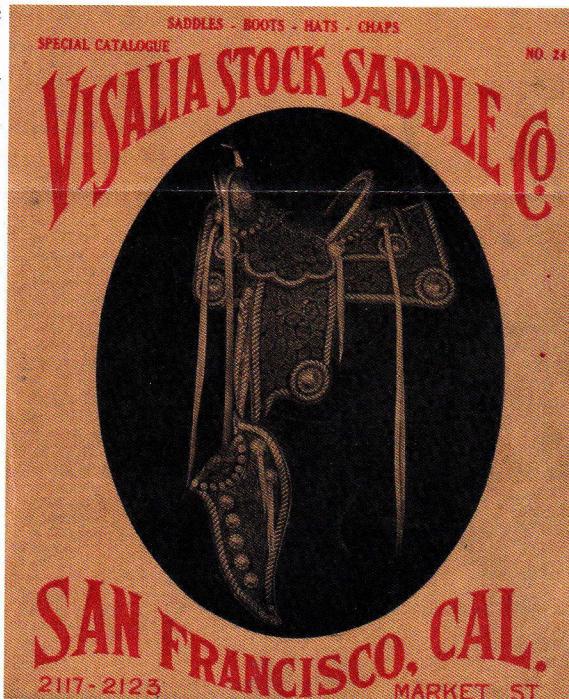


Carriage and Western Art Museum of Santa Barbara

Winter 2021

The Visalia Stock Saddle Co.

The Visalia Stock Saddle Company emerged in the 1870s as the vision of David E. Walker, better known as D. E. Walker, with the possibility of creating a thriving saddle and harness shop in California. Visalia California was a small town established in 1853 and the early growth in Visalia can be attributed in part to the gold rush along the Kern River. Gold fever brought many transient miners through Visalia along the way and when the lure of gold failed to materialize, many returned to Visalia to live their lives and raise families. In 1858 The Butterfield Overland Stage route passed through Visalia establishing it as a lasting town and businesses began to occupy Main street Visalia and not long after the Visalia Style Stock Saddle was opened. The shop was originally crafted by several men in the mid to late 19th century, the names associated with the development of this new stock saddle are Martorell, Salazar, Mattle, and Herrera. They were all friends supporting their families by repairing and making saddles in and around the Visalia area. Residing in Visalia these men were well versed in assembling this newly popular style of saddle, and they were all brought together by Walker to produce the "Visalia Saddle". The saddle trees were cut from native oak and carved in house and the leather was oak tanned. The silver work on saddles, spurs, bits, etc. was all done by Mr. Herrera and the saddles and tack were in every way, Visalia.



Visalia Catalog Cover 1934
Silsby Spalding's Visalia Supreme Saddle

The Visalia Times in the 1880s describes the shop "as the largest of its kind with saddles, bridles, spurs, bits, harness here displayed and of the best kind. The saddles are everywhere, being shipped to all parts of the country". In 1887 the shop relocated to San Francisco and here is where they truly adopted the Visalia name. It was William Weeks, partner to Walker who had the idea to name the shop Visalia Stock and Saddle Company. Weeks is credited with keeping the shop alive post bankruptcy, and the Visalia Shop saddle was the first saddle shop to reopen after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. The quake devastated the area and destroyed many buildings including the Main and Winchester saddle shop, which was the largest saddle shop in the area at the time, this was the end of Main and Winchester in the area and opened the door for the Visalia shop to thrive.

