



# F R E S N O P A S T & P R E S E N T

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## Museums of Fresno County

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We are all in some way drawn to our past. The interest often takes twists and turns to the unusual, the celebrated, and the everyday. Our national public television has become a part of this fascination through its series on life in homesteads, in nineteenth-century England, and its series *The History Detective*.

Since the explorers first came into the Valley less than 300 years ago, our own area history is young by comparison to other parts of California and the United States. We have many opportunities to collect items from the past that reflect the social, cultural, economic, and business aspects of life here in Fresno County before they disappear.

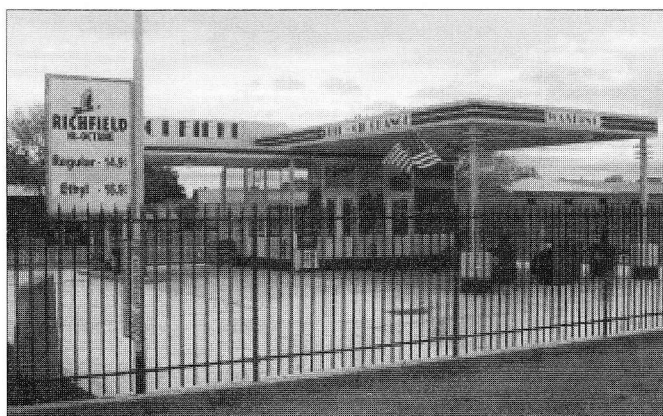
This article is an exploration of the museum collections around Fresno County and the work of dedicated volunteers to ensure that future generations know about the richness of our past. Twenty-five museum and archive establishments have been identified. Most currently have a regular schedule

of open hours for public viewing of their collections. Three are not currently open regular hours, but plans for their eventual opening are noted. One is under development with its first building to be completed in the fall of 2006. The historic life of the county also is represented in museums and archives outside today's Fresno County; however, this exploration is about those within its borders.

This tour begins with the homes of historically significant people followed by community, regional, and ethnic museums and archives. The concluding section highlights

regional museums and archives with a broad scope. The importance of collections in archives was sufficient reason for including them in this overview.

*The research for this article was gathered between June 2004 and July 2005. All photographs are by the author.*



*Restored 1934 gas station at the Baker Museum in Coalinga.*

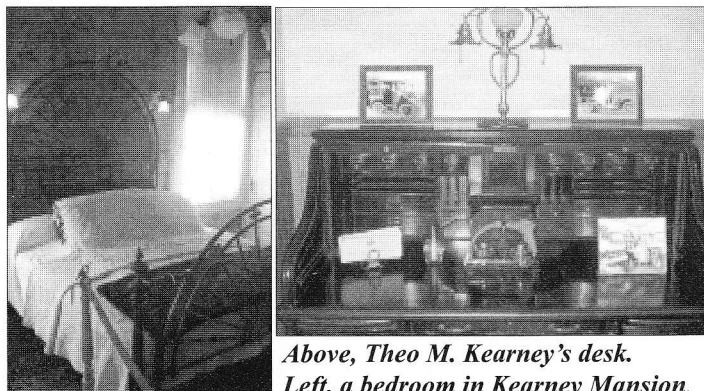
*On page 11: "Remembering Robert M. Wash"*

## THE HOME AS A MUSEUM

### Kearney Mansion (Kearney Park, Kearney Boulevard near Grantland Avenue)

The home of developer M. Theo Kearney was originally constructed as the residence for Kearney's ranch manager. It is now dedicated to the presentation of Kearney's daily life and his business and development interests.

Kearney purchased 7,000 acres east of town in 1883. By 1892, the grading and planting of Kearney Avenue were completed. The plans for the "Fruit Vale Estate" included several buildings including a chateau. The chateau was never built, and Kearney used the residence, now Kearney Mansion, as his home and office. The mansion sits in Kearney Park, a wonderfully landscaped park designed by Rudolph Ulrich.



*Above, Theo M. Kearney's desk.  
Left, a bedroom in Kearney Mansion.*

The mansion has been restored to its original beauty. Except at Christmas time, the mansion can be seen decorated as it was in Kearney's time. Period wall coverings and many of the original light fixtures adorn the rooms. The office is as Kearney left it. The bedrooms are decorated in period furnishings, with notable exceptions in Kearney's bedroom where you will find his original bed, lounge, and writing desk.

Adjacent to the mansion, the carriage house has been restored and is used as a classroom for teaching children about life at the end of the nineteenth century.

In addition to the museum, the Fresno City and County Historical Society has its archives located in the servants' quarters behind the house. In the adaptation of this space to modern uses, the character and appointments of the building have been retained. These resources are rich in local history, including photographic collections, diaries, and manuscripts.

### The Meux Home Museum (corner of Tulare and R streets, downtown Fresno)

The museum recaptures the flavor of Victorian Fresno by presenting a middle-class residence, the home of Dr. Thomas Richard Meux.

Dr. Meux came to Fresno from Tennessee in late 1887.

The property at the corner of Tulare and R streets was purchased from the County of Fresno for his home in March 1888, and the family moved in during January 1889.

