and an abundant water source, as well as 92 horses and 59 head of cattle, he knew little about ranching. Still, he set about trying to make a living off this land, which teemed with grizzly bears, mountain lions, and herds of antelope, and which included a single, small adobe dwelling, one built by a previous owner in the mid-1850s. This structure served as a stagecoach stop along the Bradshaw Trail, a route used by travelers venturing between the Los Angeles and Colorado River areas.

Gilman worked to make the ranch prosper, raising horses and cattle and tending to stagecoach patrons. In 1871, he married Martha Benoist (pronounced *be-NOY*) Smith, daughter of Dr. Isaac W. Smith, who had migrated from Iowa to what is currently Beaumont in 1853. Mattie (Martha) was a true frontierswoman, skilled at dealing with the rigors of frontier existence (including sometimes unfriendly Indians and wild game of all types). James built a small board-and-batten cottage to replace the adobe as their main residence. Together, she and James resolved to not only begin raising their family—Mattie gave birth to their first child, Marshall French Gilman, in 1871; seven more children would follow—but to make the ranch financially viable.

Even though James increased the ranch's activities and abilities, including raising hogs and performing services such as

pasturing animals and filing saws for others, he nonetheless filed for bankruptcy in 1876. It is unclear what financial problems led to this outcome. Granville bailed out James with a "paper sale" of the ranch that allowed James to keep the property. This misfortune forced James to find other ways besides raising horses and cattle to make the ranch thrive. Thus, in 1876 he and a partner began operating a portable steam sawmill eight miles north of the stage stop, selling cedar lumber to the area's burgeoning population and to the Southern Pacific Railroad. He also called on his mercantile experience to open the area's first general store, and in a further reordering of the ranch's priorities, began to concentrate less on cattle ranching and more on cultivating crops. He built a granary and barn, and began raising not only alfalfa and barley, but also bees for honey, oranges, figs, grapes, almonds, prunes, apricots, apples, and olives, in addition to the potatoes, corn, and melons grown previously. He also added on to the cottage to create a two-story Eastlake Victorian ranch house to shelter his blossoming family. By the 1880s, the ranch was a most prosperous enterprise.

In 1883, not having been home to Meredith, New Hampshire, in twenty years, James traveled from San Francisco to New Hampshire by train to visit his parents. He left Mattie with five young children, and pregnant with a sixth, to run the ranch during his three-month absence. During his journey, he corresponded frequently with Mattie, inquiring about her and the kids, instructing her on ranch operations, and apprising her of his family in New Hampshire. In a letter from Meredith dated October 12, 1883, he wrote, "Mother cannot bear to hear me talk of leaving. [It] will be hard. Will never see father again. . . . He [is] seventy." Torn between seeing his family again and knowing the amount of work awaiting him back in California, James returned to California approximately three weeks later, never to return to New Hampshire. His father, James Sr. died four years later.

While James was never to be rich, at least compared to brother Granville, he grew to be financially secure and socially prominent. He donated money to the University of Redlands Founding Fund in 1909. He also sat on Banning's first city council in 1913. He was considered a "pillar" of his Baptist church and served not only as a local school board clerk but also for many years as a deputy tax assessor, all responsibilities befitting his status as one of the Pass area's founding citizens.

James Marshall Gilman died of a heart attack on August 20, 1916, at the age of 74. He was found, alone, in the granary, where he had gone that evening to feed the horses. It is, perhaps, fitting that up until his final hour, he continued to work the ranch that has made him, despite any initial reluctance to purchase the property, a significant part of local history. ★

THE GILMAN BRAND

Branding began with the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans as a way to indelibly identify livestock, slaves, and criminals. Humans are no longer branded, but the branding of animals, especially cattle, is still the principal means of indicating who owns them.

In the Old West, where large herds of cattle ranged freely over the vast grazing lands of the cattle country west of the Mississippi, branding was the only way the cattle ranchers had to identify their cattle when it came time to round them up and drive them to market.

Two types of branding irons existed in this era of the wide-open range. The traditional stamp iron was used by the ranchers to sear full brands on their cattle. The running iron was used to alter full brands by rustlers and ranchers eager to increase the size of their own herds. The red-hot curved end of the hooked running iron was "run" across the hide of a cow to add lines to an existing brand or create a new brand on an unidentified dogie.

Brands have become more than a way to identify livestock. A cattle rancher's brand is his coat of arms reflecting his reputation, his family history, and his style and taste. Like the mark of a silver smith—it tells a story about the man who created it.

