

PLACER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A little history

By Karri R. Samson, revised 2013

On August 27, 1920, a group of men joined together in the City Trustees' Room in the Public Library building in Auburn, California to formally establish the Placer County Historical Society. The articles of incorporation were filed with Lillian Rechemacher at the Placer County Clerk's Office on August 28, 1920.



Carnegie Library, Auburn, Ca. 1920

The lower level of the Auburn Carnegie Library is where the Placer County Historical Society was formally organized and about how it looked then. Entrance on the lower left. The PCHS and Placer County Genealogical Society now share an office there. Art studios occupy the rest of this landmark.

The first officers and board of directors consisted of R.F. Rooney, President; W.B. Lardner, Secretary; George C. West, treasurer; John M. Fulweiler; Arthur C. Lowell; William. G. Lee; and Lathrop Huntley. Other original

members were Marshall Z. Lowell, J.E. Walsh, P.G. Ekberg, George McAulay, Raglan Tuttle, J. E. Prewett, A.S. Fleming, Ivan H. Parker, J. Landis, J.C. Manning, W.F. Jacobs, George Hamilton, Elmer Gum, and W.A. Shepard. They then began seeking members as well as pioneer reminiscences, old letters, pictures of pioneers, and other historic memorabilia. Temporary quarters were promised in the basement of the Carnegie Library, with the hope of some day owning a building. The City Trustees decided instead to occupy the space for city offices and as a meeting room.

In December 1927 the Society was turned over to the Auburn Parlor, Native Sons of the Golden West, by President Dr. R.F. Rooney. According to the Placer Herald of December 17, 1927, for many years the Society had almost entirely been maintained by Dr. Rooney and W.B. Lardner, who was the secretary. Lardner, who was now deceased, had maintained the Society's collections. New officers and directors were elected: J.W. Patrick, president; C H. Gwyn, vice-president; George K. Walsh, secretary; E.H. Gum, Treasurer; and George C. West; Dr. R.F. Rooney and W.A. Shepard, directors.

In 1929 the Native Sons leased the Temple lot in lower Auburn from the City of Auburn with the plan to erect a building to house its historical collection. However, the Society became inactive again.

It was not until the 1948 centennial celebration of the discovery of gold in California that the Society was rejuvenated. A Placer County Centennial Committee had been formed in 1946 by the State Chamber of Commerce. William Haines was chairman. The committee collected artifacts from the area and opened a museum in the Mining Building at the 20th Agricultural District fairgrounds; opening January 1948. In conjunction with the California Statehood Centennial, historic markers were placed at various historic spots in Placer County.

In April 1948 the Historical Society again filed papers with the State. Lathrop Huntley, one of the original directors, was still alive and this allowed the Society to reactivate under the auspices of the original incorporation. The Placer County Centennial Committee appointed officers and directors. Officers were: Judge Lowell Sparks, president; Adeline Gilchrist, vice-president; Mrs. Moya Gum Bemis, secretary; Mrs. Jane Amundsen, treasurer. In May, Judge Sparks resigned and Mrs. Gilchrist became president.

The purpose of the Society is to promote interest in the history of Placer County, to support the Placer County Historical Museum; to discover, collect and make accessible historical facts and objects; to mark places of historical interest in Placer County.

To these ends the society hosts regular dinner meetings which feature speakers on historic topics. The Society contributes financially to numerous projects such as the DVD documentary Gold, Granite and Grit: a Quarry, a Town, and the Building of California, repairs on the Gold Country Medical Museum, and the 2012 Mt. Quarries Railroad centennial celebration.

For many years the Society published the newsletter Nuggets and then The Placer. We still contribute to The Placer, now produced by Placer County Museums.

The Society has reprinted the 1882 Placer County History, the 1924 History of Placer and Nevada Counties and the 1861 Placer County Directory. In 1996 we published The Foundations of Placer County Horticulture, in 2002 sponsored the book Placer County, an Illustrated History and in 2004 produced Auburn Images, the Mel Locher Memorial Photo Collection.

The Landmarks Committee places markers on historic sites in Placer County. The Oral History Committee interviews local residents and places transcriptions of the interviews in the Placer County Library and the Placer County Archives. It has produced Auburn, a Century of Memories in 1988, and The Placer County Courthouse in 1994.

Over the years the Society has hosted historic homes tours and bus trips to historic sites. It has purchased microfilms of historic Placer County newspapers for the Placer County Library. In 1995 the Society hosted the fall symposium of the Conference of California Historical Societies. The Society sponsors the Benton Welty Historic Classroom Museum in the Auburn City Hall. Society appointees serve on the Placer County Historical Advisory Board, the Placer County Historical Organizations Committee and the Auburn City Historic Design Review Commission and other bodies.

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