The house was occupied by the family for eighty-one years, concluding with the death of his daughter, Anne, in 1970. During the early 1970s, the home was purchased by the City of Fresno, restored, and the museum developed. The interior has been redecorated in the Victorian style, in vogue when Dr. Meux raised his family and practiced medicine. Artifacts in the home are of the late Victorian period. On display are furniture, clothing, and other items belonging to Dr. Meux and his family. Since the museum's collections include some 5,762 items, displays of clothing and table settings are rotated. Among the collections from the Meux family are Dr. Meux's Civil War uniform, clothing, office equipment, rocking chairs, and wedding costumes from three generations of the family.

A costumed docent conducts one-hour tours of the museum. The museum is operated under contract with the City of Fresno.

## COMMUNITY MUSEUMS

### Sanger Depot Museum (Seventh Street between the Library and City Hall)

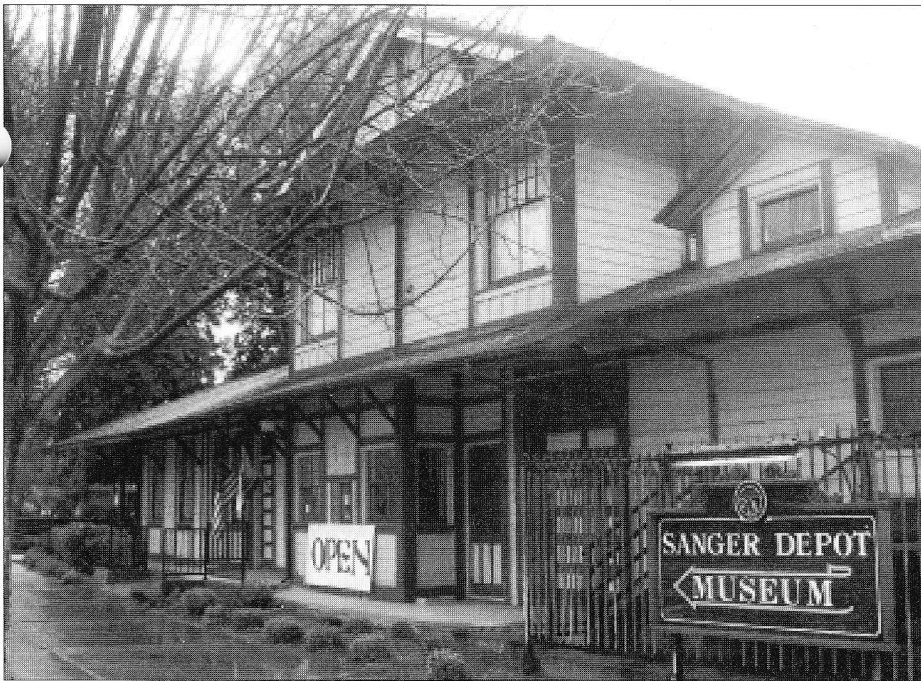
Operated by the Sanger Historical Society, this museum, which opened in December 1977, sits on property owned by the Sanger Unified School District. The building and artifacts are owned by the society. A knowledgeable staff of volunteers operates the museum, keeping regular hours.

The building is the former Sanger railroad depot, once the center of the town's development. Built in 1887, the Sanger depot sat beside the Southern Pacific Railroad line that ran between Fresno and Porterville. Among the cargo that passed through this depot were grain, citrus, and lumber brought down from the Sierra by Sanger's lumber business.

Before destruction of this historic resource could occur, Jack Tanney and his brother purchased the depot and donated it to the Sanger Historical Society.

Currently on display, one may see a main street scene of the Brehler block, first post office, the general merchandise store, the Sanger Dutch Bakery, the Sanger Herald, and a replica of the porch and living room of the Victorian home that once stood at 521 I Street. Also on display in the Pioneer Room area are photographs of pioneer families, along with feature displays that rotate annually. In the Indian Room is a display of the society's portion of the Oscar Brehler Collection of Indian baskets including eighty-two items. (See also the Discovery Center.)

Another portion of the museum is dedicated to a di-



*The Southern Pacific depot, the oldest building in Sanger, was moved to its present location in 1977.*

orama of the flume and lumber operations that operated from the 1890s to 1920. The flume extended from Millwood in the Sierra to the Kings River Lumber Company just east of the railroad tracks on Eleventh Street in Sanger.

#### **Central Sierra Historical Society Museum (under development on a site in the community of Shaver Lake)**

The Central Sierra Historical Society has as its major goal to establish and operate a high quality museum at Shaver Lake devoted to the rich history of the Central Sierra Nevada. Proposed for the museum are major exhibits encompassing early Indian culture, early settlers, grazing, logging, hydroelectric development, water resources, natural history, and recreation.

The museum as planned will include three galleries: Foothill, Forest, and Alpine. It is anticipated to be an educational resource for children that will convey respect for Native American culture, an understanding of geology, natural history, engineering, agriculture, forest management, wildlife management, and the use of public lands for recreational purposes, and the preservation of the mountain environment for future generations.

The Central Sierra Historical Society conducts educational programs, is raising funds to build the museum, and is working to restore San Joaquin & Eastern caboose #50 on the museum property, which has been set aside for the museum by the Southern California Edison Company. Groundbreaking for a small building took place in the fall of 2005 with construction to be completed by fall 2006.

