



Newsletter

WORKING FOR A FUTURE
THAT CELEBRATES THE
PAST

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SAVHA FALL DINNER TO FEATURE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT TOMMY STORELLI ON THE ART OF BLACKSMITHING

The San Antonio Valley Historical Association (SAVHA) will host its upcoming Fall Dinner and Lecture on Saturday, November 14th at 4:30 PM. This year's event will take place at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Jolon, CA, and will feature a special presentation by Tom (Tommy) Storelli, a talented local craftsman and the 2026 SAVHA Scholarship Recipient.

Storelli's presentation, titled "Preserving the Past Through Fire and Iron," will delve into the rich history, engineering, and enduring relevance of traditional blacksmithing. Drawing from his immersive experience as an intern at the Monterey County Agricultural and Rural Life Museum (MCARLM), Storelli will share his unique journey of working inside the historic Olson Blacksmith Shop.

The evening promises a wonderful blend of local history, community fellowship, and great comfort food, catered by Craig Banuelos. We invite all history lovers, craft enthusiasts, and SAVHA members to join us for an inspiring evening celebrating the next generation of historical preservationists.

Tickets are \$35 per person for SAVHA members and \$40 per person for non-members. Advance reservations and payment are required by October 30. To reserve tickets, 805-472-2780 or 831-385-0323, or email savha4@gmail.com. Please mail payment by check to SAVHA, P.O. Box 145, Lockwood, CA 93932. We hope you can join us!



Long before modern hardware stores and mass manufacturing existed, rural blacksmiths were the backbone of agricultural communities

P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E

BY DENNIS PALM

At the time of our last newsletter, the rain's were over and the wildflower season was about to peak. The weather was perfect for **SAVHA's Spring Tour, Cemeteries of the San Antonio Valley.**

Also, last Spring, SAVHA was represented at **Fort Hunter Liggett's 85th Anniversary Open House**, on May 2.

SAVHA Board Member, David Savoy, myself and my wife Ollie tabled with historic items from the early Army years. The community members and organizations added their support, there were tours of the Hacienda and fireworks in the evening. Fun and history for all.



We are now moving into Fall and leaves along the San Antonio are beginning to fall. Forecasts are for an El Nino winter, so be prepared.

SAVHA's Annual Meeting, Fall Dinner and Lecture is scheduled for November 14. Tommy Storelli, blacksmith, recent graduate of KC High, and recipient of SAVHA's 2026 Scholarship Award will be the guest speaker. Details are available in the newsletter.

We hope to see all on November 14 and 'till then, "keep your powder dry."

REQUEST TO MEMBERSHIP

San Antonio Valley Historical Association (SAVHA) is all about history. But it's now time we moved into the 21st Century.

In an effort to save money, we would like to email our newsletter to our membership.

When you renew your membership, please include your email. Not only is it a convenient way to learn about the comings and goings, it saves natural resources and MONEY!

The year I was born, a first class stamp was three cents. Now it costs 84 cents to mail a letter. Even if it was an increase of one cent per year, it shouldn't be that much.

Please help, and give us your email address.

PRESERVING THE PAST THROUGH FIRE AND IRON

BY TOMMY STORELLI, 2026 SAN ANTONIO VALLEY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

When most people think about history, they think about reading books, looking at photographs, or visiting museums. For me, history has always been something you can touch, hear, and experience firsthand. As an intern at the Monterey County Agricultural and Rural Life Museum (MCARLM), I have had the opportunity to do more than learn about history—I have had the chance to live it through my work in the Olson Blacksmith Shop.

The Olson Blacksmith Shop represents an important piece of Monterey County's agricultural heritage. The original shop was located at Paraiso Springs, where it served ranchers, farmers, and community members throughout the region. Before modern machinery, replacement parts, and hardware stores were readily available, blacksmiths were essential to everyday life. They repaired broken equipment, forged custom tools, shod horses, and helped keep agricultural operations functioning. In many rural communities, the local blacksmith was one of the most important skilled tradesmen because the success of a ranch or farm often depended on his ability to solve problems and keep equipment running.

Today, visitors can experience this history through the reproduction Olson Blacksmith Shop located at San Lorenzo Park in King City. While the building itself is a recreation, many of the tools, machines, and pieces of equipment housed inside are original artifacts from the historic Olson Blacksmith Shop. These original tools help tell the story of how blacksmiths worked and demonstrate the skill and ingenuity required to support Monterey County's agricultural economy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Working in the shop has given me a unique perspective on the importance of preserving traditional trades. Blacksmithing is often associated with horseshoes, but the work involved much more than that. Blacksmiths repaired plows, fabricated specialized parts, maintained wagons, repaired machinery, and created solutions for mechanical problems that could not be solved by ordering a replacement part. Every item was built, repaired, or modified by hand. The trade required creativity, patience, and a deep understanding of how machines worked.

