Did you know that Phineas Banning’s three sons, William, Joseph and Hancock owned Catalina Island?

One hundred and twenty seven years ago, on January 30, 1892 the brothers purchased the Island from Mr. George Shatto and the James Lick Trust. They began at once to improve and remodel the Hotel Metropole, introduced water and sewer services and created an outdoor music and dance pavilion. The brothers, as island property owners, also began offering leases for various businesses which ranged from retail establishments, restaurants, hotels and tourist activities such as the glass bottom boat rides and stagecoach rides into the island’s interior.

By 1894, the popularity and success of the business endeavors at Avalon led to the formation of the Santa Catalina Island Company. This new Banning subsidiary placed all of the land holdings and management of the island businesses in the control of a Board of Directors. However, the Banning-owned Wilmington Transportation Company still provided the exclusive transportation services between the island and the mainland. With the new demands for travel to the island the WTC began improving their fleet of steamships in 1906 by adding the Warrior II, the Hermosa II and stately Cabrillo which boasted the ability to transport 1,200 passengers and complete the run to Avalon in one and a half hours. Having monopoly control of ocean transportation to the island was a major aspect of the brothers’ business model for this resort.

Two of the brothers, Joseph Brent Banning and Hancock Banning, also established homes on the island. In 1909, Joseph built a beautiful craftsman style home at the isthmus, and it is still there today as a bed and breakfast inn. Hancock built his Victorian Queen Anne style home at Descanso Canyon just west of Avalon and featured a formal garden on several acres. In 1917, this house was moved up into the canyon and converted to staff housing for the new St. Catherine Hotel built near the Descanso bay waterfront.

Continued on page 3
Cornstalk Fence Stands Tall and Proud With Your Help

Just in time to welcome our Wisteria Regale guests, the rare cast iron cornstalk fence around the home’s sunken terrace has received needed TLC and professional restoration by Smith Art Conservation LLC of Los Angeles. Originally cast in 1852, it is critical that this extraordinary fence receive the maintenance it needs to keep its striking beauty and structural integrity. With your support, we have been able to provide this vital upkeep. Thank you! Please be sure to check it out on your next visit to the Museum!

We have fantastic news to share with you. At the end of last year, we reached out to request support for purchasing new conservation forms, i.e. mannequins to be able to publicly display our fragile textile collection. Thanks to you, we not only raised the $9,000 needed to purchase five new mannequins, we actually raised $10,725! This will potentially allow us to purchase one extra form! Thank you so very much for coming through again when we needed your help. We will update you once the mannequins are purchased.

Wisteria Gets Deep Pruning in Preparation for Arbor Overhaul

Thank you to the City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks for pruning the century old Wisteria Vines in preparation for repair of the decaying arbor that supports it. Of course, it could be the Wisteria that is actually supporting the arbor! The process will take a number of weeks to complete but will be well worth it to ensure our historic Wisteria can once again display its beautiful blooms.
FOR OVER 23 YEARS, THE THREE BANNING BROTHERS WORKED TO CREATE A PARADISE GETAWAY that developed the barren landing at Avalon into a first class tourist destination for people all over the United States and the world. By 1915 there were hotels, paved streets, wireless telegraph service, luxurious steamship transportation, restaurants, incline railway, tent cities for camping, waterfront bathhouse and a wide range of outdoor activities that included deep sea fishing, hunting and horseback riding — all designed for the visitors. Unfortunately, all of that was lost in one night on November 29, 1915. A suspicious fire started just east of the Hotel Metropole and burned northwest taking approximately 2/3 of the town of Avalon. Miraculously no lives were lost in the blaze and rebuilding began almost immediately and by the summer of 1916 the island was ready for the annual tourist migration.

However, by 1919, the Santa Catalina Island Company was facing a staggering amount of debt associated with damages from the fire and the transportation monopoly business model was impossible to maintain. On February 13, 1919, it was announced that William Wrigley Jr. had purchased the island for $3,000,000 and he gained control of the Santa Catalina Island Company and the Wilmington Transportation Company. This marked the beginning of a new era of development and change on the Magic Isle which the Wrigley family continues today.

ON SATURDAY, MARCH 23, FRIENDS OF BANNING MUSEUM WILL HOST THE

WISTERIA REGALE
CATALINA
THE MAGIC ISLE

Celebrating the era that the Banning sons owned the Island from 1892-1919. PLEASE JOIN US for a most festive evening when you will be transported back in time to a period when frivolity, leisure and good times ruled the day!
Tea & Tunes Filled the Historic Barn With Beauty and Good Times

On February 9th, over one hundred guests joined us for the 14th Annual Tea & Tunes event where tea and champagne flowed freely, music filled the air and a delicious lunch was enjoyed by all. Many guests were new to the event this year and expressed their pleasant surprise as to how this tea was unlike any other they had attended especially in regard to the exquisite place settings of fine antique china and tea cups. No two tables looked the same, giving the event a unique flair and sophistication unmatched by others. We cannot say thank you enough to the Tea’s sponsors and creative force behind this one-of-a-kind event, The Sisters, Simie Seaman and Lana Hollis. Simie and Lana dedicate countless hours to designing and decorating for the Tea with their priceless collection of beautiful antiques and decor.

Thank You,
Simie and Lana!

Keeping History Alive Upcoming Lecture: June 22, 10:00 am
California Confederates: The Curious Tale of the Schooner J.M. Chapman and the Knights of the Golden Circle

While Phineas Banning was a staunch Unionist, the Los Angeles Anglo population at the time of the Civil War was 70 percent Southern Sympathizers. Come to our next Keeping History Alive lecture and hear about a fascinating plan these separatists launched. Author Michael White, who recently spoke in the Stagecoach Barn on “Shipwrecks Off the California Coast” will return with a new lecture, “California Confederates: The Curious Tale of the Schooner J.M. Chapman and the Knights of the Golden Circle.” The lecture will shine a light on the Civil War in Southern California.

In 1863, a group of California secessionists conspire to outfit a small schooner as a privateer, steal gold and silver shipments bound for the Union, and revitalize the increasingly cash-starved Confederacy. This lecture presented by Michael D. White, a vocational maritime and Civil War historian and researcher, will tell the true story of how their plot was hatched, discovered and thwarted.

Admission is FREE for Friends of Banning Museum Members and $5 at the door for Non-Members. To RSVP, please call (310) 548-2005.