



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

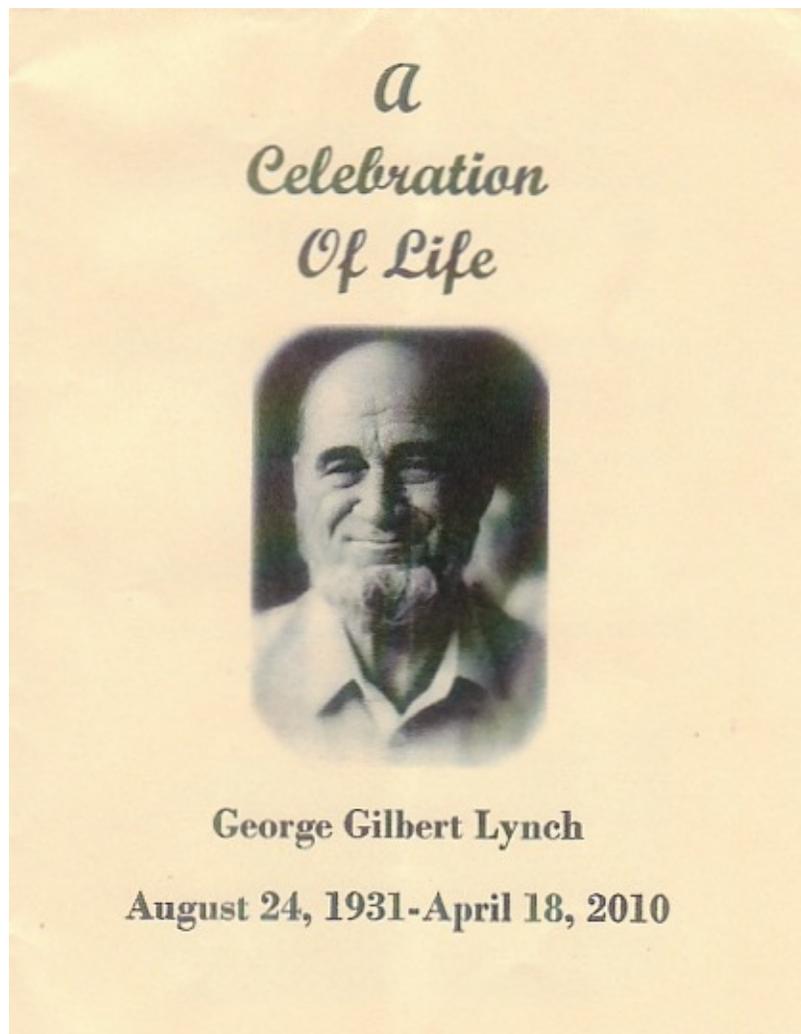
[www.gilbertgia.com](http://www.gilbertgia.com)

# **George Gilbert Lynch**

**Kern County Historian**

**1931-2010**

**Memorial Service, April 24, 2010  
Coronado Baptist Church  
516 Norris Road  
Bakersfield, California**



**George was my history friend. He came into my life about eight years ago in the parking lot at Arvin library. That evening a woman gave a talk about coming to Bakersfield in the Forties as a youngster from Oklahoma, and at the end of her presentation I identified myself and asked a question.**

**Outside it was getting dark. I was walking to my car when I heard somebody behind me call out "Hey! Hey!" I couldn't see who it was, but it sounded like it was for me, and the voice was getting closer. I didn't recognize the man, it was so dark, but he was friendly, said he loved local history, and he insisted on exchanging phone**

**numbers with me. It's been my continuing regret that I didn't call George first. My life was enriched because he took the initiative that evening. I later found out that George was naturally that way. He was a doer.**

**The Bakersfield Californian and our two, slick Bakersfield magazines carry a lot more local history than we ever had eight or nine years ago. In those days, except for the museum and the library, there wasn't much going on about the local past.**

**Sometime around 2003 my older daughter started a little throw-away newspaper. I encouraged George to send in his stories, and he kept doing that until the paper changed hands and its contents got raw. He stopped submitting, but by then he'd already talked with Ginger Moorehouse, she'd heard about him, and she invited him to write for the Californian. George was an instant hit because people related to what he wrote: It was authentic and from the heart.**

**In the months after the Arvin library incident, we shard a lot of local history, but the facts about the Lynch family itself came slowly. I found out that George had already done a lot of writing. He started when his son got sick – George wanted to entertain him and tell him about the early days. George shared some of those stories with me, and that's when I realized he'd had more life experiences than any five men.**

**Some of the stories went back to his father, Otto Lynch, who among many other things was a saw mill operator, electrician, mechanic, teacher, prospector, gold miner, and inventor. I envied George for having a father who showed his son how to hunt for gold**

**and handle dynamite.**

**Of course George had his own experiences, like the morning he woke up on a hospital bed under a tree. A week or so before, George had been gigging frogs below China Grade, got bitten up by mosquitoes, came down with encephalitis, and was in a coma for many days. Why was he under a tree? He came out of that coma on July 21, 1952, the day of the big earthquake. So, there was another George Gilbert Lynch story.**

**George had a reverence for those things we can still see of the past. The day we went out to look at the giant, concrete weir near Tupman, he praised the ingenuity of the early builders and pointed out to me the sand and gravel they mixed up by hand on the spot. George told me the weir had suffered a lot of abuse since he fished there in the Fifties, but he was sure it would last another hundred.**