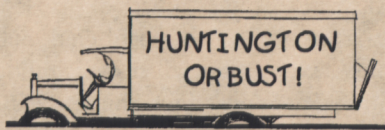


*J.M. Gilman brand
1869*

The importance of brands in James Marshall Gilman's day is best illustrated by the fact that on May 8, 1869, the same day he purchased the Gilman ranch from Newton Noble, he had Noble's brand reregistered in his name. This insured that there would be no doubt about who owned the ranch animals after the sale. While the design of the Gilman, nee Noble, brand does not tell the story of either man, how it came to be the Gilman brand shows that James Marshall Gilman was a practical man and used the most expedient means to transfer the markings of ownership to his newly acquired livestock. ★

SHELLEY DOES THE HUNTINGTON

Shelley Kibby, our site interpreter, was invited to give a demonstration on the use of artifacts in presenting educational and interpretive programs at a workshop for the Society of California Archivists sponsored by the Huntington Library in San Gabriel. This is her story.



An archivist I am not, but artifacts I had. In fact, it took two trips down the the spacious and imposing halls of the Huntington Library by my fellow interpreter, Diane Falconer, and me to get all my presentation materials to the conference room where I was to hold forth.

Using objects, in this case historical artifacts, is something I enjoy doing. What I demonstrated this day was a hands-on use of these items in a museum setting where hushed voices and hands in pockets are the norm. While the Gilman Historic Ranch Museum does not appreciate (nor allow) the use of its artifacts in my interpretive presentations, I have, with county resources, bought a number of suitable period pieces which I took with me this day—a primitive washboard hand hewn from solid oak, a tin-backed washboard, a plunger-type washing apparatus, a paddle butter churn, a set of butter hands (paddles), butter molds, a nutmeg grater, and a hand-cranked apple peeler and corer—which I hoped would evoke a feeling of déjà vu or nostalgia in some or a sense of excitement when experiencing something new or different for the the others. For some it would be their first taste of hand-made butter or their first smell of freshly ground nutmeg. As I spoke about the oak washboard, I mimed someone scrubbing and challenged the audience to envision themselves down on their knees by a stream, still cold with the morning chill, scrubbing the day's wash with hands red with the numbing cold. One elderly woman in the front row nodded, and I knew she was connecting in some way with what I was doing and saying. This woman's nod was why I was at the Huntington this day—to share with others a way to make museums more relevant by stimulating not only one's sense of sight, but their sense of sound, smell, and feel as well by showing hands-on what museum pieces were used for and how they worked. I was successful in rousing a very reserved group into participating in churning, grating, cranking, and coring. They asked questions and delighted in tasting "sweet" butter and apples sprinkled with nutmeg and, best of all, they laughed at themselves. While I feel this morning at the Huntington was well spent, and I accomplished what I'd hoped I would, doing a presentation before children is more "my cup of butter." ★

Y'ALL COME...

When the weather becomes too cold and damp for potlucks under the olive trees at the ranch, the Ranch Hands repair to the cozy Sizzler for their winter dinners and meetings, and everyone, not just the Ranch Hands, is invited. There is always good fellowship and entertainment.

Dinners begin at 6:00pm at the Banning Sizzler located at 1750 West Ramsey Street. For the moderate sum of \$8 per person, which you can pay at the door, you can have a steak or chicken breast dinner or the all-you-can-eat salad bar. For reservations call 849-2311 or 845-9502.

2000 Dinner Schedule

January 11, Tuesday (annual business meeting)
February 10, Thursday
March 8, Wednesday
April 13, Thursday
May 9, Tuesday

Hope to see you there!



BEN DE CREVECOUER

A Real Western Sheriff

By Steve Lech

The life of Ben de Crevecouer is one which is inextricably linked with the Pass and Desert regions of Riverside County, and law enforcement therein. Known for always being able to "get his man," Ben served in several capacities and was involved in two of Riverside County's most infamous cases.

Benjamin de Crevecouer was born on May 14, 1876. His parents, Hans and Margaret, had recently settled in the Morongo Valley, and in fact, Ben was the first white child born there.

His career in law enforcement began in 1897 at the age of 21. He was appointed deputy constable in Banning, only to succeed the then constable, Hugh Carpenter, when he resigned. Ben was re-elected to the post several times. In 1908 he became a special agent of the United States, which meant that he had to travel extensively throughout California, Nevada, and Arizona. The traveling must have gotten to him, because eight years later he gave that up to return to Banning and settle down.

