

Marje Rump

1919 - 2008



With the passing of Marje, CCHS lost a most dedicated member. After receiving the president's award at the 2008 annual meeting, Marje talked a bit about herself:

"I was president of the Kern County Historical Society in 1982 and took the opportunity to attend the CCHS annual meeting that year and got hooked. Jack (my husband) and I attended most of the meetings after that. I think our first assignment was as parliamentarians. I finally

ended up as treasurer for 12 years. We were both on the Trust Fund Committee for many years. I think Al's (Minard) president's award was due to my current efforts to get the treasurer's books in order. I enjoyed my term as president of CCHS (2000-2002) due to a very cooperative board."

The family moved to Bakersfield in 1953. After teaching school for many years, Marje received her Master's degree in Library Science in the 1970s from the University of Southern California. She was hired by the Kern County Library system where she worked for the next 35 years.

Marje was a longtime member of the Kern County Historical Society, where she edited many local publications on early California history. She was deeply involved in the community and maintained membership in many organizations, among which were Soroptimists, Friends of the Library, First Presbyterian Church and the Assistance League.

Book



notes

Alcatraz: The Gangster Years

By David Ward with Gene Kassebaum

University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2009
548 pages, hardcover, \$34.95
ISBN 978-0-520-25607-1

Among the hundreds of books, articles and movies about the former federal penitentiary on San Francisco Bay, *Alcatraz: The Gangster Years* is almost certainly the most authoritative and historically accurate.

Author David Ward is a professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Minnesota and is a leading authority on the American penitentiary system. His interest in Alcatraz dates back to the 1950s when, as part of a research team from the University of Indiana, he was interviewing prisoners and staff at the Federal Penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana. There he met an inmate who had been at Alcatraz. The maximum-security prison was still in operation at the time, but mystery surrounded its day-to-day operation and overall disciplinary philosophy. Ward learned, over time, that this obscurity was deliberate. Bureau of Prisons regulations prohibited guards and other prison personnel from talking or writing about what went on there — with anyone. Moreover, it remained mysterious, or at least obscure, until the University of California Press published his definitive work 50 years later.

Ward's primary aim in writing *Alcatraz: The Gangster Years* was to provide a practical study of the longterm effects of super maximum custody on The Rock's inmate population, to be used by penologists and prison administrators. Because of his reputation and standing in the field, he enjoyed unprecedented access to FBI, Federal Bureau of Pris-

ons and Federal Parole Records and his research included in-depth interviews with more than 100 former convicts, guards and administrators.

The final product is much more than an examination, analysis and comment on super maximum prison custody. Fortunately for us history buffs, *Alcatraz: The Gangster Years* also provides a one-of-its-kind authoritative account of prison life on the island from 1934 to 1948 and presents a valuable historical insight into the violence, audacity and bizarre type of gangster celebrity that existed in America during the 1920s and 1930s.

The book includes photos, index, epilogue and meticulous footnotes. Every page seems to bring some new fact, explode some old falsehood or provide some fascinating insight. A letter written by convict George "Machine Gun" Kelly to his kidnap victim Charles Urschel is just one fine example:

I feel that at times you wonder how I am standing up under my penal servitude, and what is my attitude of mind? It is natural that you should be infinitely curious. Incidentally, let me say that you've missed something in not having had the experience for yourself. No letter, no amount of talk and no literary description in second rate books — and books on crime cannot but be second rate — could ever give you the faintest idea of reality.

No one can know what it's like to suffer from the sort of intellectual atrophy, the pernicious mental scurvy, that comes of long privation of all the things that make life real; because even the analogy of thirst can't possibly give you an inkling of what it's like to be tortured by the absence of everything that makes life worth living.

Maybe you have asked yourself, how can a man of even ordinary intelligence put up with this kind of life, day in, day out, week after week, month after month, year after year? To put it more mildly still, what is this life of mine like, you might wonder, and whence do I draw sufficient courage to endure it. To begin with, these five words seem written in fires on the walls of my cell: “Nothing can be worth this — the kind of life I am leading.”

What helps me to carry on? Perhaps the thought that I might be worse off. You may laugh, but it’s probably true. I might be in a worse place where there is brutality or even bestiality. I might go blind. I might even be dead.