#### **Clovis Dry Creek Historical Society Museum (downtown at Pollasky Avenue and Fourth Street)**

The building that houses the museum was built in 1912 and served as the first bank in Clovis. The 1924 bank robbery which was the subject of a story in "True Detective" magazine in 1937 took place here. In the daylight bank robbery Thomas Griffin and his partner stole \$31,800. You can still walk into the original bank vault from which the money was taken.

During the Great Depression, the bank closed its doors to the public and sat empty for many years. Later it was used as the Fresno County Courthouse for the Clovis area. In 1981, when the Clovis Municipal Court began using the new building in the Civic Center, the city took

ownership. The Clovis Big Dry Creek Historical Society began using the building in 1987 as a museum. More recently, an expansion into what was the old police station was completed.



*The vault area in the Clovis museum.*



The museum features personal items of Clovis Cole and 185 family histories. It has a photographic collection that includes many Clovis High School graduation photos from as early as 1910. The collections include class yearbooks, Indian artifacts, and displays of historic items donated by local families including clothing.

One recent addition is the veterans' room which includes uniforms from various branches of service from World War II. The museum also houses the materials that are a part of the traveling history for third graders.

### **Kingsburg Historical Park**

#### **(just past the high school on Sierra Street)**

Operated by the Kingsburg Historical Society, the grounds and buildings are owned by the city of Kingsburg. The artifacts owned by the society are on display in the thirteen buildings on the site. As you approach the entrance, you



*A room in the Olson home which once stood on Earl Street in Kingsburg.*

will pass four restored covered wagons donated by Mrs. Al Marshall. The wagons are typical of those used by early settlers coming to California. The main entry to the park is the Clay School building. The Clay School building and restrooms were moved to the site in 1975. One room is maintained as a typical early-day classroom. Among the items housed in the school building are a picture collection, early-day articles of clothing, household items, musical instruments, military uniforms, and business machines.

After enjoying the exhibits in the school, you can tour the buildings on the grounds including the Olson/Ball House which once stood at 1400 Earl Street. Peter Olson built the house in 1908 for his family, and the society has restored the

interior to that typical of when the Olsons resided there.

Following a tour of the house you will find Jack Tapp's farm tank house, a building housing offices of physician Ewald Larson, the dental office of Conrad Kolander, and the pharmacy from Gordon Satterberg's Model Drug Store. The next buildings in the park are the barbecue/picnic shelter and the William Moore barn, which was dismantled to be moved and rebuilt in the park. Along the way are a number of early farm implements, and just beyond the barn is a Harris Combine, a grain harvester donated by Don Jackson and used on the South Lake Farms property in the Tulare Lake basin southwest of Kingsburg. This type of combine was typically pulled by forty animals, usually mules or horses.

Next on the tour is the Heritage building, housing several large items including old wagons, buggies, and a truck. This building is followed by an early-day gas station. Several vintage tractors and other farm equipment are housed in the Tractor Shed and in the Olson Brothers display building. At one end of this building is a room dedicated to Ray Olson's collectibles, which include a large bottle collection and a number of miniature replicas of some of the Olson Brothers Manufacturing Company's farm equipment.

A typical firehouse with two vintage fire engines and one ambulance is the next building, followed, after the rest-rooms, by the Rieffel Grocery Store. This building was built to house the furnishings from the original Kings Grocery owned by the Rieffels and located on the southwest corner of Marion and Draper streets.

The last building in the park you will see before returning to the school is the Hall of Fame building that includes memorabilia related to Kingsburg residents who have

achieved national/international recognition. Among them are Harry Aslan, a Lion's International president; Rafer Johnson, Olympic athlete; and Weston Anderson, who was a part of a team that won a Nobel Prize in chemistry.

### **Selma Pioneer Village (on Art Gonzales Parkway north of the Floral Avenue exit off Highway 99)**

Pioneer Village was first opened on July 4, 1980, as a part of the Selma Centennial. The grounds and buildings were owned by the City of Selma with initial operation under the auspices of the Selma Historical Society. In 1996, the village was closed. It is now operated and owned by the City of Selma and is open to the public only for scheduled events.

The village includes a number of buildings from Selma's



past including the Unger Opera House, the Saint Ausgars Lutheran Church, an old school music building that last served at Roosevelt School, and the Selma Southern Pacific depot. A number of artifacts are in storage. Among these are various transportation items including buggies and a sleigh, farm implements, and household goods and furnishings.



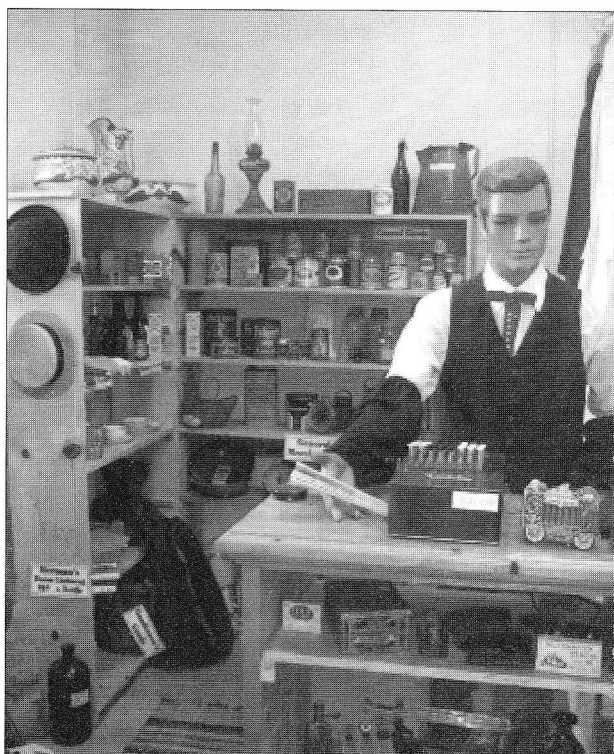
*Street light with clock at Pioneer Village in Selma.*

