



# NEWSLETTER of the Carpinteria Valley Historical Society

[www.carpinteriahistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.carpinteriahistoricalmuseum.org)

Editor/Publisher: David W. Griggs

September/October 2014

Associate Editor: Roxie Grant Lapidus

## CALENDAR

**September 18—Thursday**  
**Field Trip to Autry**  
**Museum of the West**  
**8:00 a.m. - 5:00 P.M.**



**September 24 -**  
**Wednesday**  
**Board of Trustees**  
**Meeting—6:00 PM**



**September 27—Saturday**  
**Museum Marketplace**  
**8:00 am - 3:00 PM**



**October 18—Saturday**  
**55th Annual Meeting**  
**Potluck luncheon 12:30PM**  
**Meeting 2:00 PM**



**October 25—Saturday**  
**Museum Marketplace**  
**8:00 am - 3:00PM**



**November 29—Saturday**  
**34th Annual**  
**HOLIDAY FAIRE**  
**10:00 am - 3:00 PM**



## VALLEY HISTORY

### Springs of Pitch - Part II

#### The Asphalt Deposits of the Carpinteria Valley

by David W. Griggs

---

*We continue with part-two of the history of asphalt mining  
and use in the Carpinteria Valley.*

---

The decline of the Las Conchas asphalt mine and Alcatraz Refinery shortly after the turn of the last century has variously been reported as due to the competition of a more inexpensively produced product mined in Chile; the use of cheaper petroleum refinery by-products (residuum oil) from the Summerland oil fields (rather unlikely as paving would still require rock asphalt); and the “discovery of great deposits (of asphalt) more easily handled at a point up the coast that caused the abandonment of the workings here.” This, too, doesn’t make much sense as the established mine and refinery had a spur linking it directly with the Southern Pacific Railroad’s main line, or the product could be shipped by sea from the nearby Smith Bros. wharf at Serena, near Summerland.

Highly probable was that the deposit had, for the most part, been exhausted on the land leased by the Alcatraz Asphalt Company. Bear in mind that during this period of time the west end of Carpinteria Valley was experiencing an oil boom at Summerland, and this had prompted much wild-cat drilling and speculation throughout the vicinity. Mineral rights were closely guarded by landowners and leased to the highest bidder. Asphalt was profitable, but oil was black gold. Possibly unable to expand, the asphalt mine was abandoned around 1903.

One quarter mile east of the Las Conchas Mine on the adjoining Higgins property, P.C. Higgins had dug a well in 1894 which was 4' x 6' and 354 feet deep, but no oil was encountered. A few years later "a well was sunk in the shale at the edge of the bluff about one-fourth mile east of the asphalt mine. Heavy oil was struck, but it was too viscous for pumping and the well was abandoned."



*The P.C. Higgins well produced extremely heavy crude oil, more of a liquid asphaltum.* Museum archives photo.

In October of 1906 it was reported that "the most important and deepest well (near Carpinteria) is that of the Columbia Oil and Asphalt company, located on the north side of the railroad one-half mile east of the asphalt mine (on the Higgins tract) ... It is about 3,000 feet deep, and encounters artesian water ... at 100 to 150 feet, asphaltum at 1,200 to 1,400 feet and oil in the lower 100 feet (at 2,900 foot depth). The oil in the sump is black and heavy ... (and) production of the well is probably not large."

Eventually, oil exploration in this area of the valley was abandoned and attention again returned to asphalt. In 1909 Andrew Sattler, a former

manager of the Alcatraz Refinery, re-opened the old Las Conchas Mine to supply local paving materials to the County Roads Department. This was to mark the beginning of a second era of asphalt mining in Carpinteria that would span another twenty-five years. But instead of shipping the product across the country, as was done originally, the new operation would strictly supply local demand.

At this time the lease on the old Las Conchas Mine and the Refinery was held by the Guarantee Oil Co. By 1911, an unnamed third party sought to buy the lease for \$25,000 in an attempt to monopolize the supply of asphalt and thus be able to set the price in the lucrative County Roads Dept. contract. This was done after "prospecting" on the Higgins Ranch, "on which it was rumored there were other deposits of bituminous sandstone," and finding nothing.