I feel splendid and am in perfect physical trim. My one obsession is the climate of the island. I am constantly bothered with colds. My cell, made of steel and concrete, is always a trifle chilly; but I’ve even come to believe that man is so made that the presence of a small superficial irritation, provided the sensation is acute without being symptomatic of any serious trouble, is a definite aid to his mental equilibrium and serves to keep occupied the restless margin of his consciousness. He regards it too, as a sort of ring of Polycrates, for I suspect that there is in all of us, always, an obscure sense of fate, inherited from numberless ancestral misfortunes, which whispers: “We are not sent into this world to live too happily. When there’s nothing to worry us, it’s not natural, it’s a bad sign.” A little misfortune gives us the

assurance that we are paying out our “residence tax” so far as the world is concerned — not much to be sure, but enough to ensure against the jealousy and thunderbolts of heaven.

I have found the secret of how to “do” easy time. I just let myself drift along; the tide of time picks me up and carries me with it. It will leave me high and dry precisely where it chooses and when it chooses; consequently, I have nothing to worry about.

But, I must be fair. Being in prison has brought me one positive advantage. It could hardly do less. Its name is comradeship — a rough kindness of man to man; unselfishness, an absence, or a diminution, of the tendency to look ahead, at least very far ahead; a carelessness, though it is bred of despair; a clinging to life and the possible happiness it may offer at some future date.

A person in prison can’t keep from being haunted by a vision of life as it used to be, when it was real and lovely. At such times I pay, with a sense of delicious, overwhelming melancholy, my tribute to life as it once was. I don’t really believe it can ever be like that again.

Alcatraz: The Gangster Years deserves a place in the library of anyone or any institution interested in truth and scholarship regarding The Rock and the prohibition/depression era zeitgeist that created it.

**Reviewed by Webb Johnson
Past President and Board Member
Contra Costa County Historical Society**

Members’ doings & idea exchange

CONGRATULATIONS:

To **Arlene Bernholtz**, intrepid RVP of CCHS Region 25 (San Fernando Valley). In recognition of her demonstrated concern and efforts in preserving Calabasas’ local history and historic sites, she has been appointed to the **Calabasas Historical Commission**. The commission oversees the city’s designated historic landmarks, landscapes and districts.

To **West Kern Oil Museum** which has recently received the donation of a 1920 Dodge touring car from **Harry Jungi**, a long-time member. He bought the car from a junkyard in 1977 and spent the next seven years restoring it. Now completely and beautifully restored and in drivable condition, this gem is the oldest vehicle in the museum.

To **Searles Valley Historical Society**, co-host of the CCHS March Symposium. Happy 30th Birthday this year! Incidentally, we like the slogan printed on their newsletter: it’s your memories – it’s our treasures – it’s their future.

Northwestern Pacific Railroad Historical Society informs us that **California Western’s Skunk train** is running, and has a full schedule for the rest of this year. This includes trips from both Fort Bragg and Willits. Steam- and diesel-powered trains or motor cars will operate between Fort Bragg and Northspur, while Willits-Northspur trains will feature motor cars. Also, various special train events are planned for 2010. Check with www.skunktrain.com for fares and other details. Remember, we’ll be in the neighborhood when we visit Mendocino County for the October Symposium!

We hear that the 426-acre parcel of **old-growth redwoods** that are one of the famous highlights of the Skunk train ride is in danger of being cut by a logging company. What a tragedy that would be! We hope it’s not too late for you to express your opinions to santarosapubliccomment@fire.ca.ca.gov.

See **Newspaper front pages** at www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/flash/. A map of the US will appear. Choose

the city you want to investigate, click on it, and the front page of the city newspaper appears. You can then pull up the paper's regular site to see the rest of the pages. One can enlarge a location, such as Los Angeles, as it has many newspapers from which to choose. In addition to the US, one can search North America, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, Middle East, Oceania, South America and Africa. Our thanks to the **San Fernando Valley Historical Society** for this info.