A new advisory commission has been established by the city to assist with future development and preservation of the resources in Pioneer Village.

### **Reedley Historical Society Museum (on Tenth Street next to the Reedley Opera House)**

Housed in the old city hall and firehouse, the museum opened in October 1979. The city hall building was constructed in 1917 and was later added to, to provide for the fire department. An addition to the building was completed in 1994 to provide two rooms for display space, an expanded workshop, and a second floor area within the building for storage.

The museum is operated by volunteers of the Reedley Historical Society. Some of the exhibits rotate to display vari-



*An exhibit in the Reedley Historical Society Museum.*

ous aspects of the collections. On display in the Native American room are baskets of the Wetchikit Indians, a subgroup of Yokuts, from the collections of Oscar Noren and the Casper Jensen family, along with dioramas of typical Indian villages and life along the Kings River.

One room is dedicated to the ethnic and cultural groups in Reedley with rotating exhibits. On display through 2006 is an exhibit of Korean cultural traditions.

Equipment in the old firehouse includes an ice wagon, hand-drawn fire equipment, a two-seat buggy, and a lumber wagon owned by T. L. Reed, the city's founder. In this section of the museum are sets of the Nelson Photographic Studio and the office of Dr. Hare. There is a separate display of vintage cameras, key historical events panels, a mining shack typical of those found in the Sierra, and a display of fruit labels.

In the Turn of the Century Room (nineteenth to twentieth) are displays of a typical general store, school classroom, and home kitchen; World War I exhibits; office equipment; an elaborately hand carved "cathedral" clock; and new interactive exhibits for children.

### **Eastern Fresno County Historical Society Museum (on Tollhouse Road just beyond Sierra High School near the Senior Center)**

The museum is on the grounds of the Sierra High School. There are two exhibit buildings on the property. The main collection is in the former Wish-I-Ah school house. The old Burroughs Valley Store and Post Office is also on the property. This building was constructed in 1875 and was in operation until the late 1940s. It was reassembled on the site and houses the original store counter, post office divider and other artifacts related to the commercial uses.

This site was created to share the area's local history. The site features a San Joaquin & Eastern caboose, farm implements and an Indian shelter. Under construction are a restroom, a polebarn and a gas station.

The collections include chairs from SJ&E excursion cars, clothing, artifacts of home and business life, area school yearbooks, and photographs assembled by Bud Olson. Photographs in the collection are from pioneer families, photo albums found in attics, Pacific Gas and Electric and Edison company archives, valley historical societies' files, glass plates found in barns and at antique sales, and newspaper files. Many of the pictures are available on the Internet and are sorted by category, such as Elementary Schools, Sierra High School, Auberry and Prather area, and Tollhouse area.

**Huntington Lake/Big Creek Historical  
Conservancy — Billy Creek Museum  
(on Huntington Lake Road  
on the northwest side of the lake)**

The restored Billy Creek Museum opened to the public on July 20, 2001. It is operated by volunteers of the Huntington Lake Big Creek Historical Conservancy. According to its website, the conservancy was established "to educate the general public on the natural, Native American and socioeconomic history and hydroelectric contributions of the Huntington Lake and Big Creek communities; to restore, maintain and protect natural resources through education, provide public interpretive facilities along with maintaining other historically significant buildings and sites; and to preserve the tradition of the Huntington Lake and Big Creek Hydroelectric System." More than 15,000 visitors have benefited from educational programs presented by volunteers.

**Auberry Branch Library Special Collection  
(on Auberry Road just before the county  
maintenance yard on the opposite side of the road)**

Housed in a special room here since 1988 is a collection of over 500 books, manuscripts, tapes, and photographs pertaining to the Mono, Miwok, and Yokuts tribes. Information available in this collection is in only two other locations, the North Fork Branch of the Madera County Library and the California State University, Fresno Library. Known as the California Indian Library Collection, it was created from archives at the University of California at Berkeley. The collection includes items related to the local Indian tribes and is placed so that native and non-native members of the communities may have convenient access to their history.

Thirteen different archives on the Berkeley campus yielded such gems as wax cylinder recordings from the late nineteenth century, anthropologists' field notes, and historical photographs. The material was reviewed by a committee of local tribal elders for suitability before it was made available to the public. One particularly important element is the tapes which have allowed many young people to listen to their ancestors for the first time.