But the County Supervisors relied on other information as reported in the *Carpinteria Valley News* on March 15, 1912: "... the Supervisors, who knew exactly what they were doing, made their lease of the Higgins property which the 'expert' had declared valueless, and opened up the bed eleven feet thick and extending under twenty acres. It was the tact and generalship of the Supervisors that in this manner saved the County about \$2 a ton on asphalt. The lease which the parties who wanted to hold up the County was not recorded, and now with the reversion of the property to the owners the whole matter is closed." Also closed was the old Las Conchas Mine, which later filled with rain, run-off, and sea water to become a brackish lake and a popular duck-hunting area.

Andrew Sattler became Superintendent of the new Higgins Mine, which was rapidly expanding, fueled by the County's demand for materials to finish paving roads west of Santa Barbara in the Goleta Valley. Demand would soon double with the passage of a Highway Bonds Measure by the residents of the Carpinteria Valley to fund the paving of the Coast Highway through the area. This period of asphalt mining and road construction reached a frantic pace, and was watched with great interest by the citizenry. It is best chronicled by using short excerpts from the *Carpinteria Valley News*:

#### NEW ASPHALT MINE June 14, 1912

A. Sattler is now working six men on the Higgins asphalt mine. The first (rail) car, shipped last week, was of high grade material and went to the Golita

[sic] roads. This material put on properly prepared roads will last a decade and more. This is the statement made by the ones who have made the test.

#### A-1 ASPHALT July 5, 1912

J. H. Price of San Francisco is recognized as the authority on asphalt. He had been to Carpinteria to examine the deposit at the Higgins mine. He declares it to be the best there is. There are other large and excellent deposits in the state but this is of the highest grade. The bed is practically inexhaustible. Thirty-five tons a day are required for the Goleta roads, and Superintendent Sattler is kept busy with his shipping crew.



*George "Bert" McLean photographed workers at the Higgins Mine in 1912. Much more asphalt could be moved via full-sized railroad flat cars loaded by steamshovel verses the small ore carts on narrow tracks that had been used at the Las Conchas Mine. Note the box furnace in the lower left used to heat the cutting spades. Museum archives photo.*

#### GOLETA HAS GRIEVANCE July 12, 1912

Goleta residents have a grievance with the Southern Pacific Railroad over the freight rates on asphaltum. The company charges \$1.25 to haul asphaltum from Carpinteria to Goleta and 70 cents to haul crushed rock from Los Angeles to Goleta. The company's explanation that it is a difference in classification does not satisfy the Goleta road boosters.

#### GOOD ROADS ASSURED July 26, 1912

Saturday was a great day in the Carpinteria Valley. The bonds for good roads carried with only one dissenting vote. Under this bond issue at the least nine and a tenth miles of pavement will be laid. The western starting point is the top of Ortega Hill beyond Summerland. The paved strip is to be sixteen feet wide and so thick that it will last for many years, since the native bituminous sandstone from the Higgins mine is to be used. This material

has no equal for durability. It is close at hand and can be put on the ground at comparatively small cost. The total cost of the improvements will be \$85,000.

#### A WONDERFUL MINE August 16, 1912

A. Sattler is rapidly transforming the level grain field to a well developed mine on the bluffs at the Higgins

ranch. Twenty men are now at work while twenty-seven were busy last week. One car a day, or fifty tons, are being shipped now to the Goleta road district where the asphalt is being used in the construction of the public highway. Men are at work at the ocean end blasting off the top of the asphalt with its upper crust. After the first layer is removed it becomes impossible to use

blasting material with any success since the native substance is too soft. The purpose is to open the bed from the end by the ocean and work inland along the deep trench instead of by means of the deep shaft as at present. It is estimated that the men will do twenty percent more work if they can act in the cut where the sea breeze comes than in the pit which is hot and ill ventilated. The cut will be over three hundred feet in length. The depth will be about twenty-five feet.

