

# The Stagecoach Inn Museum, Conejo Valley Historical Society

WHEN HIGHWAY 101 required more space, the Conejo Valley Historical Society was formed in 1964 to save a building constructed in 1876, originally called the Grand Union Hotel. The building had many uses through the years and was deemed valuable to the community. It was moved a quarter mile to the south, adjacent to a city park and under restoration to become a museum of local history, which opened in 1967. It burned to the ground in 1970. Rebuilt in its original Monterey style, it reopened in 1976 as the Stagecoach Inn Museum. Through the years, six more exhibit buildings have been built on the property. The museum complex comprises four-and-a-half acres, with seven exhibit buildings, three nature trails, and a caretaker's cottage.

The ground floor of the main building includes a lobby, parlor, dining room, and kitchen in late 1800s furnishings as well as a gift shop. The parlor contains settees, platform-style rocking chairs, a gramophone (c. 1905), a tilt-top table with a tinsel painting (c. 1875), a what-not corner stand (c. 1890), a Chickering piano (c. 1870–1875), an Estey Co. parlor organ from 1894, a zither that survived the 1871 Chicago fire, a mirror that the Marquis de Lafayette presented to a Virginia farmer upon his return to America in 1825, a framed hair-work display item, and several photos of early pioneers of the Conejo Valley.

The dining room's furnishings include a large walnut dining table (c. 1895), an oak sideboard, a china cabinet of French walnut, a chest with a marble top embedded with seashells, a silver tea service, a concert roller organ (c. 1897), a brass chandelier called a gasolier, a Gothic chair (c. 1850), seven American Federal Period side chairs made of common wood painted and grained to resemble more expensive rosewood, an English Victorian vase (c. 1895), a feather picture, an antique high chair, and various sets of china and crystal glassware.

Emily's Kitchen is furnished with a nickel-trimmed cast iron stove with a reservoir for heating water and a warming oven above the cooking surface, made by Copper Clad

Malleable Range Company, St. Louis, Missouri (H Series, no. PB83, c. 1900). Also on display are a kitchen cabinet with a slanted wooden drain board and a porcelain sink, a dish cabinet (c. mid-1800s), an icebox (c. 1880), a pie safe (c. 1880), a cream separator, butter churns, a high chair (c. 1890), an ice cream freezer, a laundry stand with a wringer and wash tubs, a large metal bath tub, a gentleman's shaving mirror and stand, and a bin table with two leaves, utensil drawers, and deep bins for storage.

There are two wings on the upper floor. The front wing consists of exhibit rooms, and the wing extending back on the south side of the building is furnished as if for the hotel owner or proprietor.

The stairwell displays a handmade quilt with the names of the members of the Thousand Oaks Community Church in 1936, Thousand Oaks being the major incorporated city of the Conejo Valley.

Historical museums are indebted to collectors. The museum is privileged to have received donations of large collections of Gramophones, hair-work jewelry, and pressing irons. The corner room of the front wing contains the extensive Ken and Barbara Kilbourne collection of more than thirty talking machines, including cylinder players, Gramophones, Graphophones, Phonographs, Grafonolas, Victrolas, Amerolas, and various other items related to the beginnings of recorded music, dating from 1898 to 1930. The earliest ones feature large, spectacular amplifying horns, and the later ones have unusual cabinetry. There are also records and collector's items such as needle cases, cylinders, Victor logo items featuring the dog named Nipper, and brushes made for cleaning the spinning records. Museum docents crank up a Graphophone for guests to hear music of the early period.

One room represents a typical hotel room of the late 1800s with simple furnishings, including a single bed, a washstand of pine, and a bear rug made from an American black bear. Another room displays ornamental hair-work. From 1968 until the time of her death in 2002, Carmelita Johnson amassed a collection of over five hundred examples of hair-work, researched and published what many call a seminal work in the field, and contributed to two other books on the subject. Her collection was renowned among dealers, authors, other collectors, and many simply interested in the craft. It includes jewelry such as rings, pendants, earrings, brooches, and bracelets; watch fobs; framed wall art; wreaths; buttons; picture frames; a diadem; a purse; a doll's coat; and many, many other items constructed of or containing human hair.

Another room exhibits a local business (1927–1969) that was a popular tourist site. It was called Goebel's Lion Farm, then the World Jungle Compound, and finally Jungleland. Louis Goebel imported animals for the movie industry, hired trainers, developed a circus, and quartered circuses during the winter months. The photos and items featured in this room are from different collectors and represent this early attraction in the valley, which had previously been the site only of farmland and ranches. A famous trainer was Mabel Stark, who had a long career working with tigers. The signage for this attraction is thorough, relating, for example, that 1,800 animals were sold at auction in 1970. A video shows the evening news of that time, with Huntley-Brinkley and Walter Cronkite describing the auction.

