



The GILMAN RANCH FLYER

Issue No. 9

Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum

Fall 2000



GILMAN RANCH WAGON MUSEUM

Historical treasures of the Gilman Ranch and Wagon Museum in Banning tell of a lifestyle in the past. A focal point in the transportation corridor through San Geronio Pass, the museum has seen progress in all types of transportation from Indian footpaths to modern-day aircraft. The Wagon Museum on the ranch houses 20 different wagons which have been in use during different eras and have served pioneers in many different ways. Several of the ancient vehicles date from the early 1800s.

Of stylish origin is a **New York State Tallyho** with candle bulbs for headlights and two trunks—one for human food and drink and the other for horse feed.

In the days of cattle drives a pioneer **chuck wagon** native to the Pass was used between the historic Shay-Barker spread at Whitewater and summer range at Big Bear. Hay from Imperial Valley now is transported through Banning by Peterbuilt semi's, but in the days of the Smith Ranch in Brawley it was hauled by a **hay wagon** bought in 1914. An interesting feature is that it had grease cups on the hubs. A **Kentucky lumber wagon** among the collection shows the results of heavy usage during the days when hauling lumber was a difficult but important job. Records of pioneer travel tell of covered wagon days and desert "**prairie schooners.**" The two differ, in that wide-gauge wheels were used for crossing the sandy desert while narrow-gauge wheels, such as on the all-purpose **Oregon wagon**, were better for traveling in mud. They also differed in the depth and length of the wagon bed, the "prairie schooner" being the largest and deepest, as well as the highest, having larger wheels.

The youngest in vintage of the collection is a **sand and gravel wagon**, which hauled in the Etiwanda area. Built

in 1915, it has seen many years of heavy use. How different from today's bob-tail sand and gravel trucks seen on the freeway.

Sheep herding was a frequent sight throughout the Pass. A herder would carry grain as well as necessary supplies in his **grain and sheep wagon** with a front entrance to the wagon bed. Progress was slow, but then so were the sheep.

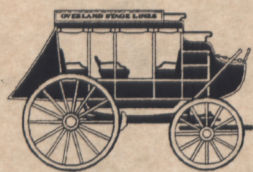
A famous brand name of the times was Studebaker, the maker of a **Top buggy** manufactured in 1902. A **Studebaker buggy** from the late 1880s is soon to be repaired. The name carried on into manufactured automobiles but disappeared about two decades ago. It is still known for quality of construction. The collection boasts three **freight wagons**, all of which have seen much use. Pulled by two, four, or six horses, each had its special ability for a particular hauling job. One, a four-horse wagon, was used in the Idyllwild area. Another trail wagon pulled heavy freight loads. A 1,000 gallon **water tank** is attached to a heavy-duty **farm wagon** with the wooden wheels banded by iron tires.

Most popular of all is a **stagecoach** from the Overland Stage Line. It lights the imagination about the times one now can only read about or see in the movies. It has four seats for passengers, wide enough for three people each, canvas side curtains, buffalo hide boot and leather traces. One seat up front is for driver and shotgun rider. After the stages came the trains and the museum's **Railway Express freight cart**, which was in use prior to 1885.

There are many other utensils and artifacts which depict pioneer days. Among them are various saddles, horse tack, doubletrees, and hitches for six-up pulling. Necessary props for a full-length western movie, with the exception of guns and ammunition, are among the collection. It has been lovingly acquired and cared for as representing authentic means of transportation for early times in the Pass.

The Gilman Ranch Wagon Museum is open Sundays from 10am to 4pm and weekdays by appointment for group tours. Picnic areas are available. Admission is \$3 for adults and \$1 for children under 12. The museum is located in Banning at 16th and Wilson Streets. Phone (909) 922-9200 for the Gilman Ranch or (909) 955-4310 for the Riverside County Park Headquarters.

—Frances Park



MORE ON THE CELERITY . . .

The centerpiece of the Gilman Historic Ranch Wagon Museum exhibit is the Celerity stagecoach. Its sides still proclaim, in fading paint, the name of its last employer—OVERLAND STAGE LINES. The Celerity was aptly named, for, as Webster defines the word, it implies rapid motion and speed in accomplishing work. It was built by Abbot, Downing and Company of Concord, New Hampshire, as a less expensive, lighter, and more rugged companion to its more handsome cousin, the Concord Stagecoach, which co-starred in later times with John Wayne. Early on, the Celerity was dubbed the “Mud Wagon,” perhaps because of its homely appearance and its ability to perform in the foulest of weather. While the Concord was normally drawn by three pairs of willing horses, the Celerity was usually pulled by two pairs of recalcitrant mules. The smoother, more traveled routes were the province of the Concord, while the Celerity and its mules took over when the trails headed into the mountains or deserts.

The crew of the Celerity consisted of an armed driver and a conductor who rode shotgun and looked after the passengers as best he could. The Gilman coach has four seats configured so that two sets of the seats face each other. When full, 12 people rode three abreast in each of the seats, with their knees dovetailed in the limited space between the facing seats. Travel in the coach has been described as bone-jarring even though Abbot, Downing and Company had attempted to ameliorate the ride with “throughbraces.” Resembling modern-day leaf springs, they were made of long straps of leather layered together that attached both sides of the bottom of the “cabin” to the front and rear of the undercarriage of the wagon. This suspension, while maybe softening the ride a bit, lent an unpleasant rocking motion to the sometimes careening and lurching coach. A small luxury was the canvas roll-down curtains that offered some protection from the rain and snow but none whatsoever from the intense heat or cold and choking dust the travelers might encounter. Stops were more at the pleasure of the horses than the passengers. Sometimes the respites were only long enough for the travelers to relieve themselves, stretch their legs, and have a drink of brackish water before continuing on their way.