#### CARPINTERIA ROAD WORK IS LET

September 6, 1912

The Santa Barbara Paving and Grading company was this afternoon awarded the contract for extended paving in Carpinteria for which the Permanent Road District there recently bonded itself for \$50,000. The company's bid was \$78,940.

## THINKS ASPHALT PAVING WELL DONE September 20, 1912

A. Sattler, superintendent of the Higgins asphalt mine, is a man of wide experience in handling and laying asphalt pavement. A representative of the *News* asked his opinion on a recent day as to the durability and workmanlike manner in laying the present asphalt pavements over the county and especially in Goleta. Mr. Sattler said, "I do not believe the criticism of the new road work is well founded. It is impossible to lay the foundations for such roads in all kinds of soil such as are encountered without having places that will sink down or be wavy. It is always necessary to tear up and relay such places here and there before the work is counted finished."

## NEW MIXING PLANT September 27, 1912

The latest development at the Higgins asphalt mine is a mixing plant. This will turn out the paving material all ready to be laid. Something like five thousand dollars will be spent in the plant which is separate from the mining operations. The necessary rock will be crushed here, and there is an abundant supply of sand along the shore. A great saving will be made by using all the material so conveniently at hand and turning out a finished product. It is the plan to abandon all shipments by rail and employ teams to do the hauling. The new plant will employ about thirty men. This will mean between fifty and sixty men all told at work at the mine.

## AT THE ASPHALT MINE October 18, 1912

There is great activity at the asphalt mine. The mixing plant is being put in shape for business. It is the plan to pave the roadway from the mine to the highway so as to facilitate the hauling of material and also as a test of material. It is likely that the work of the coast highway may begin at this end so as to have pavement for the hauling of material to the farthest end.

## AT THE ASPHALT MINE November 22, 1912

On Monday, the first asphalt was put down and the actual paving begun on the Coast highway. At the Higgins asphalt mine great preparations have been made to handle large quantities of the native product. A second hoisting crane is being installed, the first being insufficient to handle the material

now demanded. The cut is being widened about twenty feet. This makes the gash in the breast of mother earth about one hundred feet in width. The bottom of the strata of asphalt has been reached in the pit where it runs from ten to twenty feet thick. Last week Manager Sattler worked twenty-two men. This week the force is about doubled.

At the mixing plant, which stands just west of the mine, the machinery has been put in good running order. Rock has been hauled from the foothills near the Thurmond place not far from the Carpinteria school house. A little later it is expected that the tides will bring in great quantities of small boulders which will be used. Material will still be shipped to Goleta at the rate of about fifty-five tons a day, and the same amount of material will be used here. This will make a daily output of over a hundred tons a day from the mine.



The paving of the Coast Highway from Ortega Hill to Rincon Point was completed by June 1913, but work on other county roads would continue to utilize asphalt from the Higgins mine for the next two decades. The hot mixture plant which produced the actual paving material was eventually moved from the mine site to Santa Monica and Foothill Roads, perhaps to be close to the source of the crushed rock, it being easier to haul asphalt than sandstone boulders. A number of oral histories from the museum's collection describe this facility and process:

**Joe Goena** in 1991 recalled: "... (The hot plant was located where) Santa Monica runs into Foothill Road and that road that goes up to Fithian (Ranch), right in the corner, that's where they had those burners, and they had the rock crusher, and Pete Jimenez' house was right there—right next to it!"

**Frank Floyd** in 1991, remembered the rock crushing operation (when it was moved to Toro Canyon and Torito Roads) and the hot mixture plant at Santa Monica Road: "They had a group of men ... they could split rock. In those days they had rock hammers, points and wedges, and they also used dynamite. They broke all them big boulders up into various sizes—not more than a cubic foot in size—enough to throw into this rock crusher. It was a great, huge, big one-cylinder gas engine, and it had a

belt that ran from the gas engine over here to this crusher. The crusher had two big steel jaws and these jaws would go back and forth—they didn't move very much—but just back and forth, and we'd throw these big chunks of rock in there and it would just crush 'em right up. They crushed all their rock right there in Toro Canyon and they hauled it down here to Foothill and Santa Monica Road and they had a duplication of the torpedoes that they used to have down here at the asphalt pit (Higgins Mine).