In the mid-20th century the shop was in a steady decline and was moved to Sacramento where a disastrous fire in the

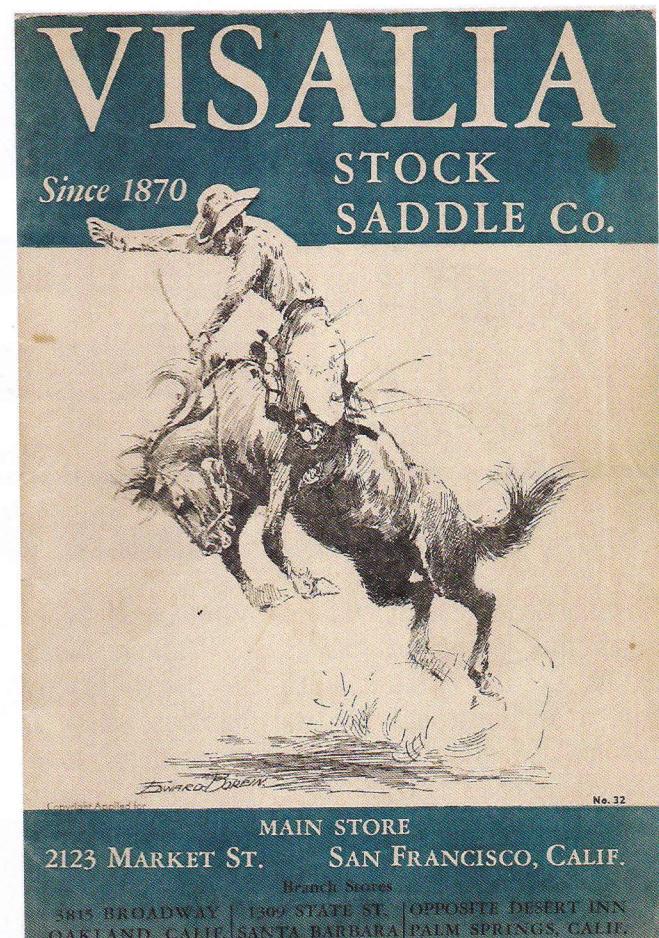
early 1960's destroyed all records of when saddles were made and who purchased or ordered the saddles. Most Visalia saddles are roughly dated by the estimating the time by serial number, the style of the saddle and family provenance. After many transfers of ownership the Visalia shop is still in business today and currently located in Fresno, California.

The Visalia Stock Saddle Company, for a limited time, did have a presence in Santa Barbara and the saddles were very popular with the locals. Throughout the 19th Century and during the first two decades of the 20th Santa Barbara saddlery firms were fully capable of supplying the local horsemen and rancher trade.

However, when the Tomlinson brothers closed their historic shop at 714 State Street in 1921, Santa Barbara began a decade and a half period with no local harness and saddlery firms. Ironically, the demand for ceremonial silver mounted saddlery spiked during this period. In the mid-1920s men who had accumulated considerable wealth elsewhere, in industries unrelated to ranching, such as oil, agriculture and the film industry, began to retire to the Santa Barbara area where they purchased parts of old Land Grant ranchos and assumed Ranchero lifestyles.

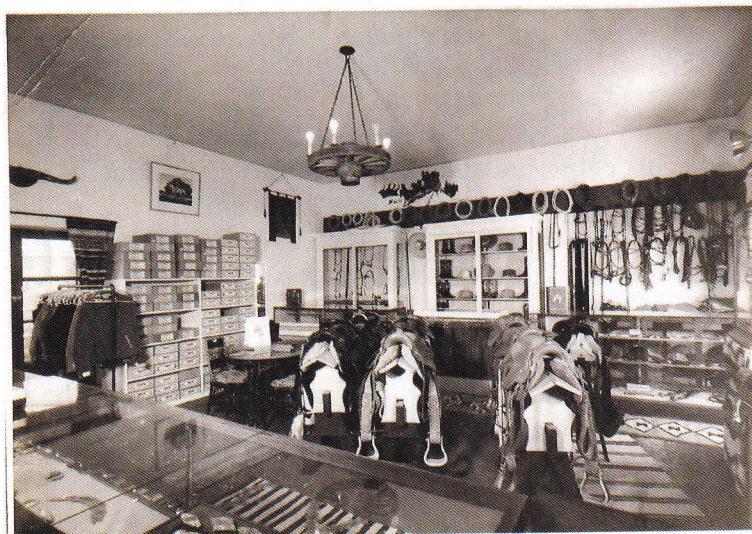
Dwight Murphy, Silsby Spalding and Jack Mitchell created a demand for fine horse gear that could not be supplied locally. Los Angeles shops, Brydon Brothers, Lichtenberger-Ferguson and later Edward Bohlin, competed for the business, but it was the venerable San Francisco firm, the Visalia Stock Saddle Company that satisfied most of the demand created by the explosion of Anglo Rancheros. Mitchell and Spalding were particularly good customers of Visalia, but the customer list of the company included a who's who of Santa Barbara notables including Thomas Storke and Sam Stanwood. So close was the relationship that when Stock Horse events were included in the Old Spanish Days show at Pershing Park, Visalia was chosen to produce the trophy saddles that were awarded to event winners and they did so for most of the