One of the most memorable projects I have participated in was helping pour babbitt bearings used in the shop's historic line shaft system. Before electric motors became common, many workshops relied on line shafts powered by a single engine to operate multiple machines throughout a building. The babbitt bearings support the rotating shafts and allow the machinery to function properly. Helping restore and operate this system gave me a firsthand understanding of the engineering and craftsmanship that powered early industrial and agricultural operations.

Through my internship, I have spent countless hours learning under the mentorship of Randy Sowash and Tom Foster. Their knowledge, patience, and willingness to teach have helped me develop practical skills while gaining a deeper appreciation for historical preservation. They have taught me how to safely use traditional tools, understand historic machinery, and approach problems with the mindset of a craftsman. More importantly, they have shown me the value of passing knowledge from one generation to the next.

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Look for updates and news of SAVHA events on our website www.savha.org and our Facebook page [www.facebook.comSanantonioValleyHistoricalAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/SanantonioValleyHistoricalAssociation)

SAVHA UPDATES

SAVHA SCHOLARSHIP AWARD



SAVHA board members Shari Schmidt and Maria Weinerth were proud to present Thomas Storelli with a scholarship to further his education.

Applicants to this scholarship need to be a King City High School graduate, have a plan for further education and a grade point average of 2.75. They are also required to write a historical essay.

The essay Thomas penned is in this newsletter and he will be expounding on the art of blacksmiths at our fall event.

We were quite impressed with this young man, and so were many other scholarship donors. Thomas received 17 cash scholarships at the awards banquet!

SAVHA YOUTUBE CHANNEL

SAVHA Spring Tour 2026 a visit to the Pleyto Cemetery

During SAVHA's Cemeteries of the San Antonio Valley 2026 Spring Tour, Janice Smith-Ramseier shared the rich history of the Pleyto Cemetery, describing how the original burial grounds were relocated prior to the construction of Lake San Antonio. She also recounted the powerful story of Glenn Allen Harris, a World War II POW who was finally brought home to Pleyto for burial—an emotional reminder of sacrifice, resilience, and the importance of honoring those who served. Ed Buntz added valuable historical context by sharing original identification maps of the cemetery plots, helping visitors visualize the early layout of the site. Adding a deeply personal layer to the visit, David Savoy spoke about his ancestors who are buried at Pleyto, offering family history that connects directly to the early settlers of the San Antonio Valley and enriches our understanding of the community's roots.

Also available on the channel are recordings of:

- ◆ "What's Under the Lake?" Patricia Ashe Woodfill 1-21-2026
- ◆ SAVHA - Oral History Interview with Patterson Family July 10, 2024
- ◆ Journey of the King City, California History Book - San Antonio Valley Historical Association
- ◆ SAVHA Spring Tour 1994 @ Pump Station # 4 and Eade Ranch
- ◆ Joanne Banuelos Interview August 27, 2021

Check back often for more videos; we will upload them as they become available. Visit our Facebook page for news on our YouTube Channel.

MORE SAVHA UPDATES

SAVHA TO HAVE INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIBED

GoTranscribe, a service that takes oral history recordings and transforms them into a written script, has been enabling SAVHA to transcribe our historical interviews.

Forty years ago, members of SAVHA devoted themselves to interviewing and recording old-timers. Those interviews started on cassette tapes and then were converted to CDs. Copies of the CDs are available at the King City branch of the Monterey County Free Libraries and in the SAVHA archives at San Lorenzo Park.

The 40 interviews include names such as Wilma Rose of King City and it is the goal of SAVHA to pay to have all the interviews transcribed.

Recent SAVHA interviews on video are also being transcribed. Those include information from Josephine Pacheco Koester, Butch Heinsen, Tom Pettitt, David Tavernetti and Howard Strohn.

SAVHA also used GoTranscribe for an interview of Ben McCormack recorded at the Nacitone Museum, pilot Red Rider for the Mesa Del Rey Airport and businessman Tiny Benadom from a recording supplied by his daughter, Lyn Benadom Pett.

CDNC PROVIDES VALUABLE INFORMATION

The California Digital Newspaper Collection (CDNC) website, affiliated with the University of California at Riverside, continues to provide anyone interested in history with access to 53 years of the King City Rustler newspaper.

By going to CDNC.UCR.edu, interested persons can research topics and family information available using Optical Character Recognition (OCR). Additionally, searches can be made in the King City Herald and The Land and its People as well as other newspapers from throughout California. The easiest search option is searching by county accessing Monterey County publications.

All these local newspapers covered the San Antonio Valley and surrounding areas in Southern Monterey County.

BECOME A BOARD MEMBER

SAVHA's Annual Meeting and Fall Dinner & Lecture is a wonderful opportunity to take part in shaping our organization's future. As you arrive, you'll receive a ballot that allows you to vote for Board Members — and if you're interested in serving, you may also add your own name for consideration. Your participation strengthens SAVHA. Don't forget to vote!

