Happenin’s 'Round the House

*Exploring the Real and Reel Outlaws and Lawmen*

#### by Museum *Education and Volunteer Coordinator*, Rachel Barnes

The Old West. Fade in on a ramshackled dilapidated main street with broken down store fronts and saddled horses tied to hitching posts. Cut to dashing lawman, lounging lazily on a creaky porch, sheriff's badge gleaming in the bright sun, wide-brimmed hat pulled down to shade the eyes... eyes you can't see but you can feel; you know that despite his noncommittal demeanor (he coolly and casually lights a cigarette while you watch), he is alert and poised, ready to defend his beaten town from even the slightest whiff of trouble.

Enter cocky, arrogant, and egotistical outlaw, strolling assuredly down the main street, gun hanging loosely on his hip, hat cocked to one side, and posse of drooling followers trailing eagerly behind, hootin' and hollerin' and shooting their guns at the sky.

Yeah, you know what happens next. Because this sounds just like a scene from a classic Bill Hart western film.

Actually it sounds like a scene from many a classic western film. The dashing lawman may have a famous name attached, like Wyatt Earp or Wild Bill Hickok. The cocky outlaw too – he could be somebody like Billy the Kid or Jesse James. But we still know how the story ends: big shootout, running and ducking and covering, bad guys dead, and good guys save the day.

Funny that real life is actually a dash more interesting. Because while this scenario above may be the classic shoot-out scene from a western film, the real life characters are far more complex than this movie makes them out to be.

Yep. Your dashing lawman there? If he was Wyatt Earp, then he was previously arrested for a recurring habit of visiting houses of ill repute, or if he was Wild Bill Hickok, then he shot and killed a friend in a dispute over a girl. If your outlaw was Billy the Kid, he was out to avenge the murder of his employer, or if he was Jesse James, he was avenging what he perceived as the wronged Confederacy by robbing Union-owned businesses.

Definitely a little more complicated than good versus evil, and as we all know, truth is far stranger than fiction. That’s why we explore this very concept at the Hart Museum’s next *Open House* on Thursday, April 24, 2014. If you’re visiting for the annual Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival, then you definitely won’t want to miss the chance to learn more about the lives and legacies of the Old West’s notorious outlaws and lawmen. Who were these guys, really? Why did they do what they did? And is the line between “outlaw” and “lawman” really that defined?

So be sure to come on by and check it out! You will also have the chance to wander through Bill Hart’s hilltop mansion at your own pace, enjoying his renowned collection of western artwork and Native American artifacts while you learn more about the men behind the names Wyatt Earp, Jesse James, Butch Cassidy, and so many others. *Open House: Outlaws and Marshals* runs from 10:00am – 3:00pm on Thursday, April 24, 2014, and the cost is completely free.

You can also check out the Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival website at [www.cowboyfestival.org](http://www.cowboyfestival.org/) for information on, and tickets for evening events being hosted inside the Hart Mansion!