San Antonio Valley Historical Association
April 2026

Newsletter

WORKING FOR A FUTURE THAT CELEBRATES THE PAST

IN THIS ISSUE

Cemeteries of the San Antonio Valley Spring Tour

This spring, the San Antonio Valley Historical Association invites the community to explore the stories of the people who shaped our region. On Saturday, April 18th, SAVHA will host its annual Spring Tour—a rare opportunity to visit several historic cemeteries and learn about the families, founders, and early settlers who built the valley we know today.

Far from spooky folklore, these cemeteries are among the most peaceful places in the valley. They offer a quiet connection to ranchers, homesteaders, soldiers, and generations of families whose lives are woven into the history of this land.

Entrance to St Luke's Cemetery

The day begins at **St. Luke's in Jolon at 9:00 a.m.** with registration, coffee, and morning treats, followed by carpool organization. From there, the tour will visit several historic cemeteries:

- **Pleyto Cemetery** – Learn about those originally buried in Old Pleyto Cemetery, once located near the former town of Pleyto and now beneath Lake San Antonio. Some graves remain under the water today.
- **Gillett Cemetery** – Hear how SAVHA's founders recognized the need to preserve the valley's history for future generations.
- **Paulsen Cemetery** – Resting place of many early families dating back to the early 1800s.

After the final stop, the group returns to St. Luke's for a catered lunch by Craig Banuelos—salads, meats and cheeses, rolls, dessert, and drinks—followed by a visit to the **cemetery at St. Luke's Episcopal Church** (often called the Jolon Cemetery) and **The Dutton Graveyard** for more local stories.

The cost for the event is **$30 for SAVHA members** and **$35 for non- members**. Advance payment and reservations are required and must be made **by April 12th**. To reserve your place, call Maria Weinerth **805-472-2780**, or Patricia Woodfill **831-236-4220** or email savha4@gmail.com. Checks may be mailed to SAVHA, P.O. Box 145, Lockwood, CA 93932.

President's Message

By Dennis Palm

Remember that song, "How's it feel to be back home, again?" Well, after a short retirement, it's feeling good to be back as President of SAVHA. I want to thank Paul Getzelman for his fine job as President, for the past several years. Also, I wish to welcome David Savoy and each of our newly elected SAVHA Board Members.

We had some pleasant rain in February and are looking forward to a nice display of wildflowers this Spring. The peak of the wildflower show in Southern Monterey County and The Indians, is usually mid-April. This year it will coincide with **SAVHA's Spring Tour**, on **April 18**. The theme will be **Cemeteries of the San Antonio Valley.** The weather should be great. Check for further details in the newsletter.

Also, this Spring is **Fort Hunter Liggett's 85th Anniversary Open House, on May 2.** SAVHA will have a table, as well as other community members. If any SAVHA members would like to help, contact me at dpalm7@sbcglobal.net, or 805 423-2845. More information to follow.

On the afternoon of the Spring Tour, you may want to leave a little time to take a **Wildflower Drive**, along Del Venturi Rd, or plan a special day and picnic, on a drive. You won't regret it.

Happy Trails!

Dennis

How to reach Us

Do you have a comment or contribution to share? Would you like to offer feedback to the Board or even consider joining it? SAVHA is always eager for both fresh ideas and time honored perspectives. If you have a suggestion for a Spring Tour site, a guest speaker for our Fall Dinner & Lecture, or an article for our newsletter, we would love to hear from you.

You can reach us by mail at **P.O. Box 145, Lockwood, CA 93932**, or by email through any of the Board members listed below.

SAVHA email: savha4@gmail.com
Dennis Palm: dpalm7@sbcglobal.net
Patricia Woodfill (Newsletter articles): patran2@gmail.com

Six Cemetery Superstitions — And Why Our Spring Tour Proves the Real Stories Are Even Better

As SAVHA prepares for this year's Spring Tour — a journey through some of the oldest and most meaningful cemeteries in the San Antonio Valley — it feels like the perfect time to look at a few long-standing cemetery superstitions. These myths have been passed down for generations, but the truth behind them is far more interesting than the spooky tales.

Our cemeteries hold history, not hauntings; stories, not superstitions. Here are six common myths you may have heard — and the real explanations you can share as we explore St. Luke's, Dutton, Pleyto, Gillett, Paulsen, and (permissions willing!) the Bolton cemetery sites.

1. "Walking through a cemetery at night will curse you."

No curses here — just trespassing citations. Cemeteries close at dusk to protect visitors and the grounds, not because of supernatural danger. During our daytime tour, you'll see just how peaceful and reflective these places truly are.

2. "You can catch a cold from being in a graveyard."

Cemeteries don't cause illness. Colds come from viruses, not from burial grounds or chilly air. Our valley cemeteries are open-air, sunlit, and as safe to visit as any park or historic site.