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PRESERVING THE PAST THROUGH FIRE AND IRON

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

As someone who plans to pursue a career in the skilled trades, these experiences have had a significant impact on me. Blacksmithing has taught me lessons that apply far beyond the forge. It has taught me patience when things do not go as planned, attention to detail when precision matters, and persistence when solving difficult problems. Working with metal has also reinforced my appreciation for hands-on learning and the satisfaction that comes from building, repairing, and maintaining things with my own hands.

The Olson Blacksmith Shop serves as more than a museum exhibit. It is a working classroom where visitors can see history come alive and where young people like me can learn skills that connect the past to the present. Every demonstration, restoration project, and educational program helps preserve knowledge that might otherwise be lost. These traditional trades helped build Monterey County's agricultural communities, and they continue to teach valuable lessons about craftsmanship, innovation, and self-reliance.

Receiving the San Antonio Valley Historical Association Scholarship is an honor, and I am grateful for the support it provides as I continue my education and pursue a future in the trades. I am especially thankful to the mentors, volunteers, and staff at the Monterey County Agricultural and Rural Life Museum who have invested their time and knowledge in helping me learn. Their dedication to preserving local history has given me opportunities that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

History is often described as something that happened in the past, but working in the Olson Blacksmith Shop has taught me that history is also something we preserve, practice, and pass on. Every time the forge is lit, a tool is repaired, or a machine is restored, another piece of that history remains alive for future generations.

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HOW TO REACH US

Do you have a comment or contribution? Would you like to express an opinion to the board? Would you like to become a board member? SAVHA is always looking for fresh and old ideas, so if you would like to recommend a Spring Tour site or guest speaker for our Fall dinner and lecture, please forward the information to one of the below board members

We can be reached by mail at P.O. Box 145, Lockwood, CA 93932, or by email through the following board members:

SAVHA email: savha4@gmail.com

Dennis Palm: dpalm7@sbcglobal.net

Patricia Woodfill (newsletter): patran2@gmail.com

THE CRIMSON OF THE CHAPARRAL: THE DEEP HISTORY AND RESILIENCE OF TOYON

As fall yields to winter in the rugged foothills of southern Monterey County, the oak woodlands and chaparral of the mountains surrounding the San Antonio Valley undergo a striking transformation. Among the fading summer brush, one resilient native shrub takes center stage: Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*). Known historically as "California holly" or "Christmas berry," Toyon erupts into dense clusters of brilliant red berries every winter, painting a vivid contrast against its dark, leathery green leaves. While modern residents admire it for its seasonal beauty, this rugged plant carries centuries of ecological, cultural, and local history—and a remarkable story of survival.



Toyon holds a unique linguistic honor: it is the only California native plant that continues to be universally known by its indigenous name. The word "toyon" is a Spanish adaptation of the original word *totcon*, given to the shrub by the Ohlone people. For centuries, regional indigenous groups—including the Ohlone, Salinan, and Chumash—relied heavily on Toyon as both a vital food source and a material resource.

While raw toyon berries contain toxic compounds, California's first peoples mastered the art of processing them safely by roasting, boiling, or baking them to reveal a sweet, spicy flavor. The processed berries were regularly ground down into a coarse meal for porridge or dried into cakes for long-term storage. Beyond its culinary value, Toyon was highly prized for its exceptionally dense, hard wood. Local tribes fashioned the sturdy branches into essential everyday tools, including arrow shafts, fishhooks, and digging sticks. When early Spanish explorers and pioneer families settled near regions like Mission San Antonio de Padua, they quickly adopted the plant, cooking the winter berries with sugar to create holiday pies, custards, and a popular fermented cider.

In recent weeks, our nearby forests have faced incredible trials as the devastating Timber and Plaskett fires swept across tens of thousands of acres in Monterey County. As local families and historians watch the smoke clear from the Ventana Wilderness and the southern slopes, thoughts naturally turn to the recovery of our native ecosystems.

Fortunately, Toyon is built for the fiery realities of California. While a fast-moving wildfire easily consumes its above-ground foliage, the plant possesses an expansive, deeply rooted underground burl. As fire crews secure containment lines, we have hope for the recovery of these historic stands. Fed by winter rains, the Toyon's subterranean roots will aggressively sprout new growth, acting as natural anchors to prevent soil erosion on the fire-scarred mountains and pioneering the return of life to the forests.

Today, Toyon stands as a beautiful reminder of our valley's untamed past and its enduring future. It supports our local ecosystem by providing critical winter sustenance to flocks of Mockingbirds, Bluebirds and American Robins, all while anchoring the historic soils of Monterey County. As we look to the hillsides post-fire, the eventual return of these brilliant red berries will serve as a living symbol of our valley's historic resilience.

*Upon the sun-
burnt, golden
hill,
When winter
woods are bare
and still,
The toyon lifts
its branches
high
Against a pale
Pacific sky.*

2027 MEMBERSHIP / DONATION FORM

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

_____ ZIP _____

Email _____ Phone _____

New _____

Households (\$25) \$ _____

Renewal _____

I wish to enclose a donation \$ _____

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