



## City of San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society P.O. Box 875, San Bernardino, CA 92402

### **LIBRARY NEWS NOVEMBER 2011**

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

This month we present the third article by Mark Landis, freelance writer for the *San Bernardino Sun*. As in the case of the previous stories, this feature has pictures he submitted to the *Sun* that did not make it into the newspaper.

### **The Rise and Fall of The Stewart Hotel**

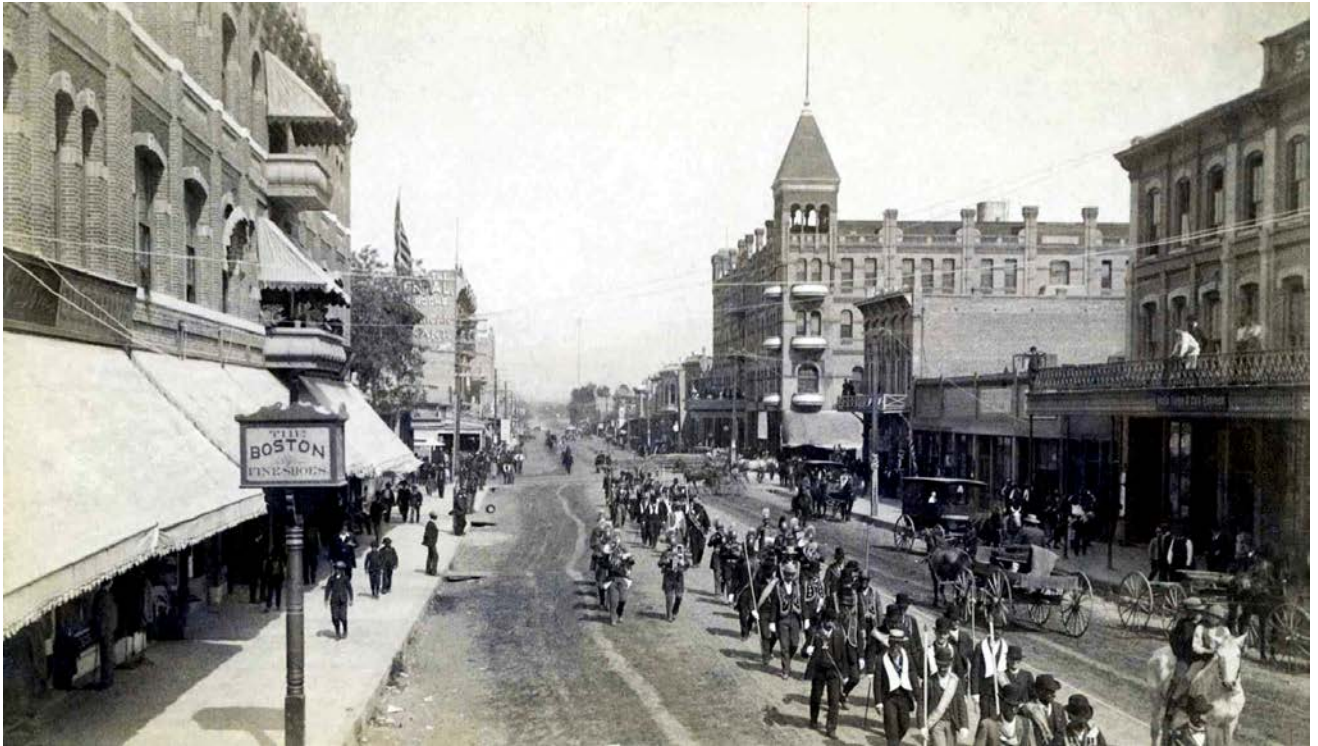
By Mark Landis, Correspondent

The magnificent Stewart Hotel in downtown San Bernardino was well-known as the city's finest accommodation, and for many years it was also considered the finest building in town. Built in 1887 at the corner of Third and E Streets at a cost of \$150,000, the Stewart became a local landmark and a source of great civic pride.



*Courtesy of San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society*

**Sketch of the first Stewart Hotel from 1890**



**Street view of the first Stewart Hotel**

In addition to the Stewart Hotel's prominence in the community, the building's unusual evolution provides an interesting chapter in San Bernardino's history.