3. "Graves can open and swallow people whole."

A dramatic story — but pure folklore. While older cemeteries may have uneven ground or wildlife burrows, there's no danger of being "pulled under." Good shoes and a watchful step are all you need on the tour.

4. "Vampire graves exist."

These legends grew from early misunderstandings of disease, not from anything found in our region's burial sites. What you *will* find on the tour are markers that reflect the cultural, religious, and family histories of the valley's earliest residents.

5. "Stepping on a grave will make the deceased haunt you."

This superstition likely began as a way to teach children respect. While we always encourage visitors to be mindful of headstones and markers, no spirits will be summoned if someone accidentally steps in the wrong place.

6. "Cemeteries are always haunted."

If anything, our local cemeteries are some of the most peaceful places in the valley. They offer a quiet connection to the people who shaped this community — ranchers, homesteaders, soldiers, families — and they remind us how deep our roots truly run.

SAVHA Updates

King City Visitor and History Center

An event titled "History, Food and Fun" is planned for Friday, May 1, 2026 featuring stories of King City's history along with food samples from local restaurants.

This will be one of the first tours hosted by the recently opened King City History Center at 110 North Vanderhurst Avenue next to the Downtown Plaza.

The event will begin at 9 a.m. at the newly renovated Vanderhurst Commons (formerly Community Church) at 209 South Vanderhurst Avenue. From there the group will walk one block to the King City History Center and then head east on Broadway to the Cork & Plough Restaurant

Be sure to stop by the King City Visitor and History

Other stops on the tour include La Plaza Bakery, Tacos La Potranca de Jalisco and Pozzi's Stampede. The final stop will be the oldest church in town, St. Mark's, built in 1890.

At each stop there will be brief presentations about the town history including the connection to author John Steinbeck as well as the early gas stations when the main street, Broadway, was Highway 101 running through town.

The event is being hosted in partnership with the Monterey County Agricultural and Rural Life Museum, the San Antonio Valley Historical Association and the King City Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture.

Price of the event is $40 per person payable in advance. Reservations are required by Saturday, April 25 by calling or texting 831-594-3740 or emailing Karenjernigan2007@gmail.com

SAVHA's YouTube Channel

The San Antonio Valley Historical Association (SAVHA) continues to enrich our YouTube channel with captivating historical content. Our most recent update features "**What's Under the Lake**", a presentation given by Patricia Ashe Woodfill of the San Antonio Valley Historical Association. She used historic photos and data to speak about Lake San Antonio which covered land that once was home to the town of Pleyto and other historic sites, like the Pleyto Cemetery. Lake San Antonio in Monterey County, formed by the San Antonio Dam, was completed in 1965, creating the reservoir primarily for water supply, flood control, and recreation, with the dam built by the Monterey County Water Resources Agency.

Be sure to check out the fascinating interviews and presentations on our YouTube channel!

https://www.youtube.com/@savha

Catherine Carpenter-Bartley

September 3, 1949 – January 18, 2026

Cathy Bartley passed away on Sunday, January 18, 2026. As a local resident with a long family history of living in Jolon and Bryson-Hesperia, she was a stalwart supporter of Hesperia Hall and San Antonio Valley Historical Association (SAVHA).

She also spent many years as a dedicated member of Kiwanis Club in Paso Robles. Always ready to lend a hand, donate time and money supporting educational endeavors, she was a consistent, uplifting presence in our community and her spirit will live on with all of us.

Catherine's legacy of service, artistry, and love continues through those she inspired. In her honor, the following poem, written by her daughter, reflects the spirit she leaves behind.

In All of Us, She Blooms Anew

by Chandra Pivo

She was the quiet strength beneath our feet,

Steady hands that lifted us all.

She gave without measure, both kind and complete,

In every large gesture and small.

Her coffee was bold as the care that she gave,

Her table a haven for all.

In the gardens she nurtured, the moments she saved,

She answered each need, great or small.

With art in her hands and a spark in her eye,

She shaped what the heart always knew.

Her love still grows—gentle, steadfast, and nigh—

In all of us, she blooms anew.

Cathy, embraced by the Hesperia Hall raffle quilt she had won and cherished.

Recommended Reading and Research for Cemeteries and Legends of the San Antonio Valley

Mysteries and Legends of Jolon California, Olive E. Wollesen—reprinted by Nacitone Foundation. Available at the Nacitone Museum, Lockwood, CA
Images of America—The San Antonio Valley by Susan Raycraft and Ann Beckett
Ghost Hunter's Guide to Monterey and California's Central Coast (2010) Dwyer, Jeff, p: 194 - 195
Ghosts of the Big Sur Coast (2002) by Reinstedt, Randall A, p: 69 - 73
What Lies Beneath: California Pioneer Cemeteries and Graveyards, by Gail L. Jenner

The Headless Horsewoman

A Headless Horsewoman rides a ghost white horse throughout Fort Hunter Liggett. Meanwhile ghost monks, a strange ball of light, and phantom figures have been seen in Mission San Antonio de Padua.

