

# William S. Hart Park Opening Set

## Rites to Dedicate Ranch of First Cowboy Film Star

A living memorial to the nation's first cowboy movie star, William S. Hart, will be opened to the public Saturday morning in Newhall, thus unveiling for a new generation a part of filmdom's most picturesque history.

The opening of the 220-acre William S. Hart Park at 24151 N San Fernando Road fulfills one of the last wishes of the stern cowboy who galloped across the silent screen between 1914 and 1930.

### Admiring Public

Hart knew that he owed his fame and wealth to an admiring public and believed that, upon his death, his earthly treasures should be returned to the people who made them possible. Therefore the property, including the fabulous hilltop ranch home, smaller ranch buildings, stable areas,

Hart's art masterpieces, western lore, movie paraphernalia, his books and thousands of personal items were bequeathed to Los Angeles County at his death in 1946 at the age of 74. The opening, however, has been delayed by long and unsuccessful attempts of William S. Hart Jr. to break his father's will.

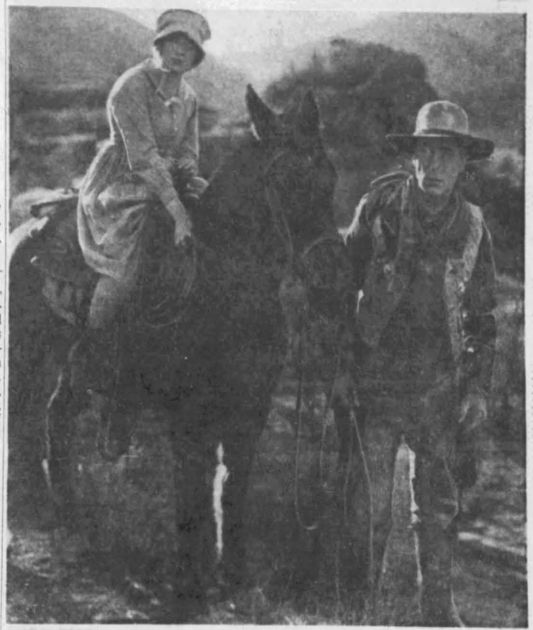
### Tribute to Hart, County

Supervisor Dorn, who will be one of the main speakers at the dedication Saturday, has called the restored ranch "a tribute not only to the character of William S. Hart and to his screen career, but also to the early days of the film industry which helped to make Los Angeles County prosper."

Taking part with Dorn in the dedication will be Frank...  
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**STILL KING**—King Valentine is still alive. At 39 he is content to pasture on the rolling hills, glancing up occasionally at the ranch hands and caretakers assigned to the East Newhall ranch. There are six of Hart's horses on the ranch.



**HARD-BITTEN COWBOY**—William S. Hart, a dashing hero who tolerated no evil and gave no quarter to the villains of that day, saves the heroine, Jane Novak, from destruction. Hart galloped silently across the screen on King Valentine.



**A LOOK AT THE PAST**—Indian tapestries, paintings and statues can be found in the same room with Hart's old greasepaint, cold cream and make-up

kit. The collections will be displayed Saturday, when the 220-acre ranch in Newhall is turned over to the County of Los Angeles for use as a public park.



**FAMOUS FIREARMS** — The Spanish-style modern hilltop ranch house includes one of the most extensive private collection of famous guns in the West.



**HART ON HORSEBACK**—James Montgomery Flagg painted Hart on horse in 1924. Fourteen Charles M. Russell originals and four bronzes are included in Hart's famous collection of western art.



**HILLTOP HOUSE**—The entire ranch and surrounding countryside can be seen from the Spanish-style ranch house. Under construction from 1925 to 1927,

the structure stands almost unchanged today, except for the lavish furnishings and the collections of art and western lore which Hart brought into the home.

# HART RANCH

## Continued from First Page

clis Gudger of Palm Springs, one of Hart's long-time personal friends, who will relate some of the anecdotes of Hart's heyday on the silent screen; Supervisor Ford and Sheriff Biscailuz. The program will get under way at 10 a.m.

### Rustic Museum

Visitors entering the decorated masonry entrance to the park, which is situated on the left entering Newhall, come first to the original one-story redwood ranch house, built in 1910. The old

ranch house has been remodeled into a rustic museum by Curator John Dewar of the Los Angeles County Museum.

Dewar has converted one part of the old ranch house into a dressing room such as could have been used on a western movie set. It includes Hart's old greasepaint, cold cream, mirror, brushes and make-up kit. In the same room are Indian tapestries, a pot-bellied stove, antique clocks and even some old film cans.

Nearby is the restored

ranch kitchen which Hart used while he lived in the hillside for his remaining days.

house awaiting completion of the hilltop dwelling, between 1925 and 1927. There are also movie posters, props, saddles, spurs, riding clothes, chaps and other equipment from Hart's films.

Adjoining the old ranch house is the stable area where some of Hart's original horses are still cared for in accordance with terms of his will. Most famous of these is King Valentine, the famed brown mount of Hart's later pictures. At 39, Old King is content to graze lazily on the rolling

hillside for his remaining days. The lavishly decorated hilltop home reflects the background, character and varied interests of its actor-owner.

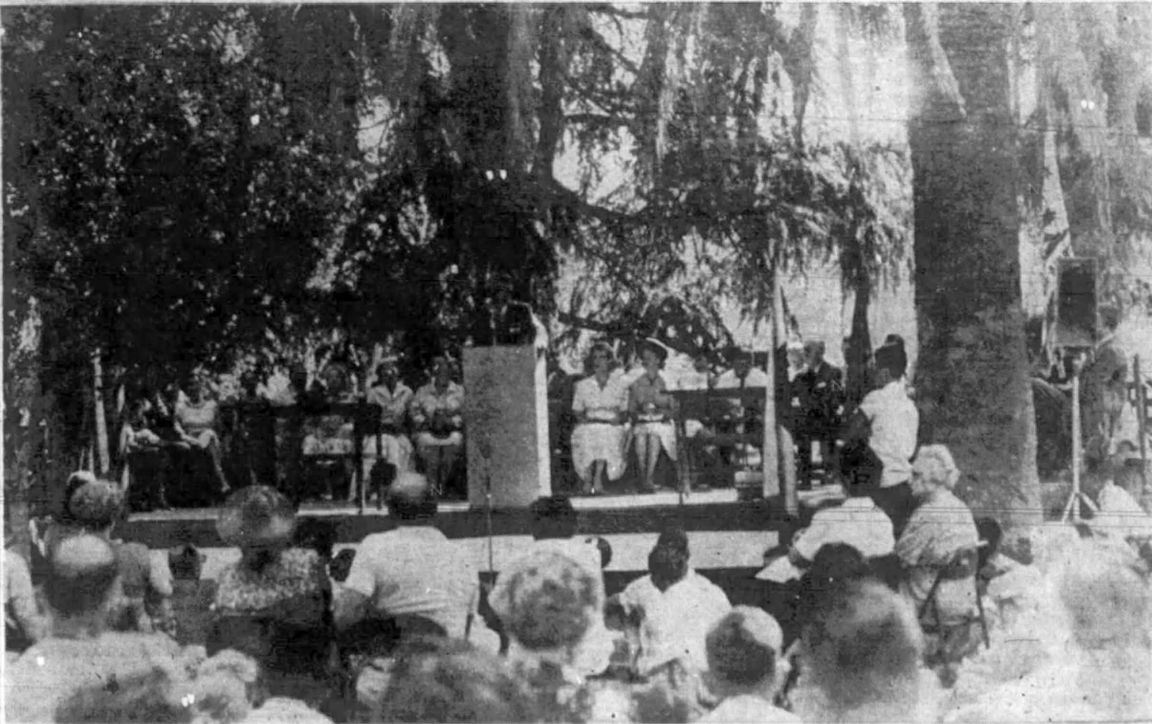
### 'Real' West

Visitors will see Hart's famous collection of badmen's guns, his art treasures including originals given him by Charles M. Russell and James Montgomery Flagg, his prized hand-carved furniture, war gear used by the Sioux, authentic dueling swords and shields and other western objects.

Despite Hart's connection with the screen, almost all of the objects in the home represent the "real," not the "movie" West.

The books written by Hart, fiction of the Old West, also are displayed prominently throughout his estate. It is planned eventually to have occasional showings of Hart movies on the grounds.

The park will remain open to the public after the dedication Saturday, with visitors welcome between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. daily except Mondays.



**HE REMEMBERED**—Gene Biscailuz, the Good Grey Sheriff of Los Angeles County was one of the few speakers at the Hart Park dedication, who personally knew and remembered the late, great western movie star. All of the rest of them knew of Bill, but only Attorney Francis Gudger, and some of the Hollywood veterans had known

Bill Hart personally. This state of affairs again pointed to the way the accumulating mists of the years intervene between Bill Hart, the man, and we of the present—that those who recall him personally are a dwindling band of Old Timers. Presently, even the kids who attend the school to which he gave his name may not even know about him.

## PROMINENT MEN PARTICIPATE IN DEDICATION OF W. S. HART PARK TO USE OF THE PUBLIC

by Fred W. Trueblood Sr.