**Millerton Courthouse  
(in Millerton Park near Friant Dam)**

The courthouse is located on state property within the Millerton Lake State Recreation Area. The history begins with Camp Barbour, now beneath Millerton Lake, established in 1850. The tent city named Rootville, later Millerton, became a prosperous town. The town was the Fresno County seat from 1856 to 1874, with its courthouse completed in 1867. In 1941 the courthouse was dismantled and reconstructed at Mariner's Point to escape the rising water of Millerton Lake,

created by Friant Dam. The courthouse has been restored to look much as it did when it served as an active part of the nineteenth-century judicial system for Fresno County. In addition to furnishings, pictures of animals of the Millerton area are on display.

As of this writing, the courthouse is open only for group events. A search is underway for a pool of volunteers to keep it open regular hours.

**Baker Memorial Museum, Coalinga (on the corner  
of Elm/Highway 33 and Seventh streets)**

The museum is dedicated to preserving the history of the Coalinga area, and began in 1956 in the Polk Street Elementary School through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. E. Baker. In 1961 the current location at 297 West Elm Street was donated for the museum. Two neighboring buildings were added in the 1980s and through volunteer efforts the buildings were con-



*One of the Studebaker buggies at the Baker  
Memorial Museum in Coalinga.*

nected internally so that all exhibits can be viewed through one outside public entrance. The area is rich in human and geologic history. The museum has traced the history of Coalinga delving back hundreds of millions of years as indicated by the collection of fossils retrieved from locations in the area.

The importance of oil to the development and life of the area is demonstrated through a large collection of oil field equipment known as the Baker Collection. Other exhibits include tack rooms, two Studebaker buggies, several vintage vehicles including a 1924 grocery truck, a 1938 Oldsmobile, a '28 Buick sedan, and a '28 Model A Ford, on display in the museum, but owned by others in the community. There is a "war" room with memorabilia from community members who served in past wars. One interesting display is the complete set of military patches from World War II and items from the "mother post" of the American Legion (Post #2).

Other elements of the museum are a picture collection, dioramas of typical interiors from homes and businesses in Coalinga, the A. S. Fisher collection, and the Charles Davenport collection, consisting mainly of shoes of famous people in the United States.

The most recent addition to the museum is a restored gas station circa 1934 located on Elm Street on the same block just north of the museum buildings. The station originally was located at the corner of Fifth and Glenn streets.

There have been four curators since 1956. Helen Cowan, a member of one of the pioneer Coalinga families, is the present curator.

## **ETHNIC MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES**

### **American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (on West Avenue just north of Shields in Fresno)**

The museum, staffed by volunteers, houses artifacts and records concerning the families who emigrated to the United States from Russia. The building is an old fire station that was purchased from the City of Fresno when it was declared surplus. Holdings include costumes, household implements, tools, church records, children's games, and pictures donated by families including those of important businesses owned by members of this community in Fresno.

One business shown in the collection is the Whitney Brewery which produced beer from its building on Hamilton Avenue. The displays rotate to present various items in the collection. There is a library of maps and books, among which are family histories and Russian and Russian-German history. The museum is one of only two repositories of the genealogical records of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, a file of over 150,000 cards. (The other one is in Lincoln, Nebraska.) One of the interesting aspects of the collection is a map of old German Town in Fresno with an index to where each family lived.

### **African American History Museum (in downtown Fresno on Fulton Street just south of Divisadero)**

This museum takes as its starting point an exhibit at the Big Fresno Fair created by Jack Kelly in 1983 on the history of African American contributions to Fresno related to the city's centennial. Mr. Kelly's tireless efforts to continue the exhibit and provide for its permanent home led to the creation of the African American Historical and Cultural Museum in 1994. An agreement between the City and County of Fresno provided for the use of an old bank building on Fulton Street in downtown Fresno. The vision is for the museum to be not simply a place to preserve the history of the African

American contribution to Fresno and the Valley, and to educate and promote this contribution, but to be a gathering place for the whole community.

The first floor supports rotating art exhibits with the works of such artists as Marcos Dorado and the photographic work of area photographers, and there is a gift shop. The second floor displays the historic photographic collection arranged by category including education, business, law enforcement, religion, music clubs and organizations, and sports. There is a special area dedicated to prominent families in agriculture.

Also on the second floor is the State Center Community College District Wall of Honor which recognizes up to three persons each year who have excelled following their education at the colleges of the district. The Links organization history is also recognized along with a children's library of books with African American history and biography, African culture, and books by African American authors. Of special interest in the library is the mural produced by five artists depicting the passage of the peoples from Africa to America.

The permanent collections include regional historical photographs, African artifacts, and an historic wagon located in the park that is used for outdoor events. While the museum was open with regular public hours for many years, it is currently open by appointment only.

### **Danish American Historical Society (in downtown Fresno on R Street just south of Tulare Street)**

Artifacts from Fresno's Danish immigrants make up this small museum. Photographs and memorabilia highlight the community's history. The collections include a number of items of clothing donated by local families. Current displays are rotated. There are examples of Danish costumes showing the regional variations found in historic Denmark.

A library of 1,400 to 1,500 Danish books and a number of Danish church records from the early history of Fresno are in the collection. Information about the families found in the church records is being organized by volunteers to improve accessibility. This is an important genealogical resource.

The museum has a gift shop with a variety of items made in Denmark.