The story goes that in Spring 1898, the Halloran family consisting of Michael and Alice along with their baby, Clara, were heading to their new homestead located on Nacimiento River. They had just arrived by train from Philadelphia. On their way they stopped off in Jolon. There, local ranchers and Native Americans cautioned them about crossing the river, stating that it was currently too high to cross. Despite being warned, and even though Alice asked him to wait, Michael Halloran pressed the family on anyway, believing that those who warned him were simply after his land.

The river was indeed too rough, and sadly the wagon was capsized by the current and overturned. Alice became caught in the reins and was decapitated as the horses struggled to free themselves, while poor Clara drowned. The graveyard where Alice was buried, headless, eventually became part of Fort Hunter Liggett. Now, Alice is a ghost haunting the area around Fort Hunter Liggett, searching for both her head and Clara. She is suppose to float above the ground, especially on moonless nights, holding out her hands, pointing in the direction of the river.

Supposedly the U.S. army has had run ins with her, the first reportedly being in the mid 1950s when two soldiers stationed at an ammunition bunker near the graveyard ran across her. One died of a heart attack and the other went out of his mind, taking several months to recover. Some of the relatively recent accounts came from soldiers assigned to Fort Hunter Liggett. “I saw it while at ASP (ammo supply point) in December 1974. It was a female, I’m sure of that,” one soldier is quoted as saying in Randall A. Reinstedt’s *Ghostly Tales and Mysterious Happenings*. Another soldier stationed at the same ASP on another occasion reported seeing a headless figure approach, and drew his weapon – only to see the figure disappear.

Drawing of the Headless Horsewomen of Jolon by Olive Wollesen 1984. From her book Mysteries and Legends of Jolon California

Like most good ghost stories, there are, of course, variations on the story. Another version claims that the headless woman was a Native American, often named Cleora, who was having an affair with a miner in the area. Her husband found out, having caught her with the prospector. He took an ax and killed her, then chopped off her head, and buried her body in one grave, and her head in a separate one. This has led to a headless horsewoman riding in the night, searching for her missing head.

The legend is well-documented in regional folklore and books, such as those by writers Olive Wollesen and Randall A. Reinstedt.

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Published Biannually by the

San Antonio Valley Historical Association (SAVHA)

The California Dandelion: Small Plant, Big Story

By Patricia Woodfill

Bright yellow and often dismissed as a weed, the dandelion is one of the most familiar plants in California. Yet this humble wildflower—especially California's native species—has a long history of usefulness and an astonishing ability to travel the globe.

California is home to native dandelions such as the California dandelion (*Taraxacum californicum*), a member of the sunflower family. Like its more common relatives, it grows from a deep taproot and produces the familiar puffball of wind-borne seeds. These seeds, carried easily on air currents, help explain why dandelions thrive in valleys, grasslands, ranchlands, and roadsides throughout the state.

For centuries, dandelions have been valued for more than their cheerful appearance. Every part of the plant can be used. The leaves are edible and rich in nutrients, traditionally eaten fresh or cooked as greens. The roots have long been roasted and brewed as a coffee substitute, while the flowers are used in teas, syrups, and even wine. Many cultures have also used dandelion in traditional herbal practices, though modern experts note that scientific evidence is limited and caution is advised when using medicinal plants.

Dandelions are masters of survival. Their seeds can travel great distances by wind, and even small root fragments can regrow into new plants. This adaptability has allowed species of *Taraxacum* to spread across nearly every temperate region on Earth—from the tropics to the Arctic.

Despite popular claims, dandelions are not established in Antarctica. The continent's extreme cold and dry conditions support only mosses, lichens, and a few native flowering plants. However, scientists closely monitor polar and sub-Antarctic regions, where increased human activity raises concerns about non-native plants accidentally being introduced.

From California fields to the far edges of the world, the dandelion reminds us that even the most ordinary plants have extraordinary stories—and that a single seed, carried on the wind, can travel farther than we might imagine.

Author's Note: I was inspired to explore the "California Dandelion" for this newsletter after reading *Wild Dark Shore* by Charlotte McConaghy, a novel centered on the Salt family, caretakers of a remote Antarctic seed bank threatened by rising seas. Orley, the youngest son in this eco-thriller, is captivated by the idea of seed intelligence. He sees the humble dandelion as a powerful emblem of resilience—its seeds capable of traveling hundreds of miles on the wind. He also challenges our assumptions by pointing out that this so-called "weed" nourishes countless species, inviting us to reconsider what we deem valuable.

2026 Membership / Donation Form

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