With dignified and touching words, with a program studded with famous movie names, and with a crowd of at least 500 people giving close attention, the William S. Hart County Park was formally dedicated Saturday, and from now on in will be the property of the public.

Many times in his last years, Mr. Hart told this reporter that this was his final and one of his dearest wishes. "While I was making pictures, they gave me their nickels and dimes and quarters," he reiterated. "When I am gone I want them to have my home."

Now, at last, they have it.

### A BIG, BEAUTIFUL PARK

And a beautiful and significant park it is.

Over it, on La Loma de los Vientos, towers the big mansion, like a castle on the rocky Italian cliffs.

Below it, on the level areas of the ranch front on San Fernando Road, are new, handsome buildings, and wide stretches of green lawns. At the south end are the fences and feed racks of a characteristic ranch horse corral.



**PARK**—The huge and gnarled branches of these two great white oak trees almost in the center of the wide greensward of the flats below the mansion, lend an air of age and dignity to the area which is to be devoted to public use.

Soaring upward toward the mansion on the hill of the winds are new paved approach roads and foot trails.

When Bill Hart built the mansion in the early twenties, a practical and usable road up to it was one of his first problems. He got a pile of old newspapers, and he had his ranch foreman trail him carrying a basket full of rocks.

Every so often Bill would stoop down, lay a piece of newspaper on the ground, pin it down with one of the rocks.

#### DEFINING THE ROAD

So sure was his eye, and so good was his judgment, that the graders who came in to make the road found the trail Bill had made to be the best and easiest line of approach, to the big front door of the mansion. Motorists of the thirties and later traveled most of this graded road in high gear. The only real steep grade was the final few yards, through the mansion wall, with a right turn up into the sunny patio.

Here in this many-roomed mansion, Bill Hart spent most of the 20 years remaining to him after his retirement in 1925. The autumns and winters and the springs. The summers he generally passed at his Connecticut estate.

Here he collected and displayed his vast store of Western relics, mementoes, pictures, books, and weapons. Here the vast expanse of living room floor was hidden with choice Navajo rugs. Here, at one end of the vast living room, was a projection booth, where Bill would cause some of his most famous silent movies to be run for the entertainment of favored guests. Here, toward the north, he looked out across the valley of the Little Santa Clara to the high slopes of the Ridge. Here, toward the south, from the

little summer house he built on the tip of La Loma, behind the mansion, spread out the magnificent panorama of Los Pinetos mountain. Here on the 220 acres of his ranch he maintained a game refuge. The only wildlife he barred were rattlesnakes. Here the jackrabbits bounced with hungry coyotes close behind; here were many trails cut

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## Prominent men at Park dedication

(Continued from page 1)

by the sharp cloven hooves of his beloved deer.

Here Bill Hart played host to the great of the entertainment world of that time. Here occasionally his beloved sister, Mary Hart came for a winter visit, and took her knitting out into a warm sunny corner of the patio.

#### FIRES WERE FOILED

On two occasions, at least, when raging brush fires swept across the hills toward his home, local residents would see his tall figure ramrod straight, standing by his wall in cool defiance, to face the oncoming fire front. But such had been his foresight and judgment that none of these fires ever breached the walls or invaded the patios. Presently his huge black limousine would be seen coming down the road in slow and stately progress as he turned the defenses of his castle over to eager L.A. County firemen.

Presently the licking flames of the brush fire would completely surround the hill of the winds, the great house could not be seen for the billowing volumes of smoke around it. From back of the flames and the smoke came the shouts and the noises of the defending firemen.

When nothing was left of the hill but steep black, faintly smoking slopes, the huge black limousine would slowly climb the hill, returning Bill to his home.

It was noticeable, and a bit pathetic, that among all of the notables who participated in the dedication program, only a few had known Bill Hart personally.

#### THEY KNEW BILL

Gene Biscalluz had.

He told about that dreadful March of 1928, when the Francisco Canyon dam went out—

how he first came to Newhall at that time—how he had met Bill Hart and how Bill had worked to relieve and help the flood victims

Master of Ceremonies of Leo Carrillo had.

He spoke of his movie contacts with Bill, and sketched some Hart personality facets.

Attorney Francis Guder had. He told of Bill Hart's New York stage career, before he came west—how he startled the critics with his portrayal of Cash Hawkins in "The Squaw Man."

Some local people had also known Bill Hart personally. They were not called upon to speak. The program had to be kept short and fast-moving.

Old Francis X. Bushman was there, still stunningly handsome, still erect and trim of figure. He had been coached by Bill Hart in the role of Messala in "Ben Hur."

#### ALL PAID DUE HONOR

But whether they had known Bill personally or not, all those present knew his reputation. All had come to do him honor. On hand were Al Jennings, Director Frank Borzage, Supervisor John Anson Ford, Big Boy Williams, Monty Montana, Dr. von Klein Smidt. Even old Otto Lederer, veteran studio make-up man who had applied greasepaint to Bill's features, was there.

At the close of the program Supervisor Warren Dorn, of the Fifth District, on behalf of the County, made formal acceptance of the park from the executors of the will.

There were several moist eyes in the assemblage when Supervisor Dorn was presented with a bridle which had adorned the head of old "Fritz," Bill's favorite pinto pony, in the days of the greatness of both Bill and Fritz.

Except on Mondays, the park will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. During these hours there will be guided tours of the mansion. Scott Thomas is resident manager of the park and John Dewar, curator of the Hart museum. Mr. Thomas has his office in the cottage formerly used by the Horseshoe Ranch foreman.

A speaker's stand had been erected at the south end of the lower expanse of the "flats" of the Horseshoe Ranch. Under the spreading fronds of two large palm trees it provided seats and shade for those taking part in the dedication program, and for the group of prominent local citizens honored by seats on the platform.

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**The Newhall Signal ★**  
**Thursday, May 17, 1962**

## **Supervisors act to settle park dispute**

Reportedly to eliminate a local level dispute of long standing between the two county bureaus operating the Wm. S. Hart Memorial Park in Newhall, the Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to place the entire park under the jurisdiction of the County Park and Recreation Dept.

Since its opening in 1957 the Park management has been split between the County Museum Dept. which operates the Hart mansion, and the lower grounds run by the Recreation Dept. At the present time the museum employs a curator, a guard and a clean-up woman.

No other details regarding the sudden change were available up to press time.

## Tuning Up



Photo by Leonard Barajas

Piano tuner Chuck Johnson checks the grand piano at the William S. Hart museum.

## Work Done On Hart Mansion

Chuck Johnson, the piano technician who has kept all of the CalArts pianos in tune for the past 13 years, has made suggestions for the proper future care of the Chickering baby grand piano in the William S. Hart Museum.

Friends of Hart Park is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to the restoration and preservation of the Hart Museum, willed by the silent films' cowboy star to Los Angeles County upon his death in 1946.

Betty Houghton Pember, the second-generation Newhall resident who serves as president of Friends, has obtained the support and expertise of the Los Angeles County departments that serve as custodians of Hart's property and possessions.

It is anticipated that next on the Friends' agenda are the reupholstery of Hart's favorite leather chair in the "Dogs' Room" and, as funds

become available, the cleaning of the many unique Indian rugs that Hart collected and restoration of the historically important oil paintings by Western artists Frederic Remington and Charles Russell.

The museum is full of treasures that require careful, competent maintenance, and all of it is expensive.

In a letter from assistant director Leon Arnold of the County Museum of Natural History to Pember, answering her request for advice on "mutual concerns on maintenance and conservation at Hart Park," Arnold wrote: "We, at the Museum, are very concerned — concerned that you act on the best possible advice available and concerned that the Hart Ranch material is treated in a proper and professional manner."

"I must also tell you that we fully appreciate your periodic requests for

information and guidance because the requests tell us that you are equally concerned and want to do the right thing."

When the Friends solicited memberships earlier this year, several persons responded with donations accompanied by specific requests.

Whenever possible, Friends will follow the wishes of the donor.

Anyone who wishes to participate in the work needed at the Hart Museum by becoming a Friend of Hart Park may telephone 255-7261 or 259-4974 for more information.

# Hart Mansion Gets Preservation Aid

By Cheryl Jensen  
Signal Staff Writer

**William S. Hart would have been proud. The silent film star's collection of western paintings and artifacts are getting a face lift.**

Friends of Hart Park, the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department and the Museum of Natural History are upgrading the museum to workable condition. The exterior features under construction will help preserve the memorabilia from film's first popular cowboy.

The Hart museum and 200-acre park in Newhall became the county's property in 1946 by terms of the actor's will.

William S. Hart and his horse "Fritz" rode across the silent movie screen in the 1910s and 1920s. He built a Spanish villa atop a hill in Newhall and decorated it with western memorabilia from his movie career and cowboy lifestyle. The house is furnished as it was when Hart lived there. The artifacts include woven Indian mats, baskets, saddles, and clothing.

Most important is the collection of paintings, drawings, and bronze sculptures that decorated the home. Hart was a close friend of painters Charles Russell and James Montgomery Flagg and of sculptor Charles

Remington. The works of these artists have since achieved worldwide stature and today are priceless, according to Mark Rodriguez of the Museum of Natural History.