### **Arte Américas (in downtown Fresno on Van Ness Avenue across from Channel 18 studios)**

The gallery's website notes that "Arte Américas was founded in 1987 by artists and teachers to 'make the Central Valley a flourishing place for Latino arts.'" Arte Américas is a center for the exhibition of the visual arts. The reference to the center, in the Mexican tradition, as a "house of culture, *una casa de cultura*," is most apt.

A more recent addition to the center's facilities is an



outdoor plaza which showcases the performing arts from May 5 through November 1.

Arte Américas is a celebration of arts in Mexico, Latin America, the Southwest, and California. For this reason the center received two collections. The first is a collection of folk art of the Oaxaca region of Mexico. The second consists of fifty photos, taken in black and white in the 1950s and 1960s, of ancient architecture of Mexico.

The center has three gallery spaces, two folk art gift stores, a children's room, a library, and educational classrooms on the second floor. It has a small permanent collection and has no plans to expand it. It does work to bring the exhibits of the arts of Mexico, Latin America, and the Southwest to the Fresno area, and to develop and support the region's artists.

### **California Mennonite Historical Society Archives (in Fresno near the corner of Butler and Chestnut avenues)**

Housed in the Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific University, this collection of Mennonite history includes the special collection of the Hiebert Library totaling 18,300 volumes. The collections include materials by and about Mennonites. The archive is one of four for the Mennonite Brethren Conference of North America. The more than 800 linear feet of materials housed in the collection cover the western region with California as the largest of the group. A number of records are specific to Fresno County, which has a large Mennonite population.

Of particular interest to historians are the collections of personal papers of prominent historical figures including Julius Siemens of Fresno County, a land promoter in the region, and the historical records and photographs of Mennonite churches in the county.

### **Fresno City College Museum of Anthropology**

Located in the social sciences building on the city college main campus, this museum is open during the academic year, staffed by student volunteers. Hours of opening vary from year to year. The museum serves the education needs of the college as well as elementary school students who regularly tour the collections in support of the history curriculum. First is the Native American basketry including the Hill Collection of Mono baskets made by the Hill family of Mono Indians. Another large collection is composed of items collected by the city college faculty, most notably Don Wren, who founded the museum. The majority of these items are native material from the Central Valley area. There are also African and other non-California items.

One exhibit of interest is a reproduction of an Aztec codex entitled: *Tira de la Peregrinacion: An Aztec Odyssey*.

The codex was produced on amate paper. The codex and the interpretative material were researched by city college students. The paper was handmade by them as well.

During 2005 and 2006, the curatorial facility is being remodeled and all collections are located in the main museum space. During the remodeling, the museum will be an active archaeology lab and visitors will be able to see students and faculty performing maintenance and restoration activities.

## **COUNTY-WIDE, SPECIALTY MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES**

### **Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art History Science (in downtown Fresno on Van Ness across from Channel 18 Studios)**

Civic leaders began their exploration to create a regional museum in 1978. Through fund-raising and with a building, the historic downtown site of the Fresno Bee, the museum opened its doors to the community on April 4, 1984.

The permanent collections of the Met contain more than 3,000 works of art and artifacts drawn from many cultures across a period of more than 400 years. They include:

The Oscar and Maria Salzer Collection of European and American Painting of over sixty *trompe-l'oeil* and still-life paintings from the sixteenth to the twentieth century; thirty-six large botanical watercolors by painter-illustrator Abigail Lyman; and nineteenth- and twentieth-century California landscape paintings.

The Charles and Sharon Small Puzzle Collection, spanning the entire history of puzzles, has over 1,200 American and European jigsaw puzzles with one puzzle being an early work by London cartographer and puzzle originator, Lord John Spilsbury.

The Ansel Adams Photo Collection is composed of landscape photographs of Yosemite and the Great Valley and several vintage photos of early California. In excess of fifty photographs of the Manzanar camps at Owens Valley, where Japanese Americans were interred during World War II, are found in the collection.

A Decorative Arts, Crafts, and Textiles Collection made up of baskets and cradleboards from Native American groups of the Central Valley of California; an Asian fine arts collection including more than 200 Chinese snuff bottles from the seventeenth to the twentieth century; and a variety of decorative arts from many other cultures round out the museum holdings.

Of particular importance to Fresno's own past is the exhibit celebrating Fresno's William Saroyan. Since 1991, writer William Saroyan's legacy has been a component of the mu-

seum as a result of a grant from the William Saroyan Foundation. Among the items are vintage photographs, Saroyan's typewriter, his Academy Award for his screenplay *The Human Comedy*, and the writer's bicycle.

**Fresno Art Museum (in Fresno just south of Clinton Avenue on First Street)**

This regional arts center was founded in 1948, and has grown to be a significant museum of contemporary and modern art. The museum began with a group of local artists, the Fresno Art League, to critique and exhibit their artwork. In 1958 the interest resulted in a building on Fresno city property at Radio Park to exhibit and study art.

According to the museum's website, "the Fresno Art Museum collects, preserves, and exhibits tangible objects valuable to art and history. Exhibitions include a wide range of contemporary as well as modern works by local, national and international artists." The collection emphasizes American sculpture, works on paper, art of California, and Mexican art from pre-Columbian times to the present.