The hotel's founder, John Henry Stewart, was a pioneer builder and prominent citizen of San Bernardino. Stewart was born April 28th, 1823, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, to Scotch immigrant parents. He was engaged in a variety of trades, and eventually became a successful businessman. In 1850, Stewart moved to California, and in 1856, he suffered a protracted illness which resulted in a permanent paralysis of his lower limbs.

Stewart moved to San Bernardino with his wife Martha and sons Clarence and Richard in 1865, and began developing commercial property there. He is credited with building the first commercial brick building in the city in 1867, at the corner of Third and D Streets.

In 1885, Stewart developed the plans and laid the foundation for the great Stewart Hotel. But before he could complete his landmark namesake, he was fatally injured in a carriage accident, and died on June 22nd, 1885. The hotel was completed in March of 1887 by John Stewart's son Richard, who also became a prominent businessman in San Bernardino.

In the distinctly blue-collar days of early San Bernardino, the Stewart Hotel became the heart of the town's modest slice of high society. The hotel was described in one publication as being "the leading hotel in San Bernardino and indeed with the single exception of the Hotel Del Coronado, it is the largest, most stylish and best managed house south of San Francisco."

The 4-story hotel had 150 rooms, and most were luxuriously furnished for the day. Many of the suites were specially adapted to families, with some even specially equipped for use by "invalids." Modern conveniences such as hot and cold water, electric lights, electric bells, and electric fire alarms were provided to the pampered guests.

There were several parlors in the hotel including an elegant parlor just for the ladies. The hotel had numerous “sample rooms” where salesmen could set up and display their products. The street-level first floor of the building housed a variety of businesses that could claim the prestigious “Stewart Block” as their address.

Perhaps the best-known amenity of the Stewart Hotel was its fine restaurant and first-class cuisine. White linen table clothes and elegant china provided the setting for meals cooked by chefs imported from fine restaurants around the world.

On November 5th, 1892, tragedy struck when a fireworks display from a political rally ignited the roof of the hotel. In spite of the heroic attempts by firefighters from all around the area, the Stewart Hotel and all the stores and offices located there were destroyed. There were numerous injuries to the firemen battling the blaze, but no deaths were reported. When the last of the flames were extinguished, a smoldering pile of rubble surrounded by a ghostly shell of walls was all that remained of the majestic hotel.

The loss of the city’s finest hotel struck a major blow to the heart of the business district. But the hotel’s investors wasted little time lamenting the loss, and by 1893, a new Stewart Hotel was erected at the same location.

The new 3-story, 100-room Stewart Hotel was described as “less costly” than the first structure, but it was “substantial and handsome” nonetheless. A domed turret and columnar entrance framed the Third and E Street corner of the stately building.



*From the collection of Mark Landis*

**The second Stewart Hotel, circa 1900.  
Note all the businesses located on the first floor of the building.**

The new hotel's management was determined to continue the Stewart's tradition of providing first-class accommodations and fine dining service. The San Bernardino *Daily Sun* provided a glowing description of the hotel in a 1901 feature article:

The house has 36 suites with private bath, each room has grate and mantel and in each and in every room of the hotel is a telephone and call bell. The appointments of the house are well nigh perfect.

The first floor housed several businesses including a bank, barber shop, cigar store, telegraph office, Santa Fe Railroad ticket office, café, and billiard parlor. On the second floor, you would find the ladies parlor, a large ballroom, and the dining room. The 1901 *Sun* article described the dining facilities:

Nowhere is the table of the Stewart excelled. Always supplied with every delicacy the market affords, his must indeed be a dainty appetite which cannot here be satisfied. In connection with the hotel is its own dairy. The butter for the house is manufactured from cream delivered every morning at the hotel. The milk and cream are abundant and delicious. From the hotel farm come every morning a choice supply of eggs, poultry and fruits.



**Stewart Hotel cigar store**

Around 1913, business was flourishing, and the hotel underwent a major addition. The domed turret was removed and a 4th floor with 40 new rooms was added to the structure. A large ornamental “ships wheel” crowned the corner of the building in place of the dome.

Tragedy struck the hotel once again when fire raced through the upper floors on Thanksgiving Day, November 28th, 1935. Spectators jammed the downtown area watching as firefighters made dozens of trips into the burning building to rescue guests. The blaze was contained to the Stewart Block and amazingly, the lower two floors were not destroyed.