Friends of Hart Park, a non-profit organization striving to preserve the museum collection, received a \$1000 grant from the American Association of Museums under the Museum Assessment Program.

Professional curator Susan Buchel, of Scotty's Castle Museum in Death Valley, recommended preserving both the exterior of the buildings and the artifacts. "This collection presents a rare glimpse at the life and career of an early film star," she

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said. The county Parks and Recreation Department is using building materials that will

preserve the collection for many years.

"We are trying to keep up the physical structures while the main interest of Friends of Hart

Park is the restoration and preservation of the collection," said north region Deputy Director John Weber.

"The physical improvements

include humidification, weather-stripping, clay tile roofing, lighting, heating and air conditioning systems and ultraviolet retardant glass," said Weber.



Workers, above, deliver clay tile for the roof of the Hart mansion. The original tile will be salvaged and reused

because it was a distinctive feature of the era and is no longer available

"Our purpose is better maintenance of the items that are on display."

Jim Yapple, president of Friends of Hart Park, says they favor upgrading the building exteriors, although their main concern is the preservation of the museum collection.

"It is foolish to put back artifacts in structures that would not preserve them in the proper environment. This will assure us it will be done in the proper way.

"A non-profit organization, Friends of Hart Park is a concerned group of respected community leaders. We want to generate interest in the museum

and raise funds in membership sales to meet these goals."

"Supervisor Michael Antonovich encourages the assessment plans and has formed a committee to study the need for recognition of the value of the collection," said Antonovich's press deputy Dawson Oppenheimer. "They will report their findings and report to the Board of Supervisors within 90 days."

The community has been supportive of the refurbishing and construction of the estate and county officials say that this is a positive sign for future museum grants.



The living-room shows the decor of the period, with Indian rugs on the hardwood floor.



## County Museum Interested

# New Curator For Hart Park?

By Gary Wosk  
Signal Staff Writer

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, with a staff of 350 including 25 research scientists, may become the new curator of Hart Park if the county Board of Supervisors gives it the green light.

"They're very supportive at this time," said John Weber, deputy director of the county Parks and Recreation Department.

Speaking to the Friends of Hart Park on Monday, Weber said "The property is significant enough to have curatorial support." But despite the optimism, "nothing is in black and white as of today."

Mark Rodriguez, deputy director of the county-owned Museum of Natural History, said the museum is trying to expand with "satellites" that have "significant historical value."

He echoed Weber's enthusiasm.

Rodriguez said the purpose of

the meeting was to discuss a "conceptual organization proposal" that will eventually be made to the county Board of Supervisors, if the Friends of Hart Park approve the plan at the group's full membership meeting next Tuesday.

The Museum of Natural History, located near the Coliseum in Exposition Park, has a floor of California history displays.

"We're very excited about Hart Park," Rodriguez said. "We are going to grow and we want you to be part of it."

"We're on the move. We're hopeful that the board will let us take over management of the collection. We have found that you have more than your facility can house."

Rodriguez assured the non-profit Friends organization that their participation would still be considered invaluable.

"We have no intention of saying 'step aside, we're taking over.' Your roles will be greatly expanded even beyond Hart Park."

However, the president of the Friends of Hart Park, "Buffalo" Jim Yaple, said the group was concerned only with Hart.

"We're interested in Hart Park, and what happens in other parts of the district is not our concern — I hope you can appreciate that."

Yaple told Rodriguez that he hoped the possible participation of the museum would bring clarified objectives.

"We can't help them (county museum) if they don't know what they're supposed to be doing. What is the purpose of the museum? The park department admits they don't anything about

running a museum."

"We don't know where we're going, but everything you say sounds good."

The Museum of Natural History is not part of the Parks and Recreation Department; it is an independent entity directly under the Board of Supervisors, and, like Hart Park, has its own volunteer support group.

The county of Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department took over control of Hart park from the county museum in 1962. Rodriguez said the museum was more concerned with the city's La Brea Tar Pits.

Yaple also asked the county museum for reassurance that his group still would have "some administrative input and the assigned curator would be highly specialized."

"We don't want deadwood," he said.

Even though any county museum involvement would probably mean improved preservation and maintenance of artifacts, there is still no guarantee of extra funding.

Yaple said occasional visits to other museum directors in the country who complain about cuts showed him how little support the park receives.

Yaple listened to them and then said, "We've got you beat. We don't have any budget."

Yaple blamed a shortage of funds in recent years on one culprit: Proposition 13. "It's a drop file for everything that hasn't been done." He said that with or without the county museum's participation, the group would continue to seek grants.

"I'm not content to sit and wait for the county's wheels to turn."

# 'Friends' Accept County's Proposal

## Museum To Become Curator Of Hart Park Buildings

By Gary Wosk  
Signal Staff Writer

Friends of Hart Park have accepted the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History's

proposal to become the curator of three buildings at the William S. Hart Park in Newhall.

But the proposal still must be approved by the County.

The 15-member Board of

Directors of the Friends of Hart Park endorsed the basic concept of the proposal at their last meeting. An endorsement letter with other suggestions was hand delivered to the Santa Clarita Valley office of Supervisor Mike Antonovich.

Besides accepting County Museum involvement, Jim "Buffalo" Yapple, president of the park group, said the letter asks the Board of Supervisors for sufficient museum funds, and requests that the Friends of Hart Park be designated as "part of the administration of museum operations."

Also, Yapple said the County Museum will ask the Board for \$300,000, which would be used to pay the salary of three curators and security through June.

If the Board approves the designation of Hart as a "satellite museum," said Mark A. Rodriguez, deputy director of

the Natural History Museum, the first step toward improving the exhibitions will take between six to eight months.

First, the artifacts in the mansion, bunk house and ranch house will be inventoried. Each item will be condition classified and hopefully "restored."

The next step will be to decide how the artifacts will be displayed and what would possibly qualify for federal grants.

Yapple is hopeful that the William S. Hart collection that is currently stored at the Natural History Museum on Exposition Blvd will be returned to the park.

William S. Hart bought the land on which the park sits in 1921. Hart willed the land to the county after his death in 1946 but it was not until 1958 that the park opened.

## Funds Asked For Hart Park

By Laurel Suomisto  
Signal Staff Writer

In order that work can be begun immediately on cataloguing the valuable collection of Western art and memorabilia at Hart Park, Supervisor Michael Antonovich yesterday asked that \$166,000 be taken out of the county's reserve fund.

The request will be considered at next week's meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

The proposal came as the result of a study of the Hart collection by the curator of Scotty's Castle.

The curator, Susan J. Buchel,  
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## Antonovich Requests Funds For Hart Park

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said the park "desperately needs" a full-time professional curator to care for the historical artifacts that provide a rare glimpse at the life and career of an early film star.

Hart was silent film's first cowboy star. He and his horse, "Fritz," were well-known to moviegoers in the 1910s and '20s.

When he died in 1946, Hart left his Newhall estate to the County of Los Angeles for a public park.

Housed in the several buildings on the estate is a large collection of Western paintings, Indian rugs, rare books, furniture and mementos of Hart's film career.

Currently, volunteers from the

Friends of Hart Park care for the collection, raise money and conduct tours of the site.

Buchel said that while the volunteers "have held the Park together and deserve much credit for the care they have given the historical house and the objects in it," no one with the necessary expertise supervises their work.

The county recently hired a full-time supervisor to care for the museum, but he has no background in managing historic sites, Buchel said.

If the Board approves Antonovich's funding request next week, the Museum of Natural History would take over the

maintenance of the park buildings and museum collection from the Department of Parks and Recreation and three permanent employees would be hired to care for the museum.

"Buffalo" Jim Yaple, the president of the Friends of Hart Park, said his group "supports the idea 100 percent."

He said the park has been without professional management since 1962, when the Parks Department took it over from the Natural History Museum.

Since then, the museum collection has suffered, he said. "It's going to take money, it's going to take time to get it back where it should be."

# Hart Museum To Register Exhibits

Beginning Wednesday, April 1, the Friends of Hart Park Museum will begin the much needed registration of all the material found in the William S. Hart Museum.

Registration is a museum term used to describe an in-depth inventory. The collection in the Hart Museum was inventoried in 1958 but never registered for several reasons.

In May of 1986, the Friends of Hart Park Museum obtained a grant from the Institute of Museum Services to have a Museum Appraisal Program conducted at the Hart Museum. In the 94-page report which was prepared by Museum Appraiser, Susan Buchel, curator of Scotty's Castle in Death Valley, it was pointed out that one of the primary needs of the museum was to have the collection registered.

Registration will tell the Friends and the County Department of Parks and Recreation what is in the collection in some detail, where it is located, it's condition and other information of value for preservation and conservation of the collection.

It is expected that the project will take up to a year and cost about \$30,000. A start up grant of \$2500 was received from Aetna Insurance Company and matched with a like amount from the Friends of Hart Park Museum. Additional funds will be solicited from the local community and the

Friends will search for additional Grant funds.

Fundraising for the project is under the direction of Maureen Focht, a member of the Friends Board of Directors.

The Friends asked the County Museum of Natural History for help and guidance in the project and as a result Kathryn Child has been loaned to the Hart Museum two days a week to supervise the project. Child will also train people who volunteer to work on the project.