In 1851 Horace Greeley popularized the phrase “Go west, young man, go west,” and thousands upon thousands of young men—some with families, some with friends, and some alone—set out for “California,” a name that was the embodiment of the west, in search of wealth and success. Before 1869 they had to go by mule or horseback, by wagon, or, for a while, by stagecoach. Each journey was an adventure

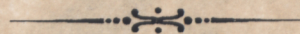
and none was without travail. None could be described as pleasant or easy. But, on May 10, 1869, traveling across America was about to change—the final spike was driven against the last rail that would complete the transcontinental railroad. After that, travel from east to west was still an adventure but one that was carried out more inexpensively with relative ease and, ironically, celerity.



In 1869 James Marshall Gilman bought his ranch from Newton Noble, a stage man and local entrepreneur. On the ranch was an adobe house that Noble had used as a stage stop beginning in 1862. After the purchase, Gilman continued to serve the stage lines from the adobe until 1876.

Passing through the ranch, and by the adobe, was the Bradshaw Trail, named for William Bradshaw, a miner and freight driver, who blazed the desert portion of the trail from information he learned from the Cahuilla and Maricopa Indians. In its entirety it ran from Los Angeles, through the San Geronio Pass, to Arizona, and beyond and for some time it was the only route from southern California to Arizona by stagecoach. It was heavily traveled by stages and freight wagons until the railroads made such trips financially unfeasible.

The Southern Pacific Railroad crossed the desert from southern California to Yuma in 1877 and began carrying passengers, mail, and freight, thus hastening the end of the era of the stagecoach on the California desert. The stages carried on as best they could until 1879 when they ceased their travel across the desert altogether. While the harshness and discomfort of traveling by stagecoach were eventually forgotten, the romantic memories of the Celerity and Concord live on. ★



SHELLEY REPORTS . . .

Greetings. I thought I'd update those of you who may be curious about how the Mountain Men / Frontier Living History Encampment went. By most accounts it was a success! There were some things I'd change and other neat things I would like to include next year. Many teachers have been sending me “thank you” packets prepared by their students, who obviously had a great time, and that's a good sign for the future of the event. The number of students who attended the three days of school activities was an astounding 2000 . . . whew!

I want to thank all the Ranch Hands who came out and gave a helping hand—I really appreciated it. I want to give a special THANK YOU to Joan Coombs for the endless hours she put in getting the museum and the general Store ready and for organizing the museum docents and helpers.

We already have many schools on the books for next year's programs, so I'm already looking forward to a successful coming year.

—Shelley Kibby, Park Interpreter



WANTED

VOLUNTEERS

THE GILMAN RANCH HANDS NEED YOU!

☆ GARDEN HELPERS ☆

Bill Deans can use help in the French Gilman Native Plant Garden. There is always weeding, raking, and watering to do, and Bill will be installing an automatic watering system soon and would welcome extra hands on that project. Regardless of your choice of jobs, only a few hours of your time each month would be of great value. Call Bill at 849-1094 for details of how you can be part of the garden project.

☆ DOCENTS ☆

Wagon museum and ranch docents have always been in demand. Learn about our wagons and the history of the ranch and then share your knowledge with our visitors. If you like, you can work with the numerous school groups the ranch hosts or the community events it sponsors. Only a few hours each month would be of great help. Phone Joan Coombs at 849-2133 if you would like to be part of this program.

☆ COMPUTER USERS ☆

Just a little time spent on the Ranch Hand's computer each month would help a lot. You would be working with the ranch hands and the Park Interpreter maintaining mailing lists, phone lists, and a Rolodex, and preparing letters and announcements. You would be given all the help you need to find existing files and learn unfamiliar programs. If this sounds interesting, please call Gordon Sisk at 927-2463.

GILMAN RANCH HANDS, INC.
WITH THE
GILMAN HISTORIC RANCH and WAGON MUSEUM
16TH & WILSON STREETS ★ BANNING ★ PHONE (909) 922-9200



FOR WANT OF A NAIL . . .

Go west, young man, go west.

—John B.L. Soule, editorial advice in
The Frontier, 1851. Soule's editorial
reprinted in the New York Tribune
by Horace Greeley

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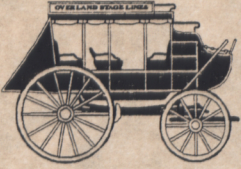


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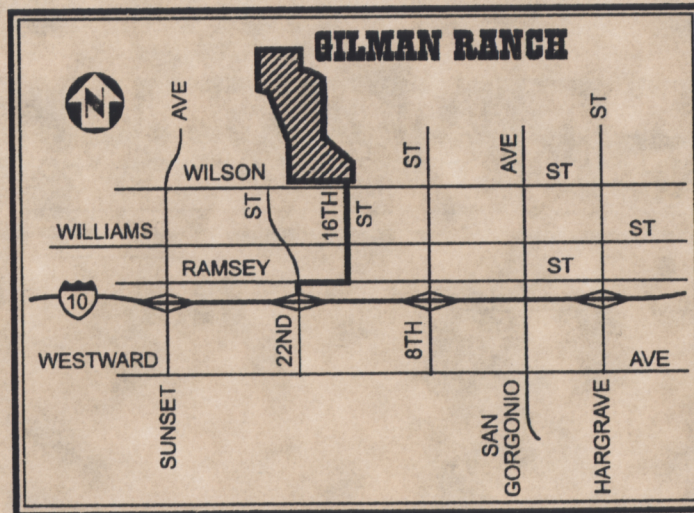


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RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL PARK AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

"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."



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