Sutro Library, the San Francisco branch of the **California State Library**, in compliance with the Governor's furlough order, has adopted curtailed hours of operation. The California State Genealogical Alliance informs us that Sutro Library is now closed on all Saturdays; and from August 2009 until June 2010, it will be closed on the first, second and third Fridays of each month. Sutro Library offers the most extensive genealogy collection west of Salt Lake City: a comprehensive local history collection; Adolph Sutro's rare book and manuscript collections <www.library.ca.gov/collections/adolphsutro.html>; genealogical, family and local history catalogs; and special indexes, guides and bibliographies. Library materials can be accessed through the California State Library's Main Catalog which is found at www.lib.state.ca.us/Web2/tramp2.exe/log_in?guest&SETTING_KEY=English&screen=home.html. Items from the Sutro Library may be borrowed on interlibrary loan through local public libraries. For additional information or directions to the library, visit www.library.ca.gov/about/directionsindex.html#SF, phone 415-731-4477 or e-mail sutro@library.ca.gov.

West Antelope Valley Historical Society reprinted this delicious-sounding recipe from the California Farmer magazine of October 25, 1958:

Eunice Hilgendorf's Almond Toffee

1/2 pound butter or margarine; 1 1/2 cups beet sugar;
pinch of salt; 6 ounces sweet (or semi-sweet) chocolate;
1 cup chopped, roasted almonds

Melt butter in a heavy skillet over very low heat. Add sugar, stirring constantly (to prevent sugaring) until mixture reaches boiling point. Boil over moderate heat, stirring frequently, for about 12 minutes, to hard-crack stage (when a little dropped into cold water becomes hard and brittle) or 300 degrees F on a candy thermometer. Add 2/3 cup chopped almonds. Spread quickly into a 9 x 13 inch pan. Shave chocolate and sprinkle over top of candy. When the heat has melted chocolate, smooth with spatula. Sprinkle remaining almonds over chocolate. Allow to stand until cold. Break into bite-size pieces. Makes about 1 1/2 pounds.

National Park Service's Teaching with Historic Places Program has launched a Service Learning Page to call attention to the ways in which Teaching with Historic Places Program supports this growing trend in education. For information: www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp

Mariposa Museum & History Center reminds us that: "A community that forgets its past has no future."

Western Sonoma County Historical Society sent us this little item from the *Sonoma Democrat* of October 12, 1878: "Melvin Stoddard accidentally shot his cousin, A.C. Stoddard, with twenty-nine shot while aiming for a flock of quail while hunting near the Laguna. The wounded boy was knocked down and was struck in the face, however, none of the shot penetrated in any great depth 'except the one that struck his nose.' His most painful wound was from two other shot which passed through one of his thumbs. He walked home after he was shot and appears none the worse for the accident."

Welcome to **Mary Mast**, newly installed director of the **Folsom History Museum**. Although not a native Californian, she has been in the state — the Sacramento area — for 23 years. A teacher of world and American history on elementary and middle school levels for 18 years, she rose to vice principal before leaving teaching to become sales representative for ESL materials. In this work she covered 23 California counties. Then she went on to become a sales trainer for Macy's. Mary's broad work experience makes her uniquely qualified to carry on the work of administrator of the **Folsom Historical Society** and museum as it enters its 50th year. The society was founded in 1960.

From **Galt Area Historical Society** comes word that earlier this year the fourth plaque to indicate a historical landmark was placed on the former **Liberty Christian Church** on 5th Street in Galt (Sacramento County). The historic building is one of the few that remain of those that were moved to Galt from the town of Liberty when Galt became a railroad town in 1869 and Liberty began to die off.

Humboldt County Historical Society publishes the *Humboldt Historian*, one of the more informative and professional publications we receive from our member societies. The 8 1/2 x 11 magazine, printed on high-grade glossy paper, is protected by a 17 x 11 cover sheet. Inside of cover are a membership application form and an order form for the society's bookstore. Inside back lists the society's many publications. It's a great way to save the publication from mutilation; it is kept by many members as a permanent reference.

The **Oakland Museum of California** shut down in August. Now scheduled for reopening in May 2010 are the art and history galleries which have been closed since January 2008. The natural sciences gallery is slated to reopen in 2012.

A sky-lit central staircase, a new main entrance and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements are already finished. Digital and interactive features will be the highlights of the refurbished art and history galleries.

During closure time, there will be programs at other Oakland venues. An art wall of plywood outside the museum along 10th Street offers local artists a place to show their work.

The museum had opened in 1969. The restoration project was made possible by a bond passed in 2002 which allotted \$23 million toward a total cost of \$56 million. The remaining \$32 million is being funded by grants and private donations.