Visalia Stock Saddle Co. shop in Santa Barbara



1940 Visalia Stock Saddle Co. catalog with Ed Borein cover art.

1930s and 40s. At the Salinas Rodeo in 1936, Edward Borein informed his good friend Lee Bergen, owner of the Visalia Shop, that the shop next to his in El Paseo was vacant and encouraged him to open a branch store there. Bergen agreed and transferred his display from the rodeo grounds after the Salinas show to Number 16 El Paseo and was open for business for Old Spanish Days in August. The Visalia catalog of 1940 features art by Ed Borein and it was said that he traded his art for the catalog cover for a Visalia belt buckle.



Visalia Prize Rodeo Saddle Old Spanish Days 1946

Silsby Spalding's 1927 Visalia Supreme



The branch shop was operated at the El Paseo location until the fall of 1940 when it was moved to 1309 State Street. War time rationing and production restrictions resulted in the closing of the branch stores in the fall of 1942. Visalia continued to produce the Old Spanish Days trophy saddles at least until 1946. By 1949 these trophy saddles were being made by the local firm, G J Jedlicka's, established in 1932 as a boot and repair shop but first appeared with the Harness and Saddlery title in the 1943 Santa Barbara directory. Then in the mid-1950s Dick May took over and produced three trophy saddles for Old Spanish Day, two of which are in our collection.

In our collection we have several Visalia saddles, dating from the 1920s into the 1950s including the world famous Visalia Supreme, ordered and owned by Silsby Spalding of the Tecolote Ranch. Silsby was the first Mayor of Beverly Hills and was very close friends with Will Rodgers, Dwight Murphy, Leo Carrillo and various other famous California individuals. Silsby was a serious collector of saddles and equestrian tack and sizable portion of his collection now resides in The Santa Barbara

Carriage and Western Art Museum including the famous Visalia Supreme. Made in 1927, The Visalia Supreme was the most elaborate and beautifully crafted saddle Visalia ever made. The Supreme is a parade saddle adorned with Schazline silver roping, silver berries and beautiful custom silver conchoes depicting his ranch emblem a tecolote (owl) and a tecolote embossed on the horn with ruby eyes. In our collection are 11 saddles owned by Spalding with many being made by Visalia. We have a very detailed and unique saddle made by the Visalia Co.in the S. Loomis style, a saddle company native to Santa Barbara that dissolved in the early 20th century. A pair of Visalia saddles that are very special to our



Caroline Spalding's
1926 Visalia Sunburst

collection were made for Caroline and Deborah Spalding, they are a mother daughter pair of Visalia Sunburst Parade saddles. These saddles, made in 1926, are nearly identical with exception of the size and slight differences in engraving, each saddle is personalized with their name. The silver work is very intricate, ornate and tasteful the silver work was again done by Schazline. Silsby had several other beautifully tooled Visalia saddles made for his collection, all carry the Tecolote horn with ruby eyes and many of these saddles were ridden the Old Spanish Days Fiesta Parade by his friends and often on Dwight Murphy's famous Palominos. .