"... (The torpedoes) had a furnace underneath them, gas furnace or oil, first it was oil and water and air. And they'd fire those torpedoes and they'd put the asphalt in, they'd put the rock in, they'd put the sand in, and mix it all up—just like you'd be making pancake batter. They used that for a long, long time in surfacing roads."

### Barney Church

described the mixing "torpedoes" in a 1988 interview: "(The torpedoes that heated the asphalt/gravel/oil

mixture were) 8' x 10' in diameter and about 20x30 feet long. And they kept turning it over and they heated it up with gas fire. There was two of them. We used to take half (the asphalt) out of one, and half out of the other. So in other words, you didn't take all of it, didn't take all the heat out of one torpedo because it took too long to heat it up. It had to be in there for at least 3/4 of an hour in order for it come up to temperature so that they could lay it out and roll it. ...We had a temperature (gauge). Laurie Doerr, he was in charge of that. Before it came out he would have a thermometer, and I can't remember how hot it had to be, but I remember he used to put the thermometer in there, and when it began to get a little cold, we had to put the cover back on and let it warm up more.

"(The asphalt came) from on the Higgins place, below the railroad tracks, where the Standard Oil is now. And that's where at one time

they used to have the dump. In the middle thirties, is when they found it wasn't too productive or too economical. They could make it cheaper (elsewhere) than what they could here and so they gave up."

**Geraldine Franklin Dunlap**, in 1979, recounted the paving of the local roads: "I can remember about the time they were putting the roads in here, it did come from the asphalt back of Higgins. And, of course, slowly the roads were paved those days. It's amazing, how they were. This hot asphalt would be pulled in with two mules, sometimes there were four to a wagon, and (the wagons) held such small

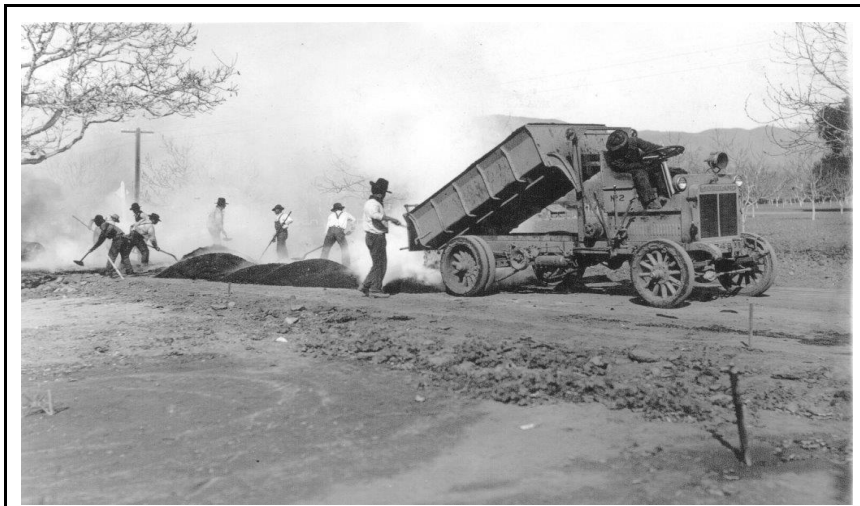
amounts, and they would be let out at the bottom (of the wagon) this small little pile of hot asphalt. And then men with sacks on their feet and long-sided rollers would hand-roll it out.

"And I can remember when they were paving down here in front of Casitas Pass (Road), Jo and I were coming home from (Rincon)

school, both of us on our little mule, riding. And that mule decided that she didn't like being at the side of the road, and of course we would stay on our side, we'd crossed up higher. But she just took it in her head and took the bit in her teeth, and down the center of the road we went, with the men yelling and cursing us. I don't blame them. But for months those hoof marks still stayed in the road from our stubborn little mule."



