



## A Trip Through Rio Vista's Past Museum Celebrates Its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

by Phil Pezzaglia

The Rio Vista Museum contains a unique collection of artifacts depicting the 153-year history of the community of Rio Vista. The exceptional collection of local treasures is housed in a spacious historic building that was the blacksmith shop of Andy Cavagnaro from 1927 to 1965 and then operated as an auto parts store. Some of the interior walls have remained as they were—two-by-fours and tin—thus providing a certain ambience, which could not have been obtained with a newer structure.

From the outside, the building may seem small. However, visitors are pleasantly surprised when they cross the threshold and see what is revealed inside.

The museum is able to balance a unique blend of artifacts ranging in size and shape from the very small to the rather large. Currently the museum walls are covered from floor to ceiling with a variety of pictures, maps, banners, flags, license plates, and signs from former local businesses. Display cases are filled with everything from small Indian arrow heads and beads to household items familiar to earlier generations, while larger cabinets feature dresses, uniforms, and other articles of clothing.

The museum has an extensive collection of clothing, including a wide variety of military uniforms, wedding dresses, Victorian-era dresses, uniforms of law enforcement personnel and fire fighters, local letterman sweaters and school uniforms, and Holy Ghost Festival Queen

dresses, to name just a few. Some of the uniforms have been placed in rather permanent displays, while the bulk of the clothing is rotated in different themed presentations.

Some of the smaller items on display include household china, toys, clothing accessories, regional Indian beads and arrowheads, cameras, and cookware. The museum's collection includes a variety of military accessories such as swords, Kaiser and Doughboy helmets, and gas masks.

Some of the larger items housed in the museum include a late-1800s Tally Ho Stage, a 1929 Seagraves fire truck (the second truck purchased by the local fire department), a 1923 Ford Model T truck, a McCormick-Deering Farmall tractor, a 1926 Caterpillar 30 tractor, a Studebaker buggy, a pony express wagon, the first Marbeet harvester, pianos and reed organs, and a Montezuma Cultivator.

The majority of the museum's displays pertain to local Rio Vista history. However, there are items on display which came from the surrounding areas of the Montezuma Hills, Birds Landing, Collinsville, and the Sacramento Delta. Most of the items on display are owned by the museum, with only a few on extended loan from local families and organizations.

However, what you see did not happen overnight. It has taken more than three decades of collecting, cataloging, and creating displays, to get to this point. Not only that, it has taken countless hours donated by the volunteers who operate the museum, as well as the support of the community.

The seeds of the museum were planted in 1958, lay dormant for fifteen years, and then began to sprout in 1975, and have continued to grow ever since.





## Olde Tyme Christmas Faire December 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>

As summer fades to autumn, it is not too early to start thinking about the Olde Tyme Christmas Faire. Nora Crane has agreed to again take the lead in making this all-important event a successful museum and community happening. (Thank you, Nora!) But she needs helpers. Please contact Nora (707-374-6191) if you can volunteer a little time or if you are interested in vendor information.

If you think you might be able to volunteer more than just a little time, Nora would love to start training someone to take over more of the responsibility for future Christmas Faires. Remember, this is YOUR museum.

As usual, we will need goodies for the always successful bake sale. We hope you will share your favorites.



## Holiday Gift Ideas



### MUSEUM OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

Phil Pezzaglia	President
Renee Tingey	Treasurer
Peter Hamilton	Recording Secretary
Gail Machado	Membership Secretary
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Jim Metcalf	Past President
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Beverly Bellows	Janet Blegen
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Marilyn Wilson	Carlos Zepeda

## Notes of Note *Museum Happenings*

- ❖ Stop by the Rio Vista branch of Bank of Stockton to enjoy the lobby display of items on loan from the museum. This is one of the ways in which the museum and local businesses can support each other. Bank of Stockton recently made a much appreciated \$500 donation to the museum.



- ❖ If you shop at Amazon.com, you can help the museum at the same time. There are a couple ways you can add AmazonSmile to your Amazon account.
  - Sign on to Amazon in the usual way and type “smile” in the search box. You will be directed to choose a charitable organization. Choose Rio Vista Museum Association.
  - Go to smile.amazon.com. The first time you visit, you will be asked to choose an organization to support.

In either case, all of your Amazon account settings remain unchanged.

- ❖ Rio Vista Third Thursdays! The museum is open 4–7 p.m. on Third Thursdays. Come downtown, support our local merchants and visit the museum. Bring the kids!
- ❖ Would you like to be more involved with the museum? We are looking for volunteers to “sit” at the museum when we are open on Saturday and Sunday. Let us know if you are interested in being trained for this activity. Have fun talking with visitors. If you would prefer volunteering for other jobs at the museum, there are many areas of need. Talk to any board member.
- ❖ The museum will be open on Veterans Day, Wednesday, November 11. After the ceremony remembering and honoring our Veterans, why not stop in at the museum? It would be the perfect time to explore our collection of military uniforms and remember the local men and women who wore them.



It was in 1975 that people across the United States began to think about how their communities could participate in the nation's upcoming 1976 Bicentennial celebration. That year a group of seventeen local citizens gathered together and formed the Rio Vista Museum Association. After much discussion it was the consensus of the group that the purpose of the association would be to collect, safeguard, and publicly display documents, photographs, and objects of historical significance to the city of Rio Vista. It was felt that the time was right to open a local museum, to coincide with the country's 1976 Bicentennial.