Hands-on activity is the goal in the room dedicated to laundry of the 1800s, particularly demonstrating the level of work required to supply and heat the water. Another room features antique irons, a collection which began with a donation by collector

John McCormack in honor of his son, Phillip. Shown are pressing irons, pan irons, sad irons and cold-handled sad irons, charcoal irons, slug irons, liquid fuel irons, natural gas irons, electric irons from the turn of the century to the 1950s, and examples of the first electric steam iron and the first electric iron with a thermostat, along with a number of specialty irons like fluters, an egg iron, a goffering iron, tailors' gooses, and more.

A changing exhibit room features items in a typical gentleman's study. Rifles and a mounted elk head, a fishing pole, playing cards, cigars, and evidence of imbibing complete the room.

Looking into the family wing, a Victorian bedroom has an American black walnut bedroom set from the Renaissance Revival Period (c. 1865–1875), a handmade black walnut cradle (c. 1845), a marble-top black walnut wash stand, a rose velvet love seat (c. 1880), and an unusual hand-carved oak rocking chair from Bavaria, Germany (c. 1870, with a curtain-like, rose velvet treatment added in 1960). The bedspread usually on display is a white trapunto quilt made in the 1830s, never used but handed down through generations of the Newbury family, early pioneers in the Conejo Valley.

The Haigh Bedroom represents a children's bedroom, complete with a spool bed (c. 1875) that originally belonged to Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's son. There are two oak dressers and a bedside table (c. 1900), an antique Angle sconce lamp, and a small fireplace. A variety of antique toys dominate this room.

The Haigh Sitting Room displays a tapestry settee and chair (c. late 1800s, restored and reupholstered); a cabinet organ in the Eastlake style (c. 1880), with shelves for souvenirs or art objects; a small "lady's" secretary; a mahogany veneer console table (c. 1810–1850), with a massive pedestal base with inverted C-curved feet typical of the Empire Period; an occasional table of walnut in the gothic Victorian style (c. 1870); a red velvet upholstered walnut chair and matching footstool (both restored and reupholstered); and, on the wall, a bible holder, which is a wood board with two wide, cross-stitched fabric bands attached to it. The room is separated by curtains in the English style called a cosy, where a dining table, chairs, and a cabinet are displayed. The room has encased butterfly displays and Haigh family photos on the walls. The Haigh family owned the original building from 1885 until 1966.

Jeffries Nursery is a small nursery with an iron crib (c. 1880), a miniature kerosene lamp on the wall that served as a night light, and all manner of baby items.

The lower floor of the building features a large room of artifacts excavated in the Conejo Valley and reproductions of many kinds of items the Chumash people used that have not survived through time. Pictograph photos are shown, and signage explains the lifestyle of these early people. The archaeological display case contains fossils representative of geologic periods.

The building to the south, near the park, is the reconstructed Timber School. The original one-room school was nearby, close to what is now Highway 101, and was built in 1889. Grades 1–8 were taught until 1924, when a two-room school was built. This school on the museum property was built by the students at Newbury Park High School under the direction of instructor Randy Porter and was completed in 1995. A large boulder outside the school has a memorial plaque with the names of the teacher, the teacher's aide, and the student builders. The schoolhouse has three entrances, two of them being through the boys' and the girls' cloakrooms.

As building progressed in 1994, someone anonymously left the original California public school register for Timber School and other documents at the gate of the museum. Upon examination, it was discovered that Annie Sullivan, a teacher from 1892 to 1894, had carefully marked the book with the names of the students, their grades, and attendance records. The teacher's daily class program is also included, along with other records. A copy of the register is on display.

The building has slate boards from an 1892 school; a world indexing globe from 1920; antique oak double desks from Wales; a Beckwith organ (c. 1900); a wood stove made by the Comstock-Castle Stove Co., Quincy, Illinois, showing its 1883 date; an antique oak bookcase; an antique teacher's desk with a leather top; a teacher's chair of pressed oak; a small recitation bench; a wash stand; an 1893 U.S. map; an 1889 U.S. flag; portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln; a Sessions clock (c. 1910) from Bristol, Connecticut; framed displays of insects; and other items for a late-1800s school. Guests may pull the rope to hear the bell in the bell tower.

The Blacksmith Shop stands next to the parking lot. Many of the tools were from the R. O. Hunt family. Volunteers fire up the forge to make iron items for the museum gift shop as guests learn about smithing.