The feeling of the people of the valley during this period is rather poetically expressed by an article which appeared with a huge headline on the front page of the *Carpinteria Valley News* on March 7, 1913: "The asphalt roads in the Carpinteria valley represent much thought, energy and effort on the part of many men, but most of all they stand as a lasting testimonial to the tenacity, foresight, knowledge and



Paving of the Coast Highway through Carpinteria walnut groves in 1912. Photo by George "Bert" McLean. Museum archive photo.

practical ability of one Supervisor. Most any man can dream of great achievement, but it is the exceptional man who changes the moonshine of dreams into stubborn abiding facts. Where the Padres went on foot, and the pioneers went on horseback, we go in gliding automobile. They would go by devious trail among live oaks, we skim the asphalt pavement between orchard and grove. If the transition had come in a day we would have believed it the work of a magician."

After the closing of the mine in the mid-1930's, the sprawling open pit became the County Dump for the area until the mid-1950's. Terry Bliss remembered "...an old guy in a little trailer at the entrance. For 50 cents a load, you could throw anything in there. They burned it off every day." The site has since been filled in, and much of it paved over in the 1960s for the Standard Oil (now Venoco) parking lot at the foot of the pier, which is accessed by the appropriately named 'Dump Road.' A rather ignominious end for such a unique and historically rich site.

But fortunately this is not the end of the tale, as the area's important history was eventually recognized when on September 27, 1993, the Carpinteria City Council unanimously approved a proposal by our Historical Society, with the recommendation by the Santa Barbara County Historical Landmarks Advisory Committee, to declare the area between the Casitas Pier and Carpinteria Creek, south of the railroad tracks, City Historical Landmark #6. Most of this area is now known as Tar Pits Park on land donated by Chevron Oil Co. to the City of Carpinteria.

After declaring this an official city landmark, the parks department installed interpretive signs along meandering trails which detail the fascinating history of the *Pleistocene* fossils found; the native use of asphaltum by the Chumash and the naming of "La Carpinteria"; and the asphalt mining industry which spanned 60 years and provided the world with the highest quality asphalt known.

*Editor's note: This article was originally published in The Grapevine a generation ago in 1993, and is revised and reprinted here to share with a whole new audience the fascinating history of Carpinteria's historically important asphalt deposits. The museum currently has on view a special exhibit on the asphalt deposits, including Pleistocene fossils, many Chumash artifacts utilizing asphalt, and text and photos outlining the mining history, including the only known iron asphalt cutting spade known to exist!*



## MUSEUM NEWS

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

**We sincerely appreciate** the many ways in which the membership supports the work of the Society and Museum throughout the year by attending fund-raising events, contributing items to these benefits, and generously donating to the Memorial Fund.

**Now is the time to reaffirm** your commitment to the preservation of Carpinteria Valley's cultural heritage by renewing your membership in the Society. You should have received your renewal notice recently by mail. Those of you who have joined the Society and Museum within the last five months will not receive a notice as your new membership is good through the 2014-2015 year, which runs from October 1 through September 30 (as does our fiscal year).

**You can be proud** of your association with the Society and the creation of our beautiful museum. Each increase in the level of your membership will further assist us in providing educational and cultural opportunities for you, your family, and the community.

**A prompt response** to our request to renew your commitment to historical preservation will also save us the expense of mailing reminder notices, allowing those funds to work for their intended purpose.

**We truly value** your membership and thank you for your loyal support. ♥

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We wish to extend a warm welcome to our newest members of the last several months:

**Steve Bunting**  
**Rachel Edwards**  
**Nilo Fanucchi**  
**Bobbie Faoro**  
**Edward "Bud" Girard**  
**Doris E. Hanny**  
**Cynthia McAlexander**  
**Donnie Nair**  
**Ellen Robinson**  
**Carol Shamblin**  
**Janet Shaw**  
**Holly Vanderwulp**



## FALL MARKETPLACE

Our Fall Museum Marketplace will be held **Saturday, September 27 from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** on the museum grounds. Nearly all 75 spaces have been reserved by the eclectic mix of vendors that make this event such a treasure hunter's paradise.



