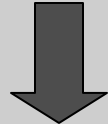


THE PLACER

A Voice of History

July - Aug 2009
Volume 12, Issue 4

In this Issue



1. Administrator's Notes
2. Hospitals/Health
3. Museums Intelligence
4. PCHS News
5. PCHS News
6. Historical Organizations/
PCHS Officers
7. Calendar of Events

Melanie Barton, Museums Admin.
Placer County Museums Division
101 Maple St.
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 889-6500
mbarton@placer.ca.gov

Michael Otten, President
Placer County Historical Society
PO Box 5643
Auburn, CA 95604
www.placercountyhistoricalsociety.org

Editor and Staff Writer:
Ralph Gibson
(530) 889-6502
rgibson@placer.ca.gov
www.placer.ca.gov/museum



Administrator's Notes

Melanie Barton

The 2nd annual Heritage Trail will be held on August 8 & 9, 2009. Once again 18 participating museums from Roseville to Tahoe are committed to showcasing history in a fun and entertaining way. All of the museums will be open from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm on both days and admittance is FREE. The theme this year is *A-Tisket A-Tasket, Bring Your Picnic Basket*. We encourage Trail Travelers to bring a picnic and eat at one of the museums designated for picnicking.

The tour promises to be a family-friendly event with many hands-on activities for all ages. Visitors can bake biscuits in an 1890s wood stove, jump to the finish line in an old fashioned sack race, explore the wonders of a granite quarry, view the world from a 19th c stagecoach, pan for elusive flakes of gold, and listen to Native American stories. Trail

Guides will be available at every museum in July and on our website.

This year there will be a bus tour and van tour each day. The Saturday bus tour will feature the foothill museums and the Sunday bus tour will explore the valley museums.

The van tours will focus on the Lincoln Highway and will visit the Tahoe City museums and the Western SkiSport museum. To reserve a seat and a box lunch, call Mary-Jane at 530-889-6500. The tour cost is \$10.00. Space is limited and seats will be reserved on a first come, first serve basis.

The museums are grouped in four clusters, and are easy to reach from I-80.

Valley Museums - located in South Placer County
Roseville Historical Society
Carnegie Museum
Roseville Telephone Museum
Maidu Interpretive Center (Roseville)
Rocklin History Museum

Griffith Quarry Museum
(Penryn)
Fruitvale School (Lincoln)

Auburn Museums - within one mile of the Historic Courthouse
Placer County Museum
Bernhard Museum Complex
Gold Country Museum
Joss House Museum
Gold Country Medical History Museum
The Benton Welty School Room

Foothill Museums - located higher in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada
Forest Hill Divide Museum
Colfax Area Heritage Museum
Golden Drift Museum

Mountain Museums - located at the crest of the Sierra Nevada and Lake Tahoe
Western SkiSport Museum (Boreal)
Gatekeeper's Museum (Tahoe City)
Watson Cabin (Tahoe City)

For the most up to date information on the weekend activities visit our website www.placer.ca.gov/museum and blog www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com

I hope to see you on The Heritage Trail! For more information call 530-889-6500.♠



Depressed Health in the Great Depression

Ralph Gibson

The dark clouds of the Great Depression had a chilling side effect on the health of people around the world. A study conducted in the U.S. and published in 1933 by the International Health Organization of the League of Nations concluded that "...sickness increased with economic hardship". It makes sense that as a family falls further down the economic scale, their quality of health care suffers. But the Great Depression had a psychological effect on physical health as well. In *Health Statistics in Historical Perspective* the IHOLN report further stated that:

Not only were families in the "poor" class sick more often than those in "moderate" or "comfortable" classes, but families whose incomes had fallen the most had the highest rates of illness. Families who between 1929 and 1932 had fallen from the comfortable class into the poor class had rates of disabling illness 45% higher than the rates of those who remained in the comfortable class, while the formerly comfortable whose incomes had fallen still further, so far that they qualified for relief in 1932, had rates 73% higher than those who remained in the

comfortable class. The formerly comfortable who had become poor or had gone on relief suffered even more illness than the chronically poor, those who remained in the lowest economic class throughout the whole period.

The results of this study were indicative of what was happening in Placer County during the depression. Rates of pneumonia, flu, and other illnesses were up during this time in Placer County. The new Placer County Hospital, completed in November of 1932, could not have come at a better time. Not only were illnesses on the rise in the county, but car accidents increased dramatically after the repeal of prohibition in 1933. Construction of the hospital was delayed in 1931 after the firing of the original architect. In August of 1931, a new architect, W.E. Coffman, was awarded the contract to design and build the hospital. The official opening of the hospital, which cost over \$75,000, was delayed as well. Not because of construction woes, but because the Governor of California, James Rolph, who promised to officiate the opening, kept rescheduling.

Another problem that faced the health care system in Placer County was transients. People without incomes became homeless and wandered throughout the county seeking food and shelter. Hospitals and sanitariums around the U.S. became temporary shelters, and

Placer County was not immune. The new hospital had some transients, but Weimar Sanitarium, which was built in 1919 as a tuberculosis hospital, had many. On June 4, 1932, the Auburn Journal reported that:

Probation Officer Kinney was ordered to continue his work of investigating patients at the Weimar Joint Sanitarium by the Placer County Supervisors on Tuesday. Kinney filed a report with the supervisors on Tuesday naming several patients at the sanitarium who did not belong there. The supervisors ordered Kinney to take the necessary steps to have the patients removed.