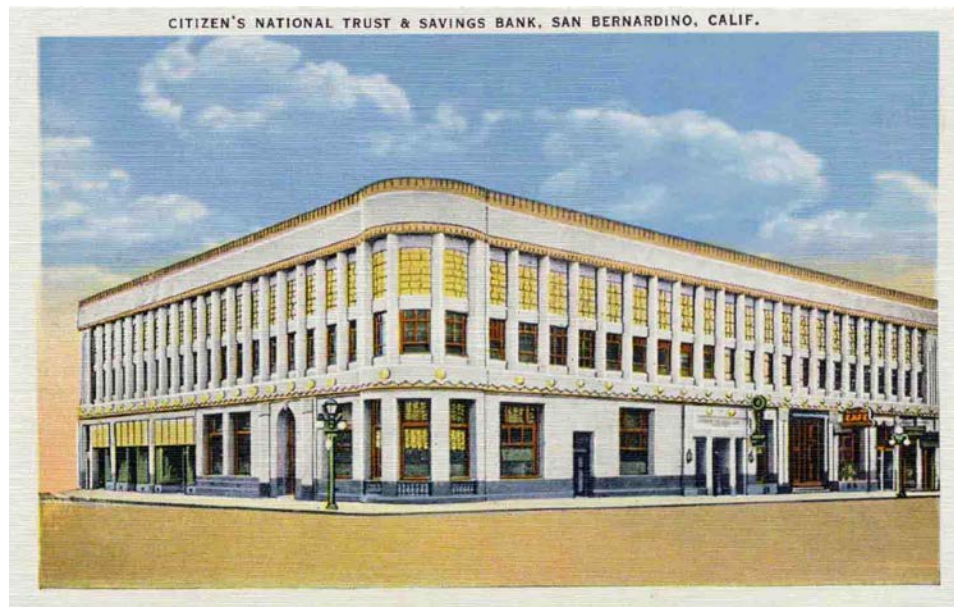


**Stewart Hotel fire in 1935**

On February 11th, 1936, the front page headline of the San Bernardino *Daily Sun* announced; “Citizens’ Bank Buys Stewart Block.” The bank, which had occupied the hotel’s first floor, purchased the property for \$100,000 and was developing plans to renovate the remaining two floors of the smoke and water damaged building.

According to the *Sun* article, Citizens’ Bank vice-president John C. Ralphs, Jr. (son of the famous John C. Ralphs, sheriff of San Bernardino County 1902-1915), stated, “The cost of remodeling of the structure may equal the price paid for the property.”

The remaining two stories of the old hotel building were remodeled with a more modern exterior and “business-type” construction. The Citizens’ Bank building, as it was then called, occupied the corner of Third and E Streets until it was demolished in 1967 to make way for the downtown redevelopment project.



*From the collection of Mark Landis*

**Postcard view, circa 1940, of the Citizens’ Bank Building  
after being rebuilt from the first two floors of the Stewart Hotel**

