

The Spirit of Fourths Past

By Daniel Hon

A kaleidoscope of pancakes, barbecued beef, balloons, queens, carnivals, dances, fireworks, flags, floats, parades, shootouts, high stakes poker games, low stakes bingo, greased pigs and poles, speeches, rodeos, cotton candy, watermelons, traffic, heat, wind, and crowds upon crowds of people have painted the environs of downtown Newhall since the first officially sponsored Fourth of July Parade was held in 1932: the epitome of small town America in the Santa Clarita Valley.

The idea of the celebration was born during the depths of the depression when people here, as in the rest of the country, had no money to use frivolously. The town fathers wanted to give the community a day to celebrate without the need to spend a lot. They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

It has been variously called The Beeg Peerade, Placeritos Days, Old West Celebration and, simply, the Fourth of July. Fireworks came to it regularly and in a big way when Pat Lizza of Bermite Powder Company first donated them to the community in 1952. Several years thereafter, the Kiwanis Club took over the display until it became too expensive for them (they broke even one year by passing the hat in the stands.)

The Mighty Signal stepped in ten years ago and filled the gap at the last minute when no other fireworks sponsor could be found. Magic Mountain and the Saugus Speedway have complimented The Signal's already incomparable show over the years with their own displays. But nothing has been done to compare with the extravaganza at Hart High School that is peculiarly home grown and loved by all, especially when the popcorn is plentiful.

Three generations of Truebloods have run the whole shebang while other chairmen have come and gone after being burned out by heavy volunteerism at the beginning and ending with the gasps of the few who actually did the work. In 1953, Fred Trueblood, Sr., owner and publisher of The Signal wrote, in a moment of pique,

Staging a full day's activities is a job of enormous proportions in a community the size of Newhall. The number of

individuals who are capable of doing things, who have the requisite imagination and energy, is a relatively small one. Then, if you subtract from this minority the competent individuals who simply will not perform what they promise, you get down to a small hard core of workers who both CAN and WILL.

The editorial was written in sympathy for Ted Lamkin who was the president of the Old West Association and who ran that year's parade with precious little help. Not only that, but this was the year that "little Tommy Frew came as a giant firecracker" and had to be extricated from his costume: He damned near suffocated in the 105 degree heat!

Mr. Trueblood Sr. knew whereof he spoke. He ran the affair in 1939 and 1940 and again in 1952. Even today, burnout is a problem. Organizations such as the Jaycees, Rotary, Optimists, Lions, Kiwanis and the overall sponsor, the Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce, have to scramble to keep finding volunteers to take on such diverse tasks as publicity, communications, float and other entry judging, breakfasts, parade line up, parade announcers, parade script writers, secretaries, sheriff coordination, refreshments, sign painters, VIP greeters, convertible top car owners to carry politicians in the parade itself, clean up crews and a myriad of others to handle details too numerous to even think about.

In earlier years there was even a street dance where Treslerras Market now is. It was the only Safeway in the Valley. In 1939, Satchell McVay's orchestra received great fanfare in The Signal as being a "colored" band. People came from miles around to dance and be entertained by his music. Howard Wingfield won the pie eating contest.

Queens have come and gone: Barbara Borden, the sister of long time Saugus High math teacher Judy Stevens, Barbara Ayres, Carol Shaughnessy, Jimmy Wright, Barbara Melby, Billie Sitton, Linda Pigg and one lady in the late '30s who was the mother of two!

Lack of music has always been a



The parade of 1973 was led unofficially by Bobbie Trueblood, now Mrs. Ed Davis, who rode her palanquin into Fourth of July parade history.

problem because of the Fourth falling in the middle of summer vacation. The paucity of bands became so acute that Signal columnist, Mimi, was forced to dub the 1977 effort as the "Plop Plop Parade," because the only sound that could be heard was the dropping of round apples by horses as they plodded along the route. A year or so later, poor Prop. 13 was blamed for the kids not suiting up and marching — it simply was not in the budget.

Traditionally, however, Hart and Placerita have teamed up to march in some array or other. Usually, they are not uniformed but they always sound good, especially when Larry Thornton, the venerable Hart bandmaster, puts that famous wide smile on his face and marches proud down San Fernando

Road leading his latest kids in the Stars and Stripes Forever.

Until recently, gambling always found its way into the melée. It got out of hand one year when some of our more illustrious citizens set up a high stakes poker game next to the low stakes bingo game at Saxon Park. Money passed hands furiously. That is, the money of the outlanders passed into the hands of our cardsharks, in such huge sums that the floeced complained to out of town newspapers. They raised such a ruckus that bingo disappeared.

