



# South Bay Historical Society Bulletin

July – August, 2022

Issue No. 38

*Brunch*

THE SOUTH BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BRUNCH WITH  
MAYOR MARY CASILLAS SALAS

WITH GUEST SPEAKER  
LOTHIAN SKELTON  
RED SKELTON'S WIFE

CHULA VISTA PUBLIC LIBRARY  
365 F ST. CHULA VISTA, CA

11:00am-1:00pm

Sunday August 21

DONATION PER PERSON  
100.00 TO BENEFIT THE SOUTH BAY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & CHULA VISTA HERITAGE MUSEUM

**KOSHER FOOD BY CHABAD OF CHULA VISTA**

*Silent Auction*

**PLEASE CALL SOUTH BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
619-422-3429  
or visit  
EVENTBRITE  
BRUNCH WITH MAYOR MARY CASILLA SALAS**

Please read more on Page 2

# You are invited to a Brunch with Mayor Mary Salas

We are so excited to have our **Brunch with Mayor Mary Salas** on **Sunday, August 21, @ 11:00 am** in the **Chula Vista Library**. Our guest speaker is **Lothian Skelton**, Red Skelton's wife. Lothian will bring the spirit of Hollywood to Chula Vista with her stories about her father Greg Toland, film director and inventor of the depth of field lens for Citizen Kane. Her life with Red was filled with laughter and art. Her humanitarian spirit is a breath of fresh air.

Should you wish to pay by check, contact Sandy Scheller [sscheller@cox.net](mailto:sscheller@cox.net) for details. **Your donation of \$100 includes a kosher brunch, mixing and mingling with old and new fiends, listening to Lothian and some wonderful surprises.** Donations for this event continue to grow our South Bay Historical Society and Chula Vista Heritage Museum with programs and events.

***RUTH Remember Us The Holocaust*** exhibit will be coming down *at the end of August* to make way for our Filipinos of the South Bay exhibit. This exhibit will include art and cultural events through 2023.

Thank you for being a continued supporter of our projects. We look forward to you coming to our event. The link is below.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/brunch-with-mayor-mary-casillas-salas-tickets-346960015747>

## The Two Men who Created Chula Vista



These are the two men who created Chula Vista. On the right is **Frank Kimball**. He purchased the Rancho de la Nación land grant, which now includes National City, Bonita, and the western half of Chula Vista. At great expense to himself, he finally got a railroad, the Santa Fe RR, to build a track to National City, which is still in operation today as the BNSF.\* He then got the Santa Fe to finance the building of the Sweetwater Dam. *That* cost him giving the Santa Fe RR all the property that constitutes the western half of Chula Vista today. Now, with a town he created, National City, and with a more stable source of water and a way to

get the produce to market, he was ready to create the "farm" he had in mind south of the Sweetwater River. - - which became Chula Vista.

The gentleman on the left is **William Dickinson**, a planner for the Santa Fe RR. As the Santa Fe, and the other railroads who came west, had to help create customers. The Santa Fe created a company, the San Diego Land Company, to develop Chula Vista. Dickinson laid out 5- and 10-acre plots. If you bought one, you had to build a substantial house within two years. Many Southern California developments went bankrupt in the late nineteenth century because the speculator's sold lots OK, but did not require the buyer to do anything - - and they didn't. They were waiting for somebody else to do something that would make their property worth more. Dickinson laid out the quarter-mile grid system of lettered and numbered main streets that we live with today.



## "Fred Rohr" on the Prop Nose Cone

Fred Rohr was a sheet metal worker, like his father. When Charles Lindbergh decided in 1927 to try and fly across the Atlantic, he engaged Ryan Aircraft in San Diego to make the plane. He wanted a plane that could fly from New York to Paris - - non-stop, of course!

Fred Rohr made the huge gas tank that was necessary to fly that far, and he also made the aluminum covering of the nose of the plane. The rest of the plane and its wings were covered with a fabric, but the nose had to be covered with metal to protect the fabric from catching fire from the exposed cylinders.

So Fred Rohr can be seen in the famous photo of Charles Lindbergh, the plane's designer, and the rest of the workmen who made the "Spirit of St. Louis" - - which was soon to make history!