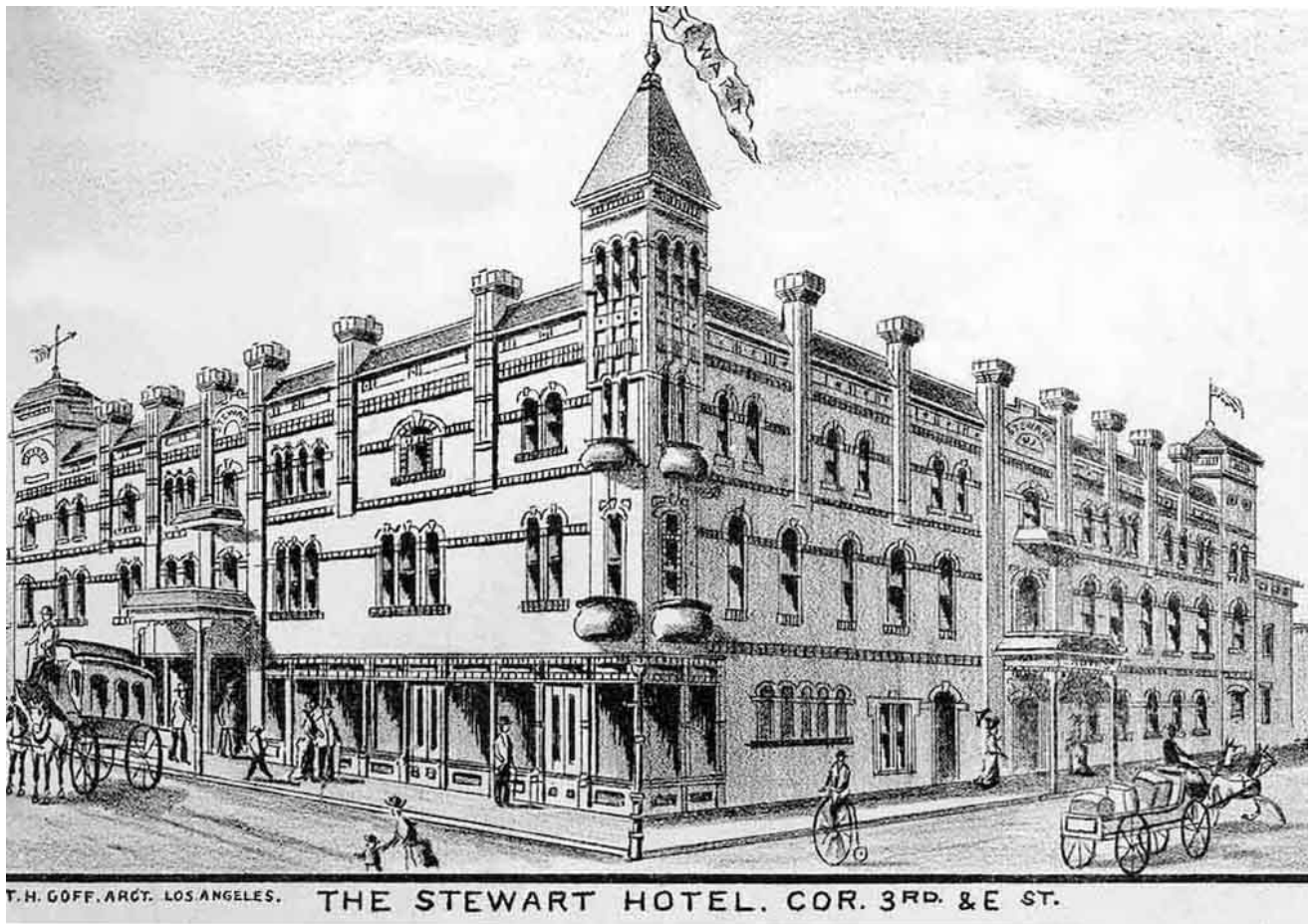
The site of the former Stewart Hotel is now occupied by the Clarion (formerly Radisson) Hotel and Convention Center on E Street.



## THE MYSTERY OF THE STEWART HOTEL DRAWING ON AN 1887 BIRD'S-EYE MAP OF SAN BERNARDINO

By Richard D. Thompson

Recently an issue arose over a drawing on a map (tentatively dated to 1887) that depicts the Stewart Hotel as a three-story building. Around the edge of the map are a few dozen enlarged drawings of some of the city's main structures, including public buildings, private business blocks, hotels, and residences. One of these is of the Stewart Hotel. The detail is very good, as can be seen below. When photographs of these structures are compared to the drawings, the latter prove to be accurate representations—except for the Stewart Hotel.



**Drawing on the 1887 bird's-eye map of San Bernardino shows a three-story building**

This drawing shows a Gothic Revival architecture design somewhat reminiscent of a medieval English castle. Note the towers at the corners, the sloping parapet walls, the battlements rising periodically and the arched windows. This looks like photographs of the 1887 structure (see page 94 above for an example), with one major exception: it is only three stories. The 1887 building was definitely four stories. After it burned down, it was replaced by the new three-story Stewart Hotel, but the architecture of the new building was decidedly different, as can be seen in the drawing below. An easily