It will take eight to 10 volunteers who will commit a minimum of three hours a week up to a year to complete the project. Anyone wishing to contribute time to this project may contact Focht at 297-0307 daytime only, for details and to schedule training dates. Volunteers need not commit for a full year but perhaps for a quarter or to complete one room in the mansion.

The Friends of Hart Park Museum have recently requested that the Board of Supervisors provide the Hart Park Museum with a professional Museum Staff. Due to budget restraints the supervisors have not been able to fulfill this request, but the Friends continue to hope this staffing will be accomplished in the near future. By undertaking this registration pro-

ject the Friends hope to further prepare for the day when a professional museum staff is a reality.

William S. Hart left a collection of western art and movie memorabilia which deserves much better attention that it has

received in the last 25 years and it will take much money and attention from the community to correct this neglect and make the Hart Museum the outstanding attraction and showplace of the Santa Clarita Valley.



JOE VITTI / Los Angeles Times

Linda McFadden, participant in a painstaking inventory of Hart Museum artifacts, sews an identification tag on one of 67 rugs in the collection.

After 40 Years, County Comes  
Through With TLC for William S. Hart Museum

## Dusting Off Memories of the Old West

By LYNN O'SHAUGHNESSY,  
Times Staff Writer

When silent-film star William S. Hart bequeathed his Spanish villa and its surrounding 233-acre Newhall estate to Los Angeles County in 1946, the county had to fight in probate court for more than a decade to gain possession.

But over the years, the county's interest in the villa, which is filled with Hart's invaluable Western art and artifacts collection, waned. In the 1960s, during a county bureaucratic shuffle, the villa-turned-museum lost its curators.

Since then, some of the museum's artifacts have deteriorated to the point that county museum experts consider the vast collection's general condition to be only fair.

A cherished Charles Russell painting is beginning to buckle, and other oil paintings are bleeding. Beads that decorated ornate Indian clothing and other tribal treasures have been discovered on the floor. Hart's stockpile of Westerns shot on nitrate film is feared to be deteriorating.

In a lengthy report last year, a consultant chided the county for being remiss in caring for Hart's heirlooms.

"The county has had possession of this fine collection for over 40 years, but has taken no real steps toward maintaining accountability for it," wrote Susan J. Buchel, a former curator with Scotty's Castle at Death Valley National Monument. "Other museums that have failed to maintain objects properly have been taken to task by donors or families of donors and, in some cases, have had to give the collections back!"

Mark Rodriguez, chief deputy director at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, says the Newhall facility "captures a portion of history, especially in the Los Angeles basin and the West Coast. It has a lot of meaning as to how Los Angeles developed in the initial years of Hollywood."

Many early Westerns were filmed near the villa in the Santa Clarita Valley's rugged hills, dotted with scrub brush and crawling with rattlesnakes. Memories of the real Wild West and Hollywood's version



Hart villa, above, houses Western art and heirlooms, including silver candy dish, below. Katherine Child, left, curatorial assistant at Museum of Natural History, paints ID number on table as part of inventory she is directing.



Hollywood until he retired to the Newhall ranch, where he died at 81.

About 50,000 people annually walk through the cool, spacious villa that Hart dubbed La Loma de Los Vientos, or Hill of the Winds. Some still visit because they adored Hart as a stern villain-turned hero who usually got the girl. But as the memory of his film aura fades, more visitors are lured by the fabulous collection of art and memorabilia.

Perhaps the museum's most famous painting, Russell's "Buffalo Hunt No. 14," hangs in the huge living room near a grizzly bear rug, a gift from Will Rogers. The Smithsonian Institute issued the painting's number to differentiate it from other paintings Russell did to commemorate buffalo hunts.

Bronzes by Frederic Remington and Charles Christadoro decorate the house's shelves and tables. Paintings and drawings by James Montgomery Flagg, who drew the famous military recruiting poster of Uncle Sam, are generously represented.

Hart's extensive weapons collection includes a Colt revolver once brandished by train robber Al Jennings, and an ax head photographed by Kit Carson. But there is an impostor in the collection: Hart thought that one of his revolvers belonged to Billy the Kid, but someone later traced the serial number and discovered that the gun was forged four months after the notorious outlaw died.

The Hart mansion is the only county-owned museum that makes do without curators. Since the staff from the county's Museum of Natural History departed in the 1960s, the museum has been under the jurisdiction of the county's Department of Parks and Recreation, which many agree has done its best under difficult circumstances.

"The parks department isn't set up to run a museum," explained Katherine Child, a curatorial assistant at the Museum of Natural History who has been directing an inventory of the museum's holdings. "They don't have people trained to take care of artifacts or identify artifacts."

John Weber, the park department's regional director, said his staff has tried hard to maintain the

of it are captured at the museum in signed photographs, letters and mementos from the likes of Wyatt Earp, Calamity Jane, Buffalo Bill and Will Rogers.

Hart was truly an urban cowboy. Born in New York, he started his career as a Shakespearean actor and didn't leave Broadway until he was 49. He made 70 cowboy movies during his Hollywood career. He lived in a large home on De Longpre Avenue in

# ART: County Takes Steps to Preserve Collection

Continued from Page 4

museum over the years and to follow the experts' suggestions.

"I think the county parks department has done an excellent job in that facility, given the resources we've had," he said.

And Norm Phillips, the park's recreational supervisor for the past year, has been taking crash courses in museum management. Phillips, the park's recreational supervisor, figures that he has almost learned enough about museums to qualify for a curator's job. "I've had to become the jack of all trades," he said.

## Volunteer Support Group

The Friends of Hart Park Museum, a group of supporters who have worried about the facility for years, believe that it is on the verge of a renaissance. It was the Friends who raised the money to hire consultant Buchel to assess the condition of the Hart collection, and the group has pressed county officials to devote more attention and resources to the museum.

"It's not the bright, busy place it used to be. But I have great hopes we'll be able to turn the corner and get it shaped up," said Jim Yaple of Newhall, the group's president.

As a first step, \$223,000 in county and state money has been invested in recent months in physical improvements at the villa, the ranch and bunkhouses, which were featured in Hart's Western potboilers. Security alarms have been installed, and climate control devices have been added to protect the buildings' contents.

The museum also might get back its curatorial staff.

Museum of Natural History officials, who would like to have the facility returned to their jurisdiction, have asked the Board of

Supervisors for \$358,000 in next year's budget to pay for a professional staff and supplies. A similar request for money, however, was turned down in 1986.

Supervisor Mike Antonovich, who supports revitalizing the museum, made his own pitch last year to raise funds for the Hart museum. He approached, among others, Hollywood cowboys Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, as well as the J. Paul Getty Museum. But all he got was an offer from Autry to showcase some of Hart's possessions in Autry's planned Western museum in Griffith Park.

Meanwhile, the Friends of Hart Museum have been raising funds and searching for museum tour guides. The group was able to match a \$2,500 donation from Aetna Life & Casualty to finance an inventory of the museum's holdings—a necessary first step toward documenting and preserving the collection.

## Time-Consuming Inventory

The inventory is a grueling, tedious exercise that began last month and, Child says, will require at least a year to complete.

So far, volunteers conducting the inventory have not made it out of the villa's dining room. They are measuring each crystal goblet, all the silverware and china, the rugs and each stick of furniture that Hart bought all at once before he moved here in 1928. The measurements and description of each item are jotted in a book, and every article is numbered in India ink.

Minor challenges have broken some of the monotony. A locked cabinet sent Phillips hunting through a box of the mansion's keys. (The cabinet contained a number of empty sacks.)

A photograph of Hart's favorite

horse, Fritz, at its 25th birthday party, set off a discussion about whether another animal in the picture should be described as a mule or a horse.

Navajo rugs are scattered in almost every room. It is one of the largest collections of Navajo rugs outside Hearst Castle, Phillips notes.

The care of the 67 rugs illustrates one of the subtler reasons for curators to take over the museum's reins. The Friends of Hart and the parks department have kept the museum clean, but Buchel, in her report, suggests that they went overboard.

The volunteer housekeepers planned to dry-clean the Navajo

rugs twice a year. But that regimen is too harsh on the valuable rugs, Buchel concluded, and cleanings should be limited to every five to 10 years—and then only if necessary. She advised the group to stop dusting the surfaces of paintings and to curtail polishing of the silverware.

The practice of displaying Indian clothing on hangers also was halted; the weight of the leather had caused rips along some seams. One of the damaged items, a Sioux dress decorated with elks' teeth and intricate beadwork, now lies on a couch in a bedroom once shared by Hart's two 190-pound Great Danes.

# After 40 Years, County Comes Through With TLC for W.S. Hart Museum

By LYNN O'SHAUGHNESSY, Times Staff Writer

When silent-film star William S. Hart bequeathed his Spanish villa and its surrounding 233-acre Newhall estate to Los Angeles County in 1946, the county had to fight in probate court for more than a decade to gain possession.

But over the years, the county's interest in the villa, which is filled with Hart's invaluable Western art and artifacts collection, waned. In the 1960s, during a county bureaucratic shuffle, the villa-turned-museum lost its curators,

Since then, some of the museum's artifacts have deteriorated to the point that county museum experts consider the vast collection's general condition to be only fair.