Vendor Vita White's tables overflow with vintage treasures at a previous Museum Marketplace. File photo.

**Tax-deductible donations** of your used items for the museum's rummage tables increase the revenue generated by this monthly benefit. The markets consistently raise from \$2,500 to over \$3,000 per month to help cover museum operating expenses. Donations are accepted any time prior to the day of the market and are greatly appreciated. *Thank you* to our many donors. Admission to the Marketplace is always free! The **last market** of the year will be held **October 25.** 🍷

## 55TH ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING & POTLUCK LUNCHEON

The Annual Meeting of the Historical Society membership will take place **Saturday, October 18.** We will begin with a **potluck luncheon at 12:30 p.m.** Next we will recognize the "Outstanding Volunteer of the Year." A brief business meeting will begin at 2:00 P.M. Membership will elect trustees to the board and receive the annual report of the Society and Museum.

**Also on the agenda** is the dedication of recent additions to the Donor & Memorial tile wall. Tiles memorializing loved ones or recognizing the gifts of donors may be requested anytime during the year, with installation and dedication taking place at

the annual meeting. The \$500 per tile donation benefits museum programs.

**This year's meeting program** will be a presented by **John Avila**, Director and Instructor of the Agriculture Science and Technology Academy (ASTA) and FFA Advisor at Carpinteria High School. John's presentation is entitled *"Ag Time with Avila: Get in Touch with your Agricultural Roots; Without Agriculture there is No Culture."* John will examine the cultural history of agricultural society in Carpinteria, how the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program came to be because of this society, and the effect that agricultural societies have had on a global level. According to John, *"We have moved away from the land by forcing farmers to produce more food on smaller pieces of land than those they have had in the past. Our society has placed less emphasis on agriculture, and is no longer interested in how agricultural products (food, clothing, cut flowers, to name a few) are produced, so long as they are they're in the stores...(The) FFA (program) prepares our high school students for their career—especially those related to agriculture—and why it is so important that we promote agriculture. I often refer to my students as "Tomorrow's Leaders." One day they will be running the world, and when they do, they must be able to recognize the importance of agriculture in our society."*

**We ask members attending** the luncheon to bring either a main dish or a salad. The Society will provide table service, beverages, and dessert. Look for your invitations in the mail and please plan to attend this special event! 🍷

## MEMORIALS

**MIYEKO FUKASAWA:** Grace Young; Anita Lewis; Betty Popnoe; David & Annie Goodfield; Angelo & Marie Granaroli; Phyllis Hansen; Chuck Treloar; Shelly & Tom Turner; Bonnie Milne; Walter & Janet Johnson.

**PAT HALES GRIFFITH:** Lawrence & Joan Bailard.

**DONALD S. PINKHAM:** Angelo & Marie Granaroli.

**JOHN ROMERO:** Lawrence & Joan Bailard; Anita Lewis.

**NADINE WALSH:** Bonnie Milne; Grace Young; Mary Ota; Claire Roberts.

**CARL ZANGGER:** Anita Lewis.





# CARPINTERIA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

956 Maple Avenue • Carpinteria, California 93013 • (805) 684-3112

Address Service Requested

Non Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Santa Barbara, CA  
Permit No. 1016

- ☐ Please enroll me as a new member in the CVHS  
☐ Please renew my membership in CVHS

Check one:

- |                                             |        |                                           |        |
|---------------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> INDIVIDUAL.....    | 25.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> CORPORATE.....   | 150.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAMILY.....        | 35.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> BENEFACTOR. .... | 250.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CONTRIBUTING. .... | 50.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> LIFE .....       | 500.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PATRON. ....       | 100.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT. ....    | 15.00  |

- ☐ I have included an additional donation, in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt.# \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

*Please make checks payable to: Carpinteria Valley Historical Society or C.V.H.S.  
Contributions are tax deductible.*