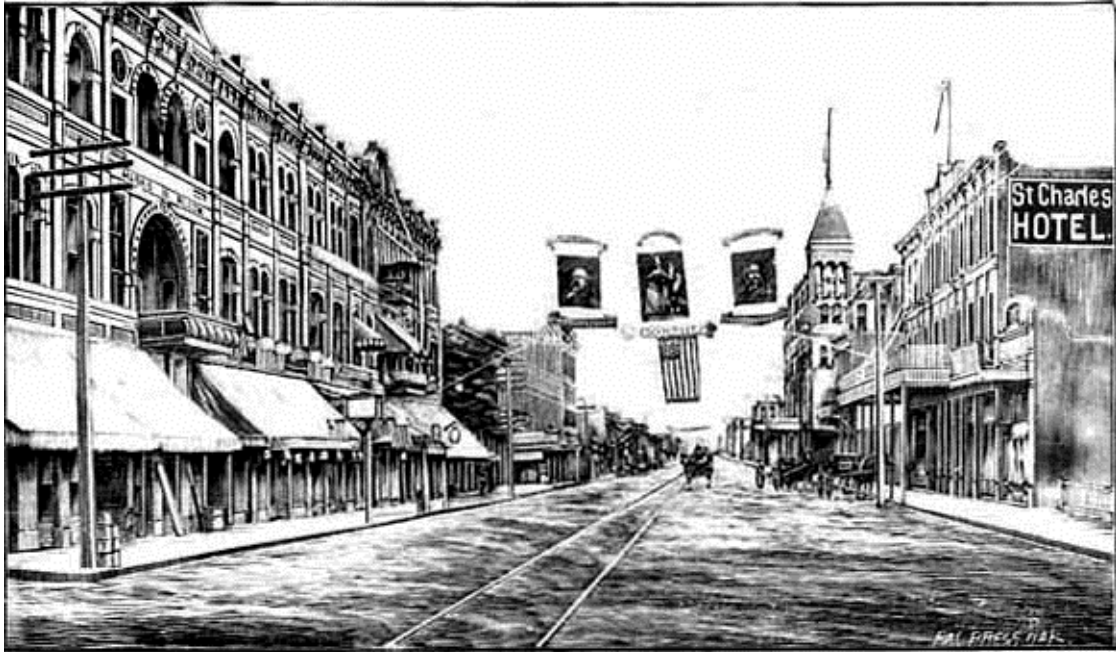
recognizable change was the main tower, which was square on the first Stewart Hotel, but rounded on its 1893 replacement. So why are all of the other structures so carefully drawn on the 1887 map and the one of the Stewart Hotel is missing an entire floor?



**Drawing of the second Stewart Hotel, built in 1893**

This mystery is resolved in Luther A. Ingersoll's book, *Century Annals of San Bernardino County* (page 379), which has a description of events surrounding the construction of the hotel. Pioneer builder John Henry Stewart began the project, but died in 1885 "before his plans were complete," according to Ingersoll. Just about this time the real estate market in Southern California started growing, and other San Bernardino businessmen saw the possibilities for profit and pride in building a first-class hotel in the city. A company was incorporated, with stock issued in the amount of \$100,000. However, the final cost of the Stewart Hotel was \$150,000, half again as much as originally planned by the investors, and it is likely that the stockholders, spurred by the boom years in San Bernardino, decided to build a larger structure than envisioned by Mr. Stewart.

In other words, architect T. H. Goff's three-story drawing that appeared on the map was Stewart's original design, but it was changed to four stories at some point preceding construction. Thus, the bird's-eye map view of the hotel was taken from Stewart's original plans. Drawings of different structures were also done on insurance maps of the era prepared by Sanborn Company. However, on the Sanborn maps a note was made indicating which structures were drawn from plans rather than photos, something the bird's-eye artist neglected to do.



THIRD STREET SCENE, SAN BERNARDINO.

This drawing from Edson D. Hale's 1888 book on San Bernardino shows a four-story Stewart Hotel (on right behind St. Charles Hotel)

In his 1888 book, *The County of San Bernardino, California, and its Principal City*, Edson Hale writes of the construction activity taking place in San Bernardino during his sojourn there. He said he wrote the text in July 1888, about six months after the Stewart Hotel was completed. He also mentions other structures that recently had been built. The drawing above is taken from his book and shows the finished hotel. It also shows the “new” St. Charles Hotel, the building on the left, and the “old” St. Charles, located on the right.

Based on the information known about these structures, it appears that the bird's-eye map of San Bernardino was drawn in early 1887.