A cherished Charles Russell painting is beginning to buckle, and other oil paintings are bleeding. Beads that decorated ornate Indian clothing and other tribal treasures have been discovered on the floor. Hart's stockpile of Westerns shot on nitrate film is feared to be

deteriorating.

In a lengthy report last year, a consultant chided the county for being remiss in caring for Hart's heirlooms.

#### Others 'Taken to Task'

"The county has had possession of this fine collection for over 40 years, but has taken no real steps toward maintaining accountability for it," wrote Susan J. Buchel, a former curator with Scotty's Castle at Death Valley National Monu-

ment. "Other museums that have failed to maintain objects properly have been taken to task by donors or families of donors and, in some cases, have had to give the collections back!"

Mark Rodriguez, chief deputy director at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, says the Newhall facility "captures a portion of history, especially in the Los Angeles basin and the West Coast. It has a lot of meaning as to how Los Angeles developed in the

initial years of Hollywood."

Many early Westerns were filmed near the villa in the Santa Clarita Valley's rugged hills, dotted with scrub brush and crawling with rattlesnakes. Memories of the real Wild West and Hollywood's version of it are captured at the museum in signed photographs, letters and mementos from the likes of Wyatt Earp, Calamity Jane, Buffalo Bill and Will Rogers.

Hart was truly an urban cowboy. Born in New York, he started his

career as a Shakespearean actor and didn't leave Broadway until he was 49. He made 70 cowboy movies during his Hollywood career. He lived in a large home on De Longpre Avenue in Hollywood until he retired to the Newhall ranch, where he died at 81.

About 50,000 people annually walk through the cool, spacious villa that Hart dubbed La Loma de Los Vientos, or Hill of the Winds. Some still visit because they adored Hart as a stern villain-turned hero

who usually got the girl. But as the memory of his film aura fades, more visitors are lured by the fabulous collection of art and memorabilia.

Perhaps the museum's most famous painting, Russell's "Buffalo Hunt No. 14," hangs in the huge living room near a grizzly bear rug, a gift from Will Rogers. The Smithsonian Institution issued the painting's number to differentiate it from other paintings Russell did to commemorate buffalo hunts.

Bronzes by Frederic Remington and Charles Christodoro decorate the house's shelves and tables. Paintings and drawings by James Montgomery Flagg, who drew the famous military recruiting poster of Uncle Sam, are generously represented.

Hart's extensive weapons collection includes a Colt revolver once brandished by train robber Al Jennings, and an ax head autographed by Kit Carson. But there is an impostor in the collection: Hart thought that one of his revolvers belonged to Billy the Kid, but someone later traced the serial number and discovered that the gun was forged four months after the notorious outlaw died.

The Hart mansion is the only county-owned museum that makes do without curators. Since the staff from the county's Museum of Natural History departed in the 1960s, the museum has been under the jurisdiction of the county's Department of Parks and Recreation, which many agree has done its best under difficult circumstances.

"The parks department isn't set up to run a museum," explained Katherine Child, a curatorial assistant at the Museum of Natural History who has been directing an inventory of the museum's holdings. "They don't have people trained to take care of artifacts or identify artifacts."

John Weber, the park department's regional director, said his staff has tried hard to maintain the museum over the years and to follow the experts' suggestions.

"I think the county parks department has done an excellent job in that facility, given the resources we've had," he said.

And Norm Phillips, the park's recreational supervisor for the past year, has been taking crash courses in museum management. Phillips, the park's recreational supervisor, figures that he has almost learned enough about museums to qualify for a curator's job. "I've had to become the jack of all trades," he said.

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# Museum Collection Registered

The William S. Hart Park Museum began registering its collection in April under the Museum Appraisal Program.

This first in-depth inventory by the museum will help to aid in restoring and preserving priceless art, furnishings and historic artifacts donated by Hart.

A grant for the appraisal program was awarded in May 1986 to the Friends of Hart Park Museum, a non-profit volunteer group, by the National Institute of Museum Services.

The Friends have also secured the services of Kathryn Child, a curator from the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, to supervise the program and train volunteers.

According to Childs, completion of the project will require eight to ten volunteers working three hours per work for up to a year.

"We can allow some flexibility in scheduling volunteer time," said Childs. "For example, someone could work for three hours each week for a few months, or as long as it takes to complete one room of the museum."

Maureen Focht, a member of the Friends of Hart Park Museum's Board of Directors, is chairing the \$30,000 fundraising campaign for

the project.

To date, a \$2500 start-up grant from the Aetna Insurance Company has been matched by the Museum.

"William Hart left to the care and enjoyment of the people of Los Angeles County a collection of personal treasures and important works of art," said Focht. "The appraisal program is the first opportunity we've had to restore and preserve this sorely neglected legacy."

"The contribution of time as a volunteer and donations to underwrite the expenses of the project are ways of insuring that generations to come will benefit from the park and museum."

William S. Hart, the first star of silent screen westerns, built a magnificent retirement estate on 260 acres in Newhall. He lived there from 1928 until his death in 1946, stipulating in his will that his property and belongings be maintained as a public park by the County of Los Angeles.

"While I was making pictures, the people gave me their nickles, dimes and quarters," said Hart. "When I am gone I want them to have my home."

Hart's Spanish/Mexican-style home, which contains the original furnishings, historical indian artifacts, movie memorabilia and an impressive collection of paintings,

prints and sculpture by such renowned artists as Charles M. Russell, Frederick Remington, C.C. Cristadoro, James Montgomery Flagg, Joe De Young, A.P. Proctor, Charles Schreyvogel, Clarence Ellsworth and Gene Hoback, was officially dedicated the William S. Hart County Park in September 1958.

The museum is open from 10 a.m. to one hour before sunset, Wednesday through Sunday. Tours are available every 15 minutes from 10 a.m. to noon, and from 1 to 4:30 p.m. There is no charge.

Further information about volunteer work may be obtained by calling Maureen Focht at 297-0307. Donations to the Museum Appraisal Program may be sent to: Friends of Hart Park Museum, P.O. Box 418, Newhall, 91322.



Treasure Neglected 25 Years

# 'Friends' Give Hart Park Museum Some Tender Loving Care

By Ruth Marks  
Signal Staff Writer

What do you do with a treasure that has been neglected for 25 years?

Why, you gather together a committee of friends and give it a lot of tender loving care, that's what.

And that is just what the Friends of Hart Park Museum in Newhall are doing with the millions of dollars worth of art and artifacts left behind by silent film star William S. Hart.

This spring a team of Santa Clarita Valley volunteers, working under the direction of Katherine Child, curatorial assistant at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, began the process of identifying each item in the house that Hart left to Los Angeles County when he died in 1946.

Everything — from bronzes, paintings and a gigantic bear rug in the living room, to pots and pans in the kitchen and clothes hanging in bedroom closets — is being meticulously identified.

While much of the inventory will consist of ordinary household goods, there are some remarkable treasures.

Museums throughout the world would envy Hart's examples of paintings and sculpture by famed Western artists Frederick Remington and Charles Russell and illustrator James Montgomery Flagg.

The cataloging is a slow, time-consuming process. After three and a half months they are only about a quarter of the way through the house, Child said. She estimates that it will take the dozen or so volunteers, working six hours every Tuesday, at least a year to complete the project.

It was more than a love of antiques that prompted the Friends to undertake the \$30,000 project, said past president Jim Yaple.

It seems that since 1962, the year county museum officials turned over control of the site to the Parks and Recreation Department, virtually nothing has been touched.

"We'll be the first ones to tell you that we don't have museum expertise," admitted Norm Philips, recreation services supervisor at the park.

Consequently, without professional guidance, no one really knew what to do with the money raised by the Friends until Yaple arranged for a museum assessment grant.

From Susan Buchel, a curator on loan from Scotty's Castle in Death Valley, he learned that they should first conduct a "registration," the museum term for an inventory.

Through the efforts of the Friends' new president, Maureen Focht, Aetna Insurance Company contributed \$2500. The Friends matched the grant, arranged for Child to oversee the project, and registration began.

The remaining \$25,000 needed, said Yaple, continues to trickle in from the county and community donations.

After the inventory is completed, the estate will be eligible for other government grants and consideration as a state historical landmark, which Friends members are counting on to put the museum "on the cultural map" in Southern California.

The museum is, of course, open to the public while the inventory is in progress.

Approximately 40,000 visitors a year pass through the rooms and hallways and up the impressive win-

ding stairway of the main house, built on what Hart used to call his "Horseshoe Ranch."

Led by docents, guests feast their eyes on Indian rugs, paintings, buffalo heads, antique furniture, props from Hart's stage and film career, and sculptures.

A particularly large statue of the old cowboy himself, with one gun drawn and the other on its way out of the holster, confronts the visitor at the top of the stairwell.

"If you stand in front of it, he looks like he's looking right at you and he's going to shoot you," said Child, who has had the opportunity to walk around and view it from all sides. "It's very realistic."

One upstairs showcase houses a collection of objects recently unearthed by volunteers searching through kitchen cupboards.

