



THE EUREKA REPORTER

[Print](#)

The Eureka Reporter/Diane M. Batley

Regional history specialist and tour operator Ray Hillman describes the architecture and history of the Buhne Building located at 213 G St. in Old Town.

Ray Hillman: Shedding light on Old Town's colorful past

by Diane M. Batley, 7/20/2005

Guess where Waterfront bar fights involving author Jack London, the second-largest all-wood building in California and where a shop's name inspired by a French sea captain are located?

All in Old Town Eureka, said regional history specialist and tour operator Ray Hillman while leading a group of locals on a walking and historical tour of some local points-of-interest on Saturday.

In 1910, author Jack London was visiting the Oberon Saloon, now known as Pacific Flavors. London loved waterfront districts and the characters who frequented them, Hillman said.

London and Stanwood Murphy, owner of The Pacific Lumber Co. had a political argument, Hillman said. A fight ensued

and they “fought it out ... and were taken to the hospital,” Hillman said. A framed letter now hanging in Pacific Flavors and written in 1966 tells the story by a person who witnessed the fight, Eureka resident W.J. “Hap” Waters.

Waters wrote that London, “a confirmed socialist,” and Murphy, “a conservative Republican” met in the Oberon in the spring of 1910.

“They argued over politics and they started throwing punches,” Waters wrote. “The bartenders locked the doors and they fought for over an hour. ... After the fight they were both in the hospital a couple of days licking their wounds. It happened on a warm Saturday evening, spring of 1910. I was there.”

The letter goes on to say that this incident was never published in the newspapers because of the “popularity and prestige of both gentlemen. ... Only those present were privileged to see the fight of the century. There was no radio or TV. It was a hush-hush affair.”

Hillman also told the group that the Vance Building is the second largest all-wood building in California. The largest is located in San Diego, he said.

The name of ice cream parlor Bon Boniere, which means “a very pretty candy container” in French, was the name inspired by a good customer, a French sea captain, Hillman said. The name was accidentally misspelled on the sign, because an “n” was left out of the word Boniere, he said.

Some other highlights of the tour included architectural information and history of the Buhne Building, the Carson Block Building and a trip inside the building to view the old Ingomar Theater and a visit to the oldest commercial building in Old Town, Buhne General Merchandise, which now houses the Maritime Museum and was built circa 1858.

Hillman, a San Francisco native, moved from Stockton to Eureka in 1986 when he accepted a job as the director/curator of the Clarke Museum.

He graduated from the University of California and received a degree in U.S. history in 1965 and a master’s degree in librarianship in 1967. He also earned a teaching minor focusing his studies on the history of the Western U.S.

The center of Old Town is now one of his classrooms, he said.

“I’m in my element up here with such a presence of the past,” Hillman said.

He also teaches at College of the Redwoods. This fall Hillman is teaching a class titled “Highlights of Humboldt History.”

Hillman owns Pride Enterprises Tours. The name has its roots in a river steamer that his great uncle worked for on the San Joaquin River, he said.

His repertoire of tours includes visits to Old Town, Redwood National Park, Avenue of the Giants, the Lost Coast, Ferndale, Hoopa and more.

“You can’t separate human history from natural history,” he said.

For more information or to book tours, phone (707) 445-2117.