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President Steve Shaw provided some of the photographs and drawings of the Stewart Hotel that were used in this month's articles. Many thanks, Steve.

**AUTHOR PHILIP D. NATHANSON, COLLECTOR OF PIONEER PHOTOGRAPHS,  
TO SPEAK BEFORE THE SOCIETY ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2011**

A number of requests have been received by the Society to have programs earlier in the day than the usual 7 p.m. at the monthly Thursday meetings. Author Philip D. Nathanson, a long-time collector of early Southern California photography, has agreed to provide a show at the meeting hall at 8th and D Streets at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 12, 2011. This will be one you do not want to miss, and admission is free, as usual.

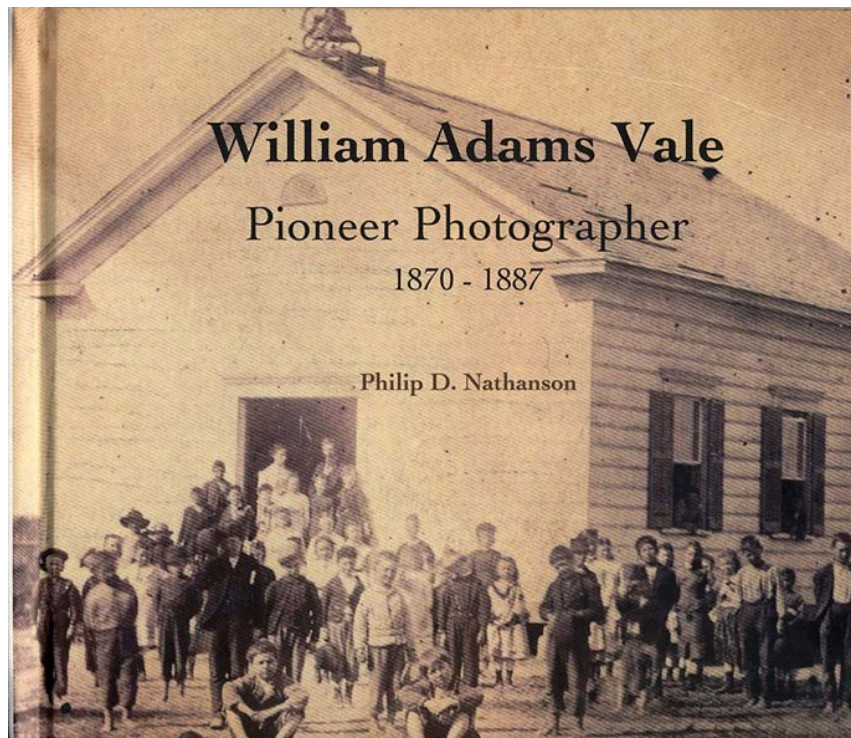
The title of the talk is “**Early Photography in Southern California from the Civil War to the Boom of the 1880s.**” Phil will be presenting a program that consists of:

1. A brief history of early photographic techniques and formats.
2. A discussion of early photographers residing in Southern California during the 1870s.



3. A presentation on the career of William Adams Vale, one of the first photographers residing in San Bernardino, who photographed both locally and along the wagon roads to San Diego and Los Angeles.

There will be a large-screen projection of numerous vintage photographs. Phil will also bring examples of daguerreotypes and other original early photographs that may be examined by attendees. He will have copies available of his newly published book, *William Adams Vale: Pioneer Photographer, 1870-1887*. These will be sold at a discount: hardcover \$35, and softcover \$25.



**Nathanson's book on Vale contains about 40 rare photographs, maps and other visuals, which will make this quite the collector's item**

The book is a large format, 8-1/4" x 9-3/4", so the photographs in the book are larger than the originals, which are either from *cartes de visite*, stereoscopes or glass slides. The Society made available to Nathanson some Vale photographs from its collection, and these have been used in his publication. This includes both the front and back cover photographs, and one facing the title page. We could not have received more prominent positioning in the book than this. Phil carefully credits the Society for each photo used. Some of the photos were provided by Steve Shaw, but he suggested that the Society be credited, as he has done on many other occasions.

Philip Nathanson has written a nice biography on William Adams Vale, which includes photographs of Vale, his wife, two daughters, and his brother. Join with us on Saturday, November 12th, at 1:00 p.m., for a very entertaining and informative afternoon.