"In a box we found some things that had been donated to the museum by Iron Eyes Cody — several pairs of moccasins, part of his headress, and an autographed book," Child said.

What makes Hart's personal art collection unique is that a lot of his things were made by people he knew.

"He was a good friend of Charlie Russell," Child said. "They were getting started at the same time. Same with James Montgomery Flagg, who has a lot of paintings here, too. I don't think he bought any of them as an investment. These were his friends and he liked their work."

Walking through the house, one can't help but notice how well preserved everything is. This is surprising when you stop to think that it wasn't until 1986, 40 years after Hart died, that the county came up with \$180,000 to install an environmental control system and ultraviolet screening on the windows.

"Most of the stuff is in pretty good condition," Child agreed. "The fabrics and textiles probably suffered the most, just like they would in your own house."

Speaking of textiles, the day of The Signal's visit three volunteers sat on the living room floor, cheerfully struggling to poke needle and thread through the backs of thick Indian rugs.

They were attaching identification numbers written in India ink on cotton tape.

Why, they were asked, were they giving up their Tuesdays to work at the museum?

"My husband is an artist," said Linda McFadden of Canyon Country. "We both have an interest in Western art. I love Russell and Remington paintings."

Said Valencia resident Susan Blackburn, "We lived in New Mexico for several years, so I like Indian arts and crafts and Old West things."

"And I'm an antique freak," confessed Peggy Thompson of Newhall. "I read about this project in the paper and knew it was up my alley."

Once the inventory is completed, Yaple is hoping that Supervisor Mike Antonovich will have enough clout to persuade the county to provide a permanent, professional staff person for the Hart Park Museum.

"He's trying to drum up support for a budget," Yaple said. "The way the proposal is written, the County Museum of Natural History would take it over as a satellite museum. I realize that it might be way beyond the abilities of the county to provide, but I'm still in hopes that it will come to pass."

So are a lot of other people in the community.



Hart Museum workers sew inventory labels into the museum's large rug collection.



Photos by Patricia Robinson

Linda McFadden, Katherine Child from the Museum of Natural History, and Peggy Thomson work to identify and inventory all the items at the Hart Museum.

## True Friends

By Ruth Marks

True friends are one of life's greatest treasures.

And if William S. Hart could come back from the grave, he would find that he has a whole passel of them.

When the silent film star died in 1946, he left his Newhall estate to the County of Los Angeles with the stipulation that it be turned into a public museum. The county eventually carried out his wishes, and the first outsiders got a peek inside the mansion in 1958.

Along about 1981, a group of volunteers working as docents realized that someone needed to take a greater interest in the estate and its contents. A group called the Friends of Hart Park was formed, with Betty Pember as its founding president. She was followed by Jim Yapple in 1984, and about a month ago he was succeeded by Maureen Focht.

"The Friends is an organization of concerned citizens, I guess you could say, that are interested in the preservation of Hart Park and William S. Hart's personal belongings — his art collection, clothes, movie memorabilia, all that stuff," said Yapple.

Today the group is 250 strong, but a lot more members are needed, Focht said.

"I could use people who are experienced in fund raising, grant writing and art conservation procedures. I could also use docents and gift shop volunteers," she added.

Currently, the Friends' biggest project is to inventory each and every item in the estate. They brought in Katherine Child, curatorial assistant from the Los

Angeles County Museum of Natural History, to orchestrate the year-long, \$30,000 effort.

Once it is finished, the Friends will have a better feel for which things have the most urgent restorative needs. At stake are such marvels as paintings by well-known artists Frederic Remington and Charlie Russell, and sculptures by Charles Cristadoro.



Photo by: Pete Schulte

The Friends of Hart Park volunteers work diligently to register Hart artifacts.

For 25 years these items have sat as Hart left them, unattended except for an occasional dusting. In 1962 the county museum turned the Hart collection and estate over to the Parks and Recreation Department, which had neither the expertise nor the funds to properly care for the art pieces.

The Friends are hoping all of this will change, once the

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## Friends

*Continued from Page 62*

inventory is completed. They should then be able to apply for grants and attract the attention of trained professionals.

In the meantime, there are other activities occupying members' talents, such as the docent program and the soon-to-open gift shop.

About 25 men and women volunteer for the docent program. They wear western costumes and provide guided tours for the 40,000 visitors who come through the museum every year.

New docents are needed all the time, and no previous experience is required. Individuals are, of course, thoroughly trained before being asked to lead a group. Anyone interested in the Old West and American Indian artifacts is urged to call Norm Phillips, park recreation services supervisor, at 259-0855.

The plans for a gift shop are also well underway. Anyone caring to volunteer their services here should also contact Phillips.

To date, the Friends have probably spent \$10,000 on Hart Park, Yapple said. "We've cleaned and repaired a few of the Navajo rugs, and provided water troughs and feeders for some of the animal pens. We also put in new carpeting in all the areas where the public goes through the mansion.

"We've done a lot of little things, like rebuild vacuum cleaners and rewire lamps, things that don't show but need to be done.

"The Park Department is the bug on the windshield of progress for half of this stuff, though, as far as I'm concerned. You bring a problem to their attention and it'll come up again in five years, if they haven't forgotten about it."

The group's first president, Pember, agreed that working with the county requires an extra measure of patience. "When you work with public agencies, things are always a little slow," she said. "I know Jim has a bloody forehead from bouncing against the wall, but then I had the same problem. Fortunately, I think we can see that things are coming along nicely now."

Despite slow progress, the Friends has a large and loyal following. "That's because members know what we have here," Pember said, referring to the Hart treasures. "They know it's important. And they are very aware, very farsighted."

Rather than be intimidated by the past, newly-elected Friends president Focht sees all of this as a grand challenge. She is already hard at work. Her goals are to get a professional museum staff member to oversee the collection, and to work more closely with community members and county officials to get the ball rolling in all directions.

One thing she wants to do is boost membership. "You can join for only \$10," she said. Other memberships are also available for \$25, \$50, \$100, \$250 and \$500.

"But local people should realize that we don't just want their money, we want their interest. Referrals. Spreading the word.

"We have a treasure that's been neglected. A lot of people don't even know what's up there. It's kind of like a big secret that has to be let out of the bag."

The Friends hold regular meetings on the fourth Tuesday of every month, 7:30 a.m., at the Senior Citizen's Center on Market Street.

"Anybody who has an interest is invited to come," Focht said.

For more information about the group and its activities, one may reach her at 296-9610.

## New Collections Manager: A Child at Hart

By Ruth Marks  
Signal Staff Writer

If patience is as virtuous as they claim, the folks at Hart Park should be sitting at the right hand of God by now.

For nearly a decade they have been asking the county for a museum professional to oversee the Hart mansion and its contents.

Help finally arrived last Tuesday, in the form of Katherine Child. She became collections manager for the Hart Park Museum on the first of September.

Child, 29, is no stranger to anyone connected with William S. Hart's hilltop home and its valuables. She has been on loan from the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History since March, one day a week, helping a cadre of local volunteers identify and tag the silent film star's belongings.

"It's exciting to be up here for this new period in the park's history," said Child, who will be moving from West Los Angeles to Canyon Country this weekend. "Things are really starting to happen now. It's a good time for the park."

Child, who remains an employee of the Natural History Museum, is well prepared for her new fulltime position. She has a master's degree in history from UC Riverside, specializing in cultural resources management. "It provided specific training for museum and historic site work," she said.

While earning her degree she worked at Riverside's Mission Inn, participating in an inventory project similar to the one now taking place at Hart Park.

After graduation Child went to work for the Natural History Museum, in its historic records section, cataloging manuscript and ephemeral collections.

"Her work here was very good," said Janet Fireman, assistant chief curator of the museum. "We're actually

sorry that she won't be here, but glad that she'll be at Hart Park."

Fireman said that they also hope to add a curator to the park's museum staff within a year, "but that'll depend on our funding capabilities."

If the county had all the money it needed, what kind of a staff would Fireman eventually like to see at Hart Park?

"Three or four historians, a collection manager, two or three curators, education specialists, and specialists in exhibit technique and design," she said, warming to the subject.

All of that for such a little place? "Oh well, it's such a fantastic place, you know," she said. "We would like to have it as a satellite museum."

The Natural History Museum already has one full satellite, the Paige Museum in Hancock Park. El Dorado Park in Long Beach is a partial satellite, and Hart Park is under consideration as a third member of its retinue.

Meanwhile, back to business as usual.

Child is planning to expand the one-day-a-week inventory, or "registration" as it's called in museum terms, to twice a week. Anyone who enjoys careful detail work and is interested in the Old West is encouraged to call the park at 259-0855 and become a volunteer.

And now, after nearly a decade of delays, how does everyone at Hart Park feel about having a flesh-and-blood museum person on staff?

"We are really excited about it because the docents and the Friends (of Hart Park) have come to us many times asking how they could fix something, and we just didn't know," said Norm Phillips, recreation services supervisor for the park.

"Katherine's a big plus."



Photo by Patricia Robinson

Katherine Child works on inventory at Hart Museum.