**My friend was generous in sharing what he knew, but vandalism and neglect of the water wheel at Hart Park made him doubt people. As a preservationist, George especially worried about the old pillars down the hill from the site of the park's old swimming pool. Otto Lynch helped build those petrified wood monuments, and George was concerned that if people knew what they were made out of, they might want to take some samples home.**

**George also took pictures of the bronze plaques that had been set out on the hillside back in the early 1930s. He guessed they wouldn't survive the next generation. He'd shake his head and say, "Yep, someday they'll be gone, too." But the next moment he was back doing his current project. George wasn't one to dwell on negatives.**

**This man had a lot of interesting life experiences, although he would never call them that. When he talked, people knew they were hearing the real deal. One afternoon I invited George and two other friends over to my place to talk history. George hadn't met those men, a civil engineer and a school administrator, former oil company executive. I remember George explaining to us how he walked a string of flat cars through the narrow tunnels on the Tehachapi line.**

**The next day George called and said, "When are you going to set up another get-to-gather?" He'd enjoyed himself, but it turned out the others were just as interested in seeing George again. His first-hand stories fascinated men who'd spent most of their careers behind desks.**

**I didn't go with George on all his outings; I missed the one when he was looking for the remains of the Rancheria Road Bridge that Louis V. Olcese built in 1893. George emailed me a few days later, and what a surprise that email was. In the Subject, he'd written "White Man's Petroglyph," and when I opened the image I saw a block of concrete inscribed with the initials L.V.O., Louis V. Olcese. Things like that give historians goosebumps. I was impressed, and George got some deserved mileage out of writing the story.**

**Last week when the Californian asked me about George, I told of his sixth sense for finding things that have been covered up for a hundred years. I didn't mention the time George and I went out looking for information about Nellie Calhoun. That was the little Kern County girl who went from poverty to a being a famous opera singer, and in 1914 married a Serbian Prince.**

**George wanted to find the exact spot where the Calhouns had their old sheep camp down hill from Keene. We were driving along the road when George said, "Pull up anywhere along here. See that circle of grass that looks different from the rest? That's where their sheep corral was, and their old shack was right over there next to those rocks." From where I was sitting it seems farfetched, but after we got out and looked, I was a believer. There are many other stories about George's outdoor sleuthing abilities, including how he found the Butterfield stage route on the bluffs, and how he identified the Nickels' old storehouse on Rio Bravo Ranch.**

**I never heard George complain, and if times were tough for the Lynches, I never knew it. He only once alluded to their son's medical bills; He didn't say anything more than "Oh, yes. They were high," and then changed the subject. For the same reason, it was a long time before I knew that George had gone through treatments on his throat that left him with a persistent dry mouth and prevented him from public speaking. That was when I understood when he always carried a cold-cup of ice and Pepsi and a box of hard candies. "You want one of these lemon drops?"**

**I think George had a basic undercurrent of faith that things always would work out. It might have started with him as a kid when his family was out of money and almost out of food. That afternoon his mom and dad stopped along Union Avenue to cook some supper, and after they set up their camp they sent George and his sister out for firewood. The kids came back with firewood, but they'd also found a wadded up \$10 bill.**

**Luck like that happens once in a while, but people-helping-people**

**is what got families past some tough times – that and ingenuity. On a trip George's family took to California in the Thirties, his dad used Stoddard fluid in the tank instead of gasoline. Stoddard's was for cleaning clothes, but it was cheaper than gas, and it could work instead of gas-- sort of – if you knew what you were doing. Otto Lynch knew how, and George picked up that kind of ingenuity.**

**Some time ago I bought a rather expensive digital camera so I could take pictures of newspaper articles on the library's microfilm reader. I emailed George my pictures, and a few weeks later he emailed me pictures he'd snapped at the Beale. His shots were excellent. A few days later at the library I noticed he had a digital camera that cost about half of what I'd paid. "How did you get those good shots, George?" He explained he'd experimented with every single setting until he got it right. George made that camera do the very best it could, and his pictures beat mine, hands down.**

**For a while after we met, it seemed like George and I were the only people doing local history research, so George was the only person I could talk shop with. It was always my delight to talk to him, share information, and complain about how sore our backsides got from sitting for so long in front of the microfilm machines.**

**It didn't take me very long to see how dedicated a researcher my friend was. I knew it the day he said "I read that over three or four times to get it all down good in my head." George got the facts down good, alright. He had excellent recall.**

**On several occasions I'd come upon him reading at the Beale, and he looked up and practically shouted, "I found the mother-load this**

**time!" What he meant by that was he'd found an historical needle in a haystack. You might think that find would become a new story, but it wasn't like that because his next words were "Man, I've been looking for this for a week, and it's only going to be one sentence in my story." On those times when I told him the same thing, he'd nod just a little and say, "I know."**

**A couple of months ago I had an extra printer in the house, I offered it to George, and he took it. Months later he called me and asked if I could use a good printer. I didn't need one, but I got the feeling he wanted to do a payback for the one I'd given him. "Well," I said, "my little nephew could use it." He said come get it.**

**We talked about this and that before he brought out the printer. I looked at it and said, "George, that's brand new!" He said, "Well, I bought it, but it didn't work with my computer. It works real good as a copy machine, and that's all I've used it for. The wife told me not to buy it online because I couldn't return it, but I bought it anyway. Now I'm stuck with it. She could have said something, but she never mentioned it again."**

**-Gilbert Gia, April 24, 2010**

**< 0 >**