Four thousand items are in the permanent collection of which a large number are Mexican art from pre-Columbian times to the present. Local artists, including Bill Minchew and Jean Ray Laury, are represented in the collection. There is also a planned bequest of significant collections of pre-Columbian ceramics and French post-Impressionist graphics.

The museum is working to serve as both an educational facility and a repository for important collections from the Central Valley.

**Legion of Valor Museum  
(in downtown Fresno on Fresno Street across from the historic water tower)**

The museum, opened in 1991, is housed in the historic Fresno Memorial Auditorium owned by the City of Fresno. Staffed by volunteers and with the support of the City of Fresno, the museum has thousands of items such as framed citations, photographs, uniforms, and equipment of different eras. Exhibits narrate America's wars through those who served as soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Included among the exhibits are displays of ships, firearms, uniforms, and other interpretative material. Most of the exhibits are composed of items donated by local residents who served in defense of our country. There is a small library with published material related to the wars and campaigns of the United States.

Of particular significance is the interpretative material related to the Legion of Valor and the military honors which make up the Legion. According to its website, the Legion of Valor was organized on April 23, 1890, in Washington, D.C., by a group of Civil War and Indian War Campaign veterans who were recipients of the Medal of Honor. The Legion of

Valor includes those who have received the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, and the Air Force Cross. The museum in Fresno serves as the national headquarters for the Legion of Valor of the USA, Inc.

**The Discovery Center (in Fresno on Winery Avenue just north of McKinley Avenue)**

The Discovery Center is located in east central Fresno on 5.5 to 6 acres of park land leased from the City of Fresno, with an office and gift shop in a 1924 bungalow on 1.4 acres across the street. The center emphasizes the joy of learning about nature, science, regional history, and the world around us. It accomplishes this through exhibits, activities, and events for children, families, and adults. The Discovery Center provides interactive programs to bring science alive. The exhibits of the center are Walden Pond, Mystery Maze, Worm Farm, the Deutsch Cactus Garden, a 1960s vintage fire engine, and the Roessler Winery building. The main exhibit hall is not currently open. A fire in the building caused significant damage and fund-raising is underway to restore exhibit space to the center.

The center's holdings include one half of the Oscar Brehler Collection of Indian baskets. (See also the Sanger Museum.) The baskets are in storage and are on periodic display at the center and other venues.

The Deutsch Cactus Garden was moved to the center in 1995. This collection of over 250 species of cactus and succulents was originally located in Old Fig Garden. It was developed by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Deutsch behind their home.

The Roessler Winery building was constructed in 1893. It was the primary building used by the winery, which operated continuously into the 1940s. It is one of the wineries in



*In the Legion of Valor Museum in Fresno Memorial Auditorium.*

California that produced sacramental wine and thus remained in operation during Prohibition. Plans call for retrofitting the building for use as an exhibit hall.

### **The Central Valley Political Archive (in Fresno near Shaw and Barton avenues)**

According to its website, "The Central Valley Political Archive was established to document twentieth-century political life in the San Joaquin Valley (Bakersfield to Sacramento) and to record its impact on society by collecting the personal papers of state legislators and United States congressmen from California representing the region." It is a part of the Henry Madden Library on the campus of California State University, Fresno.

The archive is nonpartisan, representing all political parties and persuasions, but focuses on the uniquely bipartisan, cooperative nature of politics.

The types of materials found in the collection are papers of California state legislators representing the region and United States congressmen from the San Joaquin Valley, papers of public officials, campaign personnel, leaders of major and minor political parties, influential, high-profile donors and political advocates of all political persuasions, and records of local chapters of political parties and political organizations. However, one will not find official government records (federal, state, and local) in the archive.

Currently, the collection holds papers and/or oral histories, noted with the dates of the papers in parentheses, of Bernie Sisk (1955-1978), Kenneth Maddy (1970-1998, bulk 1987-1995), Charles Pashayan, Jr. (1977-1990), Jim Costa (1979-2002), Rick Lehman (1976-1994), Cal Dooley (1990-2004), John Krebs (an oral history), Walter Karabian (1965-2004, bulk 1966-1974), and George Zenovich (1963-1976).

In the near future additions will be made including the papers of Dan Whitehurst and oral history covering the career of Tony Coelho. The collection exceeds 1,000 linear feet of shelving.

This collection is in the process of being moved to the fourth floor in the Henry Madden Library and will be available by appointment only until the new library opens.

### **Fresno County Library History & Genealogy Room (in downtown Fresno just south of the historic water tower)**

The Californiana and genealogy collections of the Fresno County Library were relocated to one space in 1993. The California History and Genealogy Room is a cooperative effort of the library and the Fresno County Genealogical Society. The society's joint project with the library began in the late 1960s. The room unites the library's local and California historical collections with the extensive library of the soci-

ety. Total holdings are approximately 30,000 books and pamphlets, 5,000 microforms, 300 CD-ROMs, as well as other materials.

Of particular note is the William Saroyan collection composed of published and unpublished material including letters and research material by and about Mr. Saroyan.

It is clear that our communities are preserving area history. The museums of Fresno County are rich in resources and are worthy of the community's attention and support.