Once the news of the association got around town, members of the community began contributing a variety of historical artifacts. Little by little, the walls began to be covered with images of pioneers, houses, businesses, and steamships from Rio Vista's past.

Most of the items which were brought in were easily identified. However, there were a few that were not as easily identified, and in some cases the museum did not know what to do with some of the items. During those early years Krug Dunbar, a local resident, was the curator at the museum. If an object had a label, Dunbar would often write to the manufacturer—if it still existed and if he could find contact information for it—to inquire about the history of an item. Times have changed, and the internet has made it much easier and faster to date and acquire information about an item. You still need the name of the manufacturer and an idea of what the item is, but the almost immediate response time from internet resources greatly accelerates the process.

Luckily for the museum association, the historic blacksmith building on Front Street was empty. Most recently the building had been used as an auto parts store. The committee looked the building over and unanimously felt that it would meet their needs—it was a historic building, it was more than large enough to accommodate the artifacts which had been arriving, and it was in a central location.

The museum opened its doors for the first time during the Bass Derby in October 1975, staffed by a group of enthusiastic volunteers. The unique collection was spread throughout the building, with ample space available. The support that weekend was overwhelming, and from that time forth the museum has continued to grow.

As the collection expanded, so did the need for space. There have been two additions to the original building. The first phase of expansion was



*The display of Rio Vista High School letterman sweaters and team photos is one of the favorites of Museum visitors. Did you (or your dad) play on one of those teams? Come check it out.*

the rear display room, reading room, and upstairs archives, and the second expansion created the side farm room.

Throughout the years, since the opening of the museum, the members and former members of this community have helped the museum become what it is today. The Rio Vista Museum Association is a private tax-exempt 501(c) (3) corporation led by a board of directors elected annually by the membership. The museum receives its financial support entirely from memberships, memorials, donations and fund-raisers such as the annual Hamburger Feed, Olde Tyme Christmas Faire, and various open houses. Your membership will help in the continued preservation and exhibition of the distinctive history of this lively community.

The museum is open Saturdays and Sundays, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Tours are available by appointment, please call 707-374-5169. For additional information, visit the museum website at: [riovistamuseum.com](http://riovistamuseum.com)

The museum will be open extended hours during the Bass Derby: Friday 6 pm – 9 pm; Saturday 10 am – 9 pm; Sunday 11 am – 5 pm



*The museum's collection of farm tools, tractors, cultivators, harvesters, and wagons fascinates many visitors.*

## Remembering Humphrey the Whale

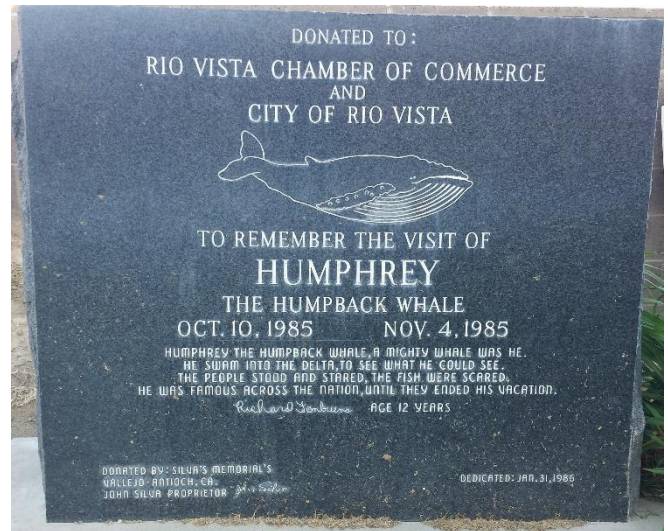
If you lived in Rio Vista in October 1985, you undoubtedly remember the unlikely visit of a humpback whale to the quiet waters of the Delta. Whether you were enthralled with the giant mammal's presence or simply annoyed by the crowds, you could not escape Humphreymania.

The story is well known. In early 1985, a 40-foot humpback whale swam into San Francisco Bay and then proceeded to swim up the Sacramento River. It continued under the Rio Vista Bridge and ended up "stuck" at Shag Slough. As numerous scientists and others tried by many inventive methods to herd the whale back down the river toward the ocean, it ended up stranded near Rio Vista for weeks. Tourists came to catch a glimpse of the whale, and local entrepreneurs sold numerous Humphrey mementos including pins, mugs, and T-shirts.

The initial efforts failed, however, and it was obvious to biologists that the prolonged stay in fresh water was causing serious physical distress to the animal. Humphrey was finally lured back down the river with recorded whale sounds and songs.

Humphrey became stuck in San Francisco Bay for a short time again in 1990. And two other whales, a mother and daughter pair named Delta and Dawn, swam up the Sacramento River past Rio Vista in 2007.

Humphrey's legacy lives on as he became the mascot of D. H. White Elementary. Rio Vision and *The Beacon* have teamed up to publish several Humphrey-themed activities for children during this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Rio Vision will also host Humphrey activities during the Bass Derby, October, 9, 10, and 11.



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