# Hart Museum Acquires Curator

The William S. Hart Park Museum recently acquired its first curator, Katherine Child, who was appointed to the position of Collections Manager for the 29-year-old estate.

For the past three years, Child has worked for the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, which is run by the county along with the Hart museum, and since March 1987 she has supervised the Hart Park Museum's first registration program.

The announcement was made by Dr. Craig Black, Director of the Natural History Museum. "Katherine's contributions to the Natural History Museum has been invaluable," said Black. "We are pleased to acknowledge her outstanding work, for us and for the Hart Park Museum, with a much-deserved promotion."

Mark Rodriguez, chief deputy director of the Natural History Museum, commented on the ongoing relationship between the two museums. "The long-awaited establishment of a Collections Manager position at the Hart Park Museum is not possible without the cooperation of the Parks and Recreation Department. We also are deeply grateful to county Supervisor Michael Antonovich, whose persistence and dedication resulted in securing the funds necessary to support the staff position. Initially, the funding is provided by the county, but future funding will include private sector support as well."

"Katherine's appointment marks a major turning point for the museum," comments Maureen Focht, the Friends of Hart Park and Museum's Board President. "She has worked tirelessly for us on the registration project, knows the collection and works extremely well with the volunteers. She is perfect for the job!" she continued. "On behalf of the entire Friends organization, I want to express our appreciation to the Natural History Museum for sharing Katherine with us since

April and now for the gift of her services on a full-time basis."

Child served as Curatorial Assistant and Collections Manager for the History Division of the Natural History Museum. Last March she was assigned to the Hart Park Museum as consultant on the museum's first complete registration program.

Child has been "on loan" from the Natural History Museum one day a week, implementing the inventory of the entire contents of the estate and supervising up to 10 volunteers in registration procedures.

In her new position, Child will continue the registration project, which is scheduled for completion in the spring. At that time she plans to develop an overall conservation program. The condition of all specimens will be stabilized by providing proper display techniques and using proper storage procedures.

In addition, in-house resources

will be developed to handle the minor treatment problems. Major treatment needs for the collection will be analyzed in order of priority and then dealt with accordingly.

In honor of Child's appointment, the Board of Trustees of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles is sponsoring a reception on October 10 for the Friends of Hart Parks Museum's Board of Directors. According to Rodriguez, "We want to show our support for the Hart Park Museum and become acquainted with the hard-working members of the Friends organization."

## 'Under New Management'



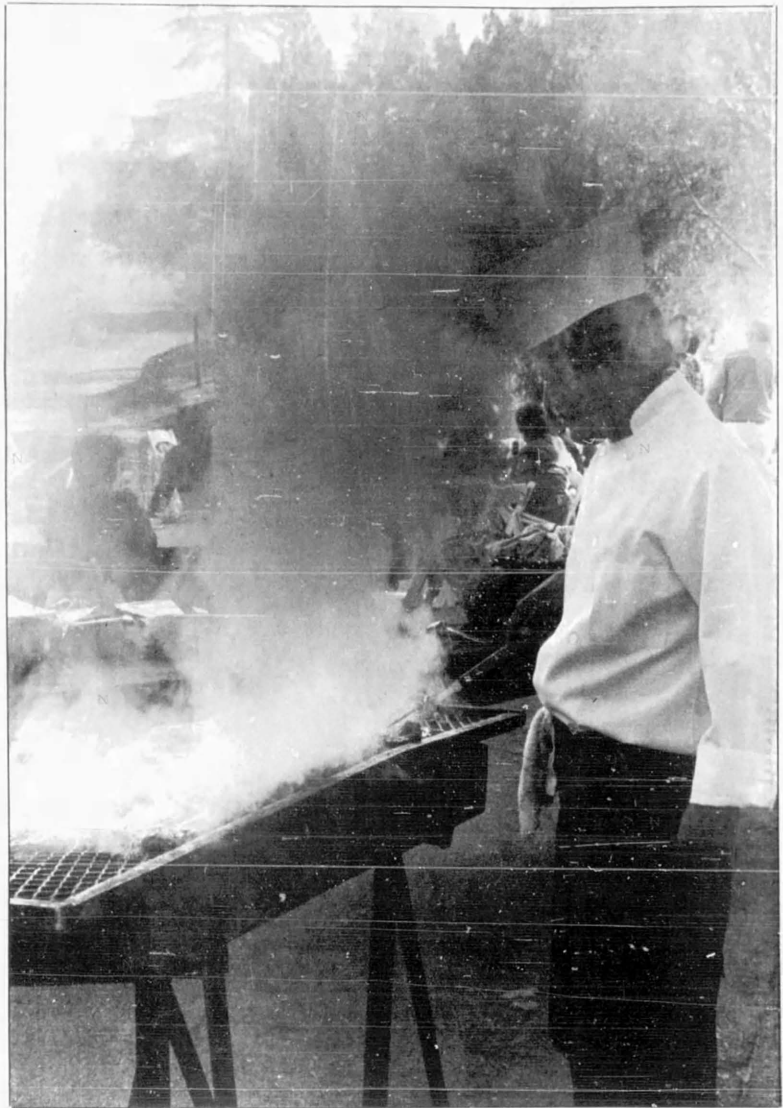
The Los Angeles County Natural History Museum has taken over management of the Hart museum at Hart Park. A reception was held Saturday to celebrate and welcome the new arrangement. Board members,

volunteer docents, the natural history museum's board of trustees and Friends of Hart Park were invited to meet each other and enjoy an afternoon barbecue to the accompanying music of a country band.



Guests heard brief speeches by the director of the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, Dr. Craig Black, and the director of the Los Angeles County Parks And Recreation

Department, Ralph Cryder, during the afternoon reception. Above, Dr. Black talks to local residents Cynthia Neal-Harris and Betty Pember.



Photos by Patricia Robinson

The barbecue provided an opportunity to welcome the new resources and expertise offered by commitment of the natural history museum's management. The present staff consists of one full-time and one part-time

employee, with tours given by volunteer docents from the Friends of Hart Park. Previously the museum was staffed solely by volunteers. The change was official as of Sept. 1.

# Carrying Away History



Photo by John Green

Workers from the County Museum of Natural History cart out William S. Hart's papers for use at the downtown museum.

## William S. Hart's Papers Moved To Downtown County Museum

Continued from Page 1

Duncan fears that because Hart's papers have not been inventoried, items from Hart's belongings could be lost.

"Some of Hart's valuables were removed (by the county) some time ago because they thought they'd be safer," said Duncan. "Now they're gone."

Said Chaput, "We have Hart's

jewelry collection. It's in my vault."

"I think there are good reasons and good intentions for moving the papers," said Katherine Child, Hart Park's collection manager. "They'll be well cared for — they just won't be here."

Child, a curatorial assistant for the downtown museum, is supervising the first comprehen-

sive inventory of the Hart Mansion's collection of western art and memorabilia.

In a Dec. 7 letter to the Department of Parks and Recreation, Chaput said his department will store the papers in the Seaver Center for Western History Research at the museum.

He said the papers will be professionally organized for the first

time, and that they'll be available to historians, journalists and other researchers.

"They feel they can take better care of these things," said Child. "The papers will be available by appointment to anyone who can make a reasonable case to see them."

Although Child said she doesn't feel there is anything morally or ethically wrong with the decision to move the papers, she would rather see the collection remain intact and stay where they are — inside the Hart Mansion.

But Chaput feels it's more important to integrate the papers with the rest of the downtown museum's western research material.

"I'm very enthusiastic about this," he said. "I think we're taking the right approach."

Chaput emphasized that the Hart Mansion does not belong to Newhall or the city of Santa Clarita — it belongs to Los Angeles County.

He said there will be more trips to retrieve material from the Hart Mansion, adding that "it's all part of a larger picture."



## Actor Hart's Papers Removed by County

By John Green  
Signal Staff Writer

Personal papers belonging to the late William S. Hart are being methodically removed from the cowboy actor's Newhall mansion.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History sent two of their workers yesterday to retrieve six boxes of personal correspondence, manuscripts, and newspaper and magazine clippings.

"We feel Hart's papers are best housed, organized and utilized here with our western history collection," said Donald Chaput, chief curator of history for the downtown museum.

But Sylvia Duncan, collections

feel very strongly about keeping these things here as the will states."

A section of Hart's last will and testament, dated June 27, 1946, reads: "The museum property shall be maintained in its present

# Hart's Papers Center Of Custody Dispute

By John Green  
Signal Staff Writer

The continued removal of artifacts from the Hart Mansion by the county has angered — and confused — the park's local support group.

The Friends of Hart Park feel that approximately 88 boxes of William S. Hart's personal papers should be returned to the cowboy actor's final home — the Newhall mansion he willed to the county.

"The community just won't tolerate the removal of these things without their being returned to the mansion," said Maureen Focht, president of the group.

The cowboy actor died in 1946. Boxes of his personal correspondence, scrap books, press clippings, manuscripts and more have been removed by the Museum of Natural History over the past two months. The items are being stored at the museum's

Seaver Center for Western History Research.

But much of the dilemma, said Focht, rests with the conflicting statements that emanate from the downtown museum.