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## **About the Author**

John Kallenberg served from 1976 to 2003 as the Fresno County librarian. In this role he also was secretary to the Fresno County Historic Landmarks and Records Commission. He has been a member of the *Fresno Past & Present* editorial board since 1984. He is a past president of the California Library Association, the County Librarians' Association, and the Kiwanis Club of Fresno. He has served as lieutenant governor for Division 5 of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of Kiwanis International and as editor of the district and his club's newsletters.

John was appointed to the California Library Services Board (later the Library of California Board) by governors George Deukmejian and Pete Wilson during the years 1990 to 2003, and was board president for four of those years.

John has contributed to professional journals including the California State Library Foundation *Bulletin*. He is currently involved in church and civic organizations including serving as chairman of the William Saroyan Society.



# Remembering Robert M. Wash

*Former Fresno City and County Historical Society president and long-time valley historian and poet Robert M. Wash died September 16, 2005. This is condensed from the eulogy presented by the author, chairman of the Historical Society's editorial board, at Mr. Wash's funeral.*

**By J. Randall McFarland**

How did we know Robert M. Wash? There were, indeed, so many ways. There was the young Bob Wash, with boundless energy and determination to rise from the farm to practice law.

There was Deputy District Attorney Bob Wash, who relished his new career but eventually steered it more toward the policy side of government. There was the Bob Wash who created and defined the position of Fresno County Counsel, bringing with it the highest ethical and fairness standards to be found at any level of government but never hesitating to inject himself, and his views, into a debate or issue he deemed important.

And there was the Bob Wash who, in retirement, delighted in concluding his career in the ancient Courthouse at Mariposa as interim Mariposa County Counsel, where he won his final case.

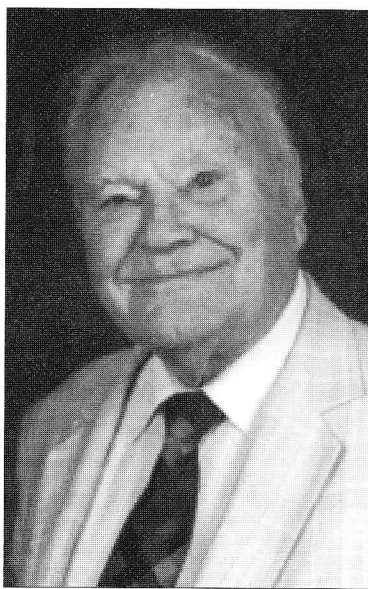
Those old and celebrated Mariposa Courthouse walls symbolized other sides of Bob Wash that many knew so well, for it could inspire Bob to share images of sheer poetry about the glories of our nation, our state, our sense of justice and our lives.

And his poetry was among the many delights he shared with us, right along with being Bob Wash, the man of principled political thought and opinion. He was a man who never missed an opportunity to join in debate, often forcefully but always with great reason, to make his views known.

The Bob Wash so many of us knew was also a man who loved California, its mountains, our valley and every inch of this County of Fresno. He savored the discovery, knowledge, discussion and preservation of our history—not only of the Golden State but its natural, native, Spanish and Mexican past and, of course, Fresno County.

Simply put, we knew him as a remarkable person, in so many ways—a man of wit, of intellect, of endless stories, of smiles, of friendship.

And within a side of his life that many of us did not often see, Bob Wash's family knew him as the most dedi-



*Bob Wash at age ninety.  
Courtesy of Cathy Rehart*

cated, responsible and loving of family men. Bob never stood taller than when he was on Missouri Hill, his Lone Star home, where he died on the afternoon of September 16 at the age of ninety-seven.

Robert Martin Wash was born May 27, 1908, southeast of Fresno near Lone Star. He graduated from Caruthers Union High School in 1926 and, after much financial struggle, from the University of California, Berkeley. He earned his law degree in 1934 at Boalt Hall, the year he began his career in law. He became a deputy district attorney in 1943 and, in 1950, was appointed as the first Fresno County Counsel, a position he held until he retired at the age of seventy.

The roses that always smelled the sweetest Bob found in the garden of history.

California and local history became his greatest avocation. Bob's deep and abiding love of Fresno County, its land, its peoples and its past took root at an early age and grew and nourished.

Bob chaired the Fresno County observances of California's bicentennial in 1969, and the United States' bicentennial in 1976. He was took an active role in the City of Fresno's centennial in 1985 and was well aware that 2006 will mark Fresno County's 150th anniversary.

Bob wrote extensively about Fresno County and valley history and headed the 1956 publication of a Fresno County centennial book. His work was included in the later book, *Fresno County in the 20th Century*. He was a tremendous scholar of history at all levels.

Bob was a member of the Fresno County and City Historical Society, the Westerners, Fresno County Historical Landmarks and Records Commission, and E Clampus Vitus. He taught classes in the valley's history, particularly from the Spanish and Mexican era, for the University of California, Santa Cruz.

In a Fresno *Bee* column in 1989, he looked back at how it began. "Perhaps it was because I had heard so many stories of those pioneer days that, as a young man, I became interested in our local history," Bob wrote. "To see, touch and aid in the preservation of those things our forebearers devised, used and cherished can be the source of a deep, warm feeling of continuity.... To discover an unsuspected link between the distant past and some person or thing familiar to us today can often give a thrill no fiction can equal."



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*Founded 1919*

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