Silsby Spalding's Visalia collection displayed at Pershing Park Fiesta Rodeo mid-early 1930s

The picture above was taken at Pershing Park in the 1930s during a Fiesta Parade and shows off four of his Visalia Saddles that are now in our collection. We also have two saddles from a sequential trio ordered by Santa Barbara's own Dwight Murphy, all three saddles are highly ornate with intricate custom carving and silver conchos with gold inlay, and all made in 1926. Each saddle unique with different leather stamping that is custom for each saddle. The Schazline silver work is extraordinary, the back of the cantles depict different scenes and one saddle referred to as the moon saddle has very tasteful turquoise adornments.

The Murphy saddles were part of his collection that was donated to the SB Historical Museum in the mid-1950s, the Historical museum has loaned The Carriage Museum two of the trio and they retained the turquoise saddle in their collection. We also have a Visalia saddle owned by former El Presidente Sam Stanwood, and an Old Spanish Days Rodeo Prize saddle made for the 1946 event, engraved with the OSD logo and the year.

Please join our new email list

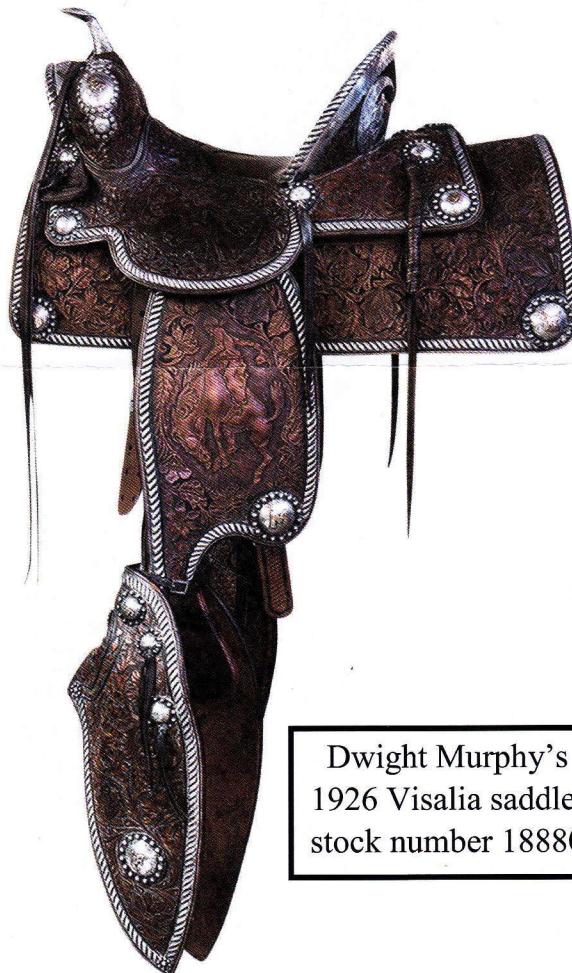
You will receive the newsletter in your inbox quarterly. You will also receive occasional museum updates with information about up and coming museum fund raisers and exciting public events

Just visit our website, carriagemuseum.org and enter your email address into the join the newsletter box

Since 1870 Visalia Stock Saddle Co. Has played a vital role in the settling and development of the old west. Innovations include the Original Humane Visalia Bits, Flat D rings, The Visalia Stirrup, The famous 3B saddle tree, the one piece wool lined tapadero and the finest hand crafted custom saddles available.

Over the span of the 151 year history, Visalia Stock Saddle Co. has and always will use only the finest materials, top first grade leather and employ only the best craftsman available.

There is a saying among cowboys of the old west: "If you don't ride a Visalia, then you ain't a real cowboy."



Dwight Murphy's
1926 Visalia saddle,
stock number 18880

A Gift for the Future

Although the museum is focused on the past, we need to plan for the future. When preparing your estate plans, please consider making a gift to the Carriage and Western Art Museum of Santa Barbara. Your gift will become your legacy and help ensure that we continue to fulfill our mission for years to come. Consult with your financial advisor for details, or contact Tom Peterson or Peter Georgi at (805) 569-0731.