But Fred Rohr's presence can be seen elsewhere. The "Spirit of St. Louis" was a single-engine motor and a propeller. The centers of most propellers in those day was a cone. This 'cone' was just for looks, it did not really have any use in making the plane fly.

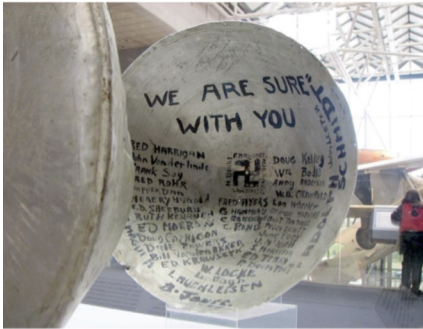
In the case of *this* plane's cone, however, something unusual was added - - the names of many of the men who made the plane, including Fred Rohr's.

When the "Spirit of St. Louis" finally left San Diego to attempt the feat, it flew first to St. Louis, Missouri. People in St. Louis had financed the building of the plane, thus its name.

After the long flight to St. Louis, the plane was gone over every which way to make sure that the plane was in perfect condition for its eventual flight over the Atlantic. The nose cone was taken off to check the propeller, etc. There are photos of Lindbergh standing next to the propeller without the cone on.

When the plane eventually landed in New York, the nose cone had a crack in it, so they made a new nose cone for the plane. Well, no matter, a new nose cone was made and that is the nose cone that is on the "Spirit" in the Smithsonian Museum, today but the *original* cone is also on display.

On the photo, you can see Fred Rohr's name fourth down along the left edge.



## When silver dollars flooded Chula Vista

In the mid-1950s, Rohr Aircraft was still a very large business in relation to the relative small size of Chula Vista. Fred Rohr tried to be a good citizen and encouraged his employees to get involved in community activities.



Well, there began to be some mutterings around town that Rohr, in fact, was *too* dominant in city affairs and that Rohr was really not that important to Chula Vista.

So one payday in 1955, Rohr paid its employees in silver dollars! (It was common for businesses to pay cash on payday in the 1950s.) Soon cash registers throughout Chula Vista were clogged with silver dollars.

Hmmm - - maybe Rohr *was* important to the life of Chula Vista.

# The NC&O – A Commuter Train Unites the South Bay

Marilyn Carnes

Have you noticed the reconfiguration of our streets lately, and talk of mass transit? Transportation is a hot topic currently; 135 years ago, people in the South Bay were just as vocal. To the residents of the National Ranch (National City and Chula Vista) who were investing in citrus orchards, and other agricultural pursuits, having the ability to get products quickly to market was the difference between economic success and failure. The ability to travel for pleasure, to enjoy a picnic in Lynwood Grove, or catch a play in San Diego was an added bonus to rural folk to whom human interaction was a welcome relief from days of hard work and isolation. It was the National City & Otay train (NC&O) that provided the answer.

By 1885 the California Southern (owned by the Santa Fe) had connected National City with the rest of the nation, but the problem still remained how residents of the National Ranch could travel quickly throughout the South Bay. Frank Kimball, always the visionary, realized that continued growth of this area would not be possible without a passenger train that connected National City to San Diego on the north and the Otay valley to the south.

At the height of the boom there was great anticipation of this train. The Record stated in February 1887 that with the coming of the NC&O, soon the area would “be so thickly populated as to resemble cities of themselves – a residence on every five or ten acres”. The article goes on to state that this train would soon make travel “a pleasure, instead of a bore, as by stage or livery team.”

On June 6, 1887 the first motor train left National City at 1 o’clock and arrived in San Diego 30 minutes later. The National Record reported that “The coach was an elegant one, entirely enclosed with windows and doors, and was crowded to its fullest capacity.” The momentum did not stop here; tracks continued to be laid south to Otay, and east to the location of the Sweetwater Dam – which was being built concurrently.

While this train, or Motor Road as it was referred to, addressed the needs of ranchers with produce and real estate men with prospective customers, an enduring affection for the faithful little train was engendered due to the pleasure it gave South Bay residents.



The NC&O ran east up 24<sup>th</sup> Street in National City, stopping at Warren Kimball’s estate, Olivewood, so tourists could view the grounds.



The early NC&O engines were enclosed, so as not to scare the horses.

South Bay Historical Society  
Bulletin No. 36, April 2022  
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