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## Museum Takes Hart Papers

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Donald Chaput, chief curator of history at the museum, said the museum will not return the thousands of paper artifacts it has removed. He said the papers are best housed at the downtown museum where they can be properly cared for.

Janet Fireman, assistant chief curator of history, agreed, adding that the items that have been removed have no exhibit value and can be best utilized when included with the rest of the research center's material.

But the museum's chief deputy director, Mark Rodriguez, said all the items that have been removed will eventually be returned to the Hart Mansion.

"What Rodriguez is saying is not happening," said Focht, who added that because Chaput has been so involved with the project, people tend to think his word is official.

In addition to the questionable return of Hart's papers, Focht fears that the items removed will somehow be lost amid the bureaucracy that is the county of Los Angeles.

Focht pointed to the theft of more than \$16,000 worth of Hart gold, silver and china from a museum warehouse in 1982 as an example. The theft remains unsolved and the items have never been recovered.

"We didn't want these things (the paper items) to be removed in the first place," she said. "They've had things down there for years that shouldn't be there."

Some of Hart's jewelry and firearms have been locked in a museum vault for years, said Focht, despite repeated and unsuccessful plans to put them on display.

"The element of trust is just not there," she added. "In the beginning we were told that everything being taken was for restoration

purposes only and that they would be returned."

Chaput said most of the items that have been removed were found in closets and were never on display at the mansion.

"The material is useless unless it's being used," he said. "And it should only be used if it's properly organized and understood. We're doing that now."

By adding Hart's papers to the volumes of material from the same period already contained at the research center, added Chaput, "it makes Hart an even bigger man than he was by allowing us to look at him from a lot of different angles."

Chaput also said that the conditions that Hart's papers were stored under was an important factor in the museum's decision to move them to a "proper facility" like the Seaver Center.

"We're not blaming any particular agency," he said. "But the point is that for 30 years the papers have been without professional custodial care. This (the Seaver Center) is a leading

Western manuscript and rare book depository and we can give the collection the focus it deserves."

Focht's greatest fear is that the removal of the paper items is simply a prelude to a more ambitious project — the removal of rare and valuable art work from the Hart Mansion.

Chaput said they have no plans to remove art work that is on display at the mansion, but added that the Friends of Hart Park has no legal mandate regarding the items in the house.

"They are speaking, acting and thinking as if they were trustees with governing authority," said Fireman. "They have no governing authority and exist only to support Hart Park."

Focht said that despite the confusion and the mixed signals she hopes the future of the Hart collection will be resolved soon.

"This whole thing is based on solid professional considerations by an awful lot of people," added Chaput. "We're convinced we're doing the right thing."

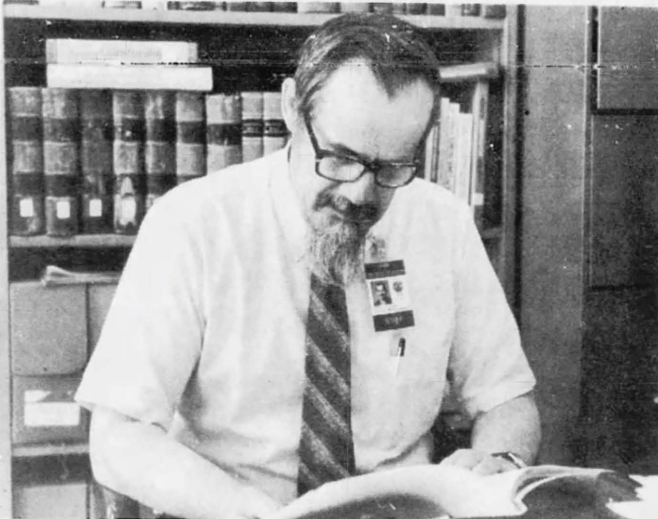


Photo by Gary Thornhill

Curator Donald Chaput in his downtown museum office.



WICKS

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**BEFORE**

NATURAL HISTORY  
MUSEUM REMOVED  
ARTIFACTS FROM  
HART MANSION



**AFTER**

NATURAL HISTORY  
MUSEUM REMOVED  
ARTIFACTS FROM  
HART MANSION

# Letters to the Editor

## BONE PICKERS

### Editor

The Museum of Natural History's carrion beetles are picking at the bones, removing all the meat, leaving just a skeleton.

I have become highly concerned about the removal of "behind the scenes" data from the Hart Park Museum. I have been a volunteer docent at the park for over five years and realize the valuable items the home contains.

I am also a director of the Friends of Hart Park and have a very deep interest in all the historical data contained within.

I was in favor of the Museum of Natural History taking over the operation of the park as the Parks and Recreation Department really lacks the knowledge, expertise and money to fully conserve the collection.

When the museum took over, they, in the words of their director, Dr. Craig Black, would administer, maintain and preserve the collection. Since "taking over" things have changed.

The Natural History Museum previously operated the Hart Museum from 1947 through 1962. During this time, guns, jewelry and other unknown items were removed from the collection and stored but not displayed.

It was assumed that they had taken all the things that they considered of great value. (We intend to make continuing efforts to have those items returned.)

Instead, the "Friends" received a letter describing how removal of certain items would be accomplished after complete registration, which is in pro-

gress. Prior to registration of certain items, the museum people started systematic removal of them.

First, just cancelled checks were removed, then on the next trip ledgers, and on the third trip all the scrapbooks. Now, plans are being made to remove all the photographs in the immediate future.

While it is true that these items were not on display, they have been used for research by the docents and many museums and authors writing articles, including people from the Smithsonian Institute.

People doing research have remarked on the psychological feeling that came from working within the great man's home and having all his data in the immediate location.

When the museum offered to make Hart Park a satellite museum, it was assumed they would not remove, but enhance the collection by returning the items taken and keeping all of Hart's memorabilia at the park.

This removal of items seems not unlike what was about to happen at the Southwest Museum when they backed out of the deal to become a satellite museum. If the removal continues, as is planned, all his clothes and the remaining research items will be gone and the museum will be an empty shell.

No longer can I tell people on a tour, "If Mr. Hart returned today, he could go to the bureau and take out his shirts and go to the closet and put on his suit." In the future, I'm afraid Mr. Hart would be standing naked with just his boots and hat. (Mr. Matthews' letter arrived on the editor's desk moments after Wicks' cartoon was completed — Editor)

When you have all the history of a man within a museum it should remain and research should be done on site and not transferred and lost among all the other historical items in the extensive Seaver Center.

As a volunteer, I have nothing but praise for the other areas of the museum. There are now two full-time staff plus one part-time worker. A van and driver are going to be available in the immediate future. We have a fine rapport with the other people who have been sent from the museum to help us expand our docent group.

I feel as though the history curator is primarily interested in acquiring more items for the basic museum when he should be enhancing the collections in the satellite museum. A statement has been made that the volunteers and local people feel as though they own and control the collection.

We know the collection belongs to the people and the people's understanding of William S. Hart would be best served by having all his memorabilia in one location and that is at the William S. Hart Park Museum.

**Frank Matthews**  
Director, Friends of Hart Park  
Newhall

The Signal welcomes Letters to the Editor, which should be addressed:

The Signal  
P.O. Box 877  
Newhall, Calif. 91322

Letters must include the name, address, and telephone number of the writer, and must be signed. Unsigned letters will not be published. Names will be withheld only if there is a compelling reason to do so.

# Museum Disputes Settled

**The Friends of Hart Park and county museum officials agreed yesterday to meet regularly to resolve disputes over the removal of artifacts from the William S. Hart Museum.**

Local members of the Friends of Hart Park and Museum were alarmed when workers for the County Natural History Museum recently removed dozens of boxes of historical papers.

Hart Friends president Maureen Focht and others expressed concern that the materials would not be returned or would be misplaced by the county.

"It was just a matter of poor communication," said Focht after yesterday's meeting at the Hart museum.

"At future meetings they (the county) will provide information on where everything is at."

The county and the Hart group formed a committee yesterday to keep local residents informed of the county's cataloguing and preservation activities.

Focht had accused the county of spiriting materials away, with no plan to return them. Under county management, historical items had fallen into disrepair and others disappeared.

But the angry rhetoric from

Focht and others was quieted after yesterday's meeting, which she described as "amiable" and "positive."

The materials would be better preserved and catalogued at the county natural history museum, she concluded. The artifacts will eventually be returned, said Mark Rodriguez, a deputy director of the natural history museum.

"What are we going to do, let the stuff sit up here and rot?" Focht asked.

Other members of the Hart group remained unconvinced of the county's preservation efforts.

Frank Matthews continued to object to the county's removal of any artifacts.

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## Museum Agreement

*Continued from Page 1*

"There have been suspicions of the county, but in this case there's not really a problem," said Jo Anne Darcy, City Council member and aide to Supervisor Mike Antonovich.

The county provided \$75,000 to catalogue the materials, which will help ensure their preservation, she said.

Materials from the Hart museum will be included in

historical displays at the Natural History museum.

Hart is important to western U.S. history and historical research should not be limited to his local Newhall retirement home, said downtown museum curator Donald Chaput.

In addition to their explanations of the cataloguing of Hart's papers, county officials told of future plans for a Hart Museum visitors center and possibly a local research center.