Law enforcement still called to him, and he again became a constable in Banning. In the early 1920's he became involved in the County prison camp, gaining the title of Camp Superintendent in 1926. Finally, in 1928, Sheriff Clem Sweeters made him a full Deputy Sheriff, and Ben was put in charge of the Sheriff's substation in Indio.

While Ben's life was one of service to law enforcement in Riverside County, he is best known for two episodes—that of the Willie Boy manhunt in 1909 and the trial of Gordon Stuart Northcott in the late 1920's.

Willie Boy was a local Indian who was accused of murdering the father of the girl he loved, then fleeing with her. When she couldn't keep up with him, he killed her too. While fleeing throughout the Morongo Valley/Twenty-nine Palms area, he was pursued by two Sheriff's posses, the second of which was led by constable Ben de Crevecouer. Willie Boy was eventually found, and killed himself with a single gunshot wound to the head. The local papers credited Ben with being the one who discovered Willie Boy, but that is in doubt. Suffice it to say, though, that Ben was there, and probably exchanged gunfire with the cornered Indian.

Some 20 years later, Gordon Stuart Northcott and his mother were tried for the murders of several young boys at their chicken ranch in Wineville, east of Riverside. Eventually it was found that the two had lured young men to their farm, savagely killed them, and buried them in their chicken coop. The "Chicken

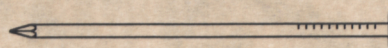
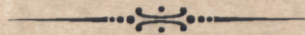
Coop Murders" brought nationwide attention to the little hamlet of Wineville, and Ben represented the Sheriff's Department at the trial, giving testimony as to what apparently had happened and what the Department had found in its investigation. When all was said and done, both of them were found guilty, and Mrs. Northcott was sentenced to life imprisonment, while her son received the death penalty. His case was upheld on appeal, and Gordon Stuart Northcott is supposedly the last man to be hanged in the State of California. Because of all the press that the town of Wineville received, the townsfolk voted to rename their town to Mira Loma, as it is known today.

In 1946, Ben's life was chronicled for a local newspaper, and while the reporter mentioned that old Ben must have had quite a few notches in his old .44, Ben said the he was proud of fact that he had been able to bring so many men to justice without killing anyone. If this is true, then he truly does deserve the title of a "Real Western Sheriff."

—Steve Lech is the unofficial historian of the City and County of Riverside. He has presented classes on the history of Riverside County at RCC as part of their Community Services program. He has been a docent at the Mission Inn for 10 years, and recently began conducting tours of the refurbished county courthouse. He also administers the USGenWeb page for Riverside County on the internet. In his spare time (chuckle, chuckle) he would be happy to answer any questions you might have about Riverside County. His e-mail address is stevelech@pe.net.

★★★★★

—Steve will present his class on the history of Riverside County again on February 3, 10, and 17 at RCC. Anyone interested in attending should call the office of RCC Community services at 909-222-8090 for details.



FOR WANT OF A NAIL...

"Man proposes and God disposes." There are but few important events in the affairs of men brought about by their own choice.

—Thomas à Kempis

THE GILMAN RANCH FLYER

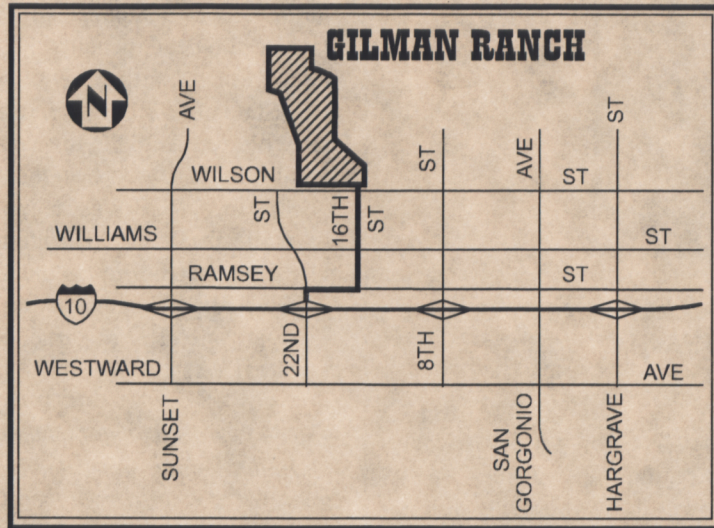


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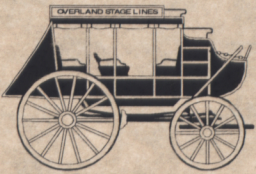
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The **Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum** is located at 16th and Wilson Streets in Banning, CA.



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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."