The Carriage House was built to exhibit stagecoaches. The most notable stagecoach was designed for the movies and looks like the Abbott and Downing coaches from Concord, New Hampshire. Next to it is a California mud wagon (c. 1870–1880), the typical vehicle of California, which could withstand the rough roads and go out into the surf on the coastal stage route. A small, red model stagecoach was built for the movie actor Joel McCrea, whose children enjoyed rides pulled by horses on their nearby ranch. Another miniature stagecoach is an accurate half-scale model of a classic Concord built for his grandchildren by Nick Olsen of the pioneer Norwegian family.

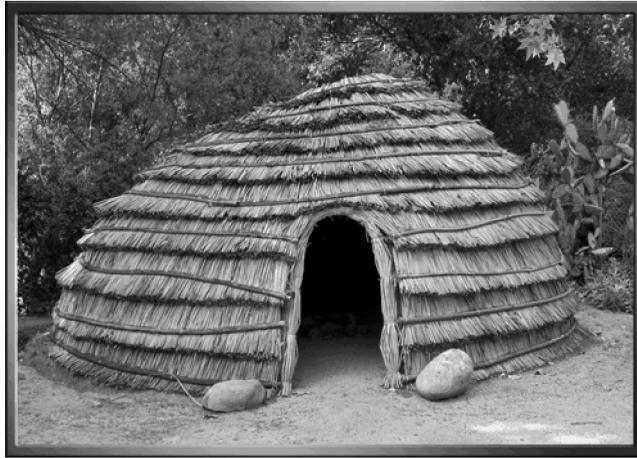
Also on display in this building are a carpenter's workbench (c. 1780–1800) with antique tools, a hand corn planter, a broom-making display, a corn grader, shoemaker's tools, a shingle splitter's bench, a harness maker's bench, several saddles, and horse tack.

On the west side of the building is Queenie's Garage, with a 1930 Ford truck that belonged to Donna Fargo, a longtime resident, volunteer, and supporter of the Conejo Valley Historical Society.

A windmill that operates on a recirculating system is located by the Carriage House.

The last three buildings, called the Tri-Village, angle down on a trail to the northeast. They represent stepping back in time with, first, an 1870s home called the Newbury Pioneer House; then, farther on, an adobe like those the Spanish and then the Mexican people built from the early 1800s until the 1870s; then an *ap*, a tule house like those the Chumash people built.

The Newbury family resided in the Conejo Valley for only three years, but they are well known because Egbert S. Newbury established the first post office and contributed items to the *Ventura Signal* newspaper. The house was built with the guidance of a small painting of their home by Mrs. Frances Newbury. In the main room visitors will see a stone fireplace, a dining table (c. 1880), braided rugs, a Salem rocker (c. 1821–1826), a cast iron stove (c. 1850), a work table (c. 1850), butter churns, cast iron cooking pots, and a laundry tub with washboards. The parents' bedroom has a cast iron bedstead (c. late 1800s), a feather mattress,



This Chumash-style house is called an *ap* (pronounced “op”). There is a nearby fire ring for rituals and ceremonies, a large woven screen that serves as a staging area for dancing, and a ramada.

a hotel-type dresser, a chest, hair curlers, and Egbert Newbury’s stirrups. The other bedroom, designated Egbert Jr.’s (Bertie’s) bedroom, contains a military-type bedstead of cast iron, a dresser, and toys of the early 1900s. Items attached to or on the porch of the Newbury Pioneer House are a cross-cut saw, a hand scythe, a large iron pot, and a table and wash tubs for hands-on laundry.

The next building down the trail is an adobe house of a type that might have been occupied by the family of a vaquero tending cattle. The furnishings are simple, with a table, two benches, and a four-poster bed with cowhide woven springs. The beehive-shaped oven outside is called a *horno*.

Also notable is an area with two covered pits that are filled with sand and fossils of under-sea creatures. These pits have tools to dig out fossils and a nearby signboard displaying and identifying the fossils to be found. All fossils are local and were donated after construction of homes on a nearby hilltop, proving that this area was indeed under water in the distant past.

Antique farm equipment can be seen throughout the property, the most notable being a large tractor behind the main building.

At the museum’s entrance, the Heritage Rose Garden is a welcoming sight with antique rose bushes that are labeled. A short trail leads along the east side of the property near a seasonal creek.

Two trails stretch from the Tri-Village area, one with moderate slopes and four footbridges across the creek. The other one, a bit steeper, is accessed by two footbridges.

Several locations on the property are available for weddings, receptions, and parties. Anderson Hall, a room on the lower floor, is appropriate for meetings and other gatherings.

All the buildings are utilized during field trips for grades 3–5.

The museum is located at 51 South Ventu Park Road, Newbury Park, California, and is open Wednesday through Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 P.M. To learn more, visit [www.stagecoachinnmuseum.com](http://www.stagecoachinnmuseum.com).