Then there was Dale Taylor who became the hero of at least three of his girl friends with whom he shared his winnings in 1956. One of the carnival games boasted huge panda bears as

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prizes. All one had to do was to throw a dime so that it landed and stayed in one of the glass plates affixed to the heads of the bears.

No one won until Dale came along and hitched up his pants in true Newhallian fashion. He won a bear and people yelled with glee. He won another and a crowd started to gather. He quit after winning his third, much to the disap-

pointment of his followers and to the relief of the carry running the game. When asked why he had quit, the young man grumped, "I ran out of chewing gum!"

Saxonia Park! The very name brings a tear of nostalgia to any of us who have enjoyed the Fourth of July in Newhall over the last thirty or so years. Located on the north end of Quigly Canyon



Signal File Photo

The familiar "clop clop" of many horses in the 1977 parade led to it being named the "Plop plop Parade."

Road in Placerita Canyon, it was started by a downtown German Club for polka dancing and beer drinking.

Nothing could match the Fourth of July in that beautiful oak tree setting. It was not unusual for the Lions Club to feed 2,000 folks beef from a pit barbecue dug days in advance. Ten times that many cups of beer and soft drinks were sold. If one listens carefully, the strains of western music can still be heard wafting through the trees, intermingled with the shouts of happy kids running sack races and making themselves sick in the pie eating contests. It was here that high stakes (I once saw as much as \$4,000 on the table in the fifties) poker games abounded.

In the 1930s it was not uncommon for the County Supervisors to give keynote speeches. Roger Jessup said, in 1933, "Of course, you folks of Saugus and Newhall, know also of the splendid work being done in Bouquet Canyon which will bring thousands of motorists through this district to reach the west side of the Antelope Valley. Such improvements, I am sure, meet with the genuine approval of my people." Oh, if he had only known what he wrought.

Law enforcement has had its trou-

bles. As early as 1927, the Sheriff was prepared to send reinforcements to Eureka Villa if need be. He even put some of them up at Castaic just in case they were needed. They weren't. What is now called Val Verde stayed peaceful.

However, it might have been a different story for the Cub Scouts in 1948, if it weren't for sympathetic Highway Patrol Captain Jack Miller. The Cubs found an old Model T rusting in a field. They pulled it to one of their member's backyards and got it running just in time for the parade. The problem was that it had no license tags and no one had thought to buy them.

They knew that the car couldn't be driven on the street without tags but the kids didn't have enough money. Captain Miller, hearing of their plight, let the word out that he was sorry but his men would be "too busy up on 99 catching speeders to 'help' patrol the parade." The kids breathed a sigh of relief and rode in their Model T. For new comers to the Santa Clarita Valley, old Highway 99 was later replaced by Interstate 5, the Golden State Freeway.

Although the first "official" parade was in 1932, there have been years

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Signal File Photo

The Good Time Clowns cheered spectators in the 1972 parade.

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when there either was no parade or it was not run on the Fourth. Paradeless years were 1937 and 1938, as were the war years from 1942 through 1945. In 1973, the Fourth fell on a Wednesday but the celebration was put off to Saturday so that the Parade could compliment that year's rodeo. However, the inimitable Bobbie Trueblood, now Bobbie Davis, following what she saw as a family and community tradition, wanted a parade on the Fourth. Many agreed.

So, on Wednesday morning, about one hundred fifty folks gathered at Lyons Avenue and San Fernando Road. A palanquin magically appeared with six bearers in tow. Bobbie mounted the swaying vehicle, a couple of buglers and a drummer stepped off and the parade, without permit or traffic control, wended its way down the middle of San Fernando Road to Hart Park. There was a man marching on crutches along side of the palanquin in his World War Two officer's "pink and



Horses in the 1973 parade took a more modern stance.

Signal File Photo

green" uniform and people are still asking, even today, "Who was that good looking stranger?"

The beer keg bringing up the rear was furnished by the Canyon County Chamber of Commerce. The Newhall-Saugus-Valencia Chamber was too busy putting up the stands for one of the biggest Rodeos this Valley has ever seen, to participate in this rump version of their extravaganza, except at the end when the keg was tapped. Good natured rivalry came to a head when it was found that nobody could slake his or her thirst. The liquid in the keg turned to foam while being rolled along San Fernando Road! By the way, a few years later, Bobbie's son, Fred III, ran the parade and the celebration.

The tradition marches on. "This year's parade will be the biggest and best yet," Chairwoman Jill Klajic says. "It is fun to be part of the history of small town America and I hope that as our Valley grows, the tradition of the Fourth of July will live on."

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