Of course, another aspect of the Great Depression was its effect on mental health. Not only were rates of mental depression higher, but the suicide rate rose from 14 deaths per 100,000 people to 17 deaths per 100,000 people. Statistics for the suicide rate in Placer County couldn't be found, but there were several accounts of suicides in the *Auburn Journal* and *Placer Herald* between 1929 and 1941, including one gruesome account of a suicide at the Placer County Hospital in the July 29, 1939 *Placer Herald*: "Bill Cheek blew his head off at the county hospital Thursday. He used dynamite".

The Great Depression was just that, a depression, both mentally and physically. But the people persevered. In spite of increased illness and suicides,

the mortality rate declined throughout the Depression. Though the dark clouds of the Great Depression reigned overhead, glimpses of sunshine were found in movie theaters, on the radio, and in recreational activities. People found a way to get through it, to survive.♣



Museums Intelligence

Placer County Museums News

Ralph Gibson

The exhibit team has been working on *Relaxation and Rejuvenation: Camping in Placer County*. This exhibit opened in the Bernhard Museum Winery on July 2nd and will be up through the end of August. Vintage camping and fishing gear and many photos of camping in Placer County are on display.

Summer will continue to be busy as we prepare for the second annual Heritage Trail and our August 15th Community Education Program: Campfire Storytelling at the Bernhard Museum. The exhibit team is also working through the summer on redesigning several of the Pate Case displays in the foyer of the Courthouse.

The exhibit *Unveiled* continues to be a hit with the community. The oldest wedding dress in the exhibit was pulled from the

Gold Country Museum due to increased heat and humidity, but the rest of the exhibit at the Gold Country and Bernhard Museums will remain until after Thanksgiving. The dresses on display at the Placer County Museum will be up until early next spring.

Volunteers Needed!

The Placer County Museums needs volunteers to help us interpret and preserve our heritage. We need docents at all of our museums and to help with our education programs. If you know anyone who you think would be a great volunteer, please have them call us at: 530-889-6500.

Community Education Program: Campfire Storytelling at the Bernhard Museum

Images of the family sitting around the campfire deep in the woods conjure memories of S'mores and ghost stories. Telling a story by the fire has been a part of human culture for thousands of years. Storytelling around the campfire is how some traditions were passed from one generation to the next and how experiences and life lessons were shared. If you would like to learn more about the history of storytelling, and to hear a few classic stories around the campfire, we encourage you to bring your family to *Campfire Storytelling at the*

Bernhard Museum. This program is especially suited for young children. The program begins at 8:30 pm and will end about 10:30 pm and is FREE! The Bernhard Museum is located at 291 Auburn Folsom Road in Auburn.

For more information, please call 530-889-6500.♦

Placer County Historical Society News



President's Message

*Michael Otten,
President*

July 11 marks the sesquicentennial of one of the dates that etches Auburn as a celebrated place in wild western villainy.

Can you imagine a stash of \$2.5 million worth of gold bullion still awaiting some lucky finder? Or did some lucky highway construction worker stumble upon a stash of 2,000 \$20 gold pieces and quietly disappeared as one fanciful so-called "true tale" portended in 1990.

That is just part of the lore of one of the West's most celebrated bad boys, Rattlesnake Dick, dubbed the "Pirate of the Placers," who was mortally wounded in a gun battle with the law on July 11, 1859, in Auburn. A deputy tax collector, George W. Martin,

33, also died, shot down by Dick's mysterious companion.

Today, such an incident would warrant huge page one headlines. But in the next issue of the *Placer Herald*-- July 16, 1859--page one was taken up with a speech given in Grass Valley by Sen. William M. Gwin, that he supposedly wrote out later just for the Herald. (Gwin, along with John C. Fremont, were California's first two senators).

The story of the demise of the notorious 26-year-old Rattlesnake Dick, a so-called good boy gone bad, followed on page 2.

That story of Richard Barter--making him bigger in death than in life-- continues to grow to the point that Beverly Lewis and the Placer-Lake Tahoe Film Office ought to start marketing its potential as a titanic western blockbuster if done right. It has all the elements. Here's some:

As a teenager Barter traveled from Canada in 1850 with a brother and a man some say was an uncle to find a fortune and ended up in the bustling Rattlesnake Bar mining camp on the American River below Auburn. His two companions returned home.

Twice Barter was falsely accused of crime, the second time earning him a trip to San Quentin, where he ran into some really bad company that influenced him to think that as long as he is being thought of as bad, he may as well really be bad.

As many of the wildly-varying accounts go, Dick was a leader of men (at least bad ones) and sought after by the few lovely women around in those days because of his handsome looks. He masterminded what turns out to be the biggest payoff in Wells Fargo Stagecoach lore, taking some \$80,000 in gold in 1856. The bullion came from a mule train winding its way down a Trinity mountain slope from the Yreka and Klamath River Mines.

The mule train robbers, led by one of Dick's ex prison mates, George Skinner, made off with the heavy gold without a shot being fired. As the stories go Richard Barter and George's brother Cy, were supposed to be rustling up some mules to replace the easily-identifiable Wells Fargo mules to carry away the gold. Instead, they were caught and jailed in Auburn.

Supposedly, Skinner buried half the gold--valued at \$2.5 million in today's dollars--about 12 miles from the holdup scene, and headed back with his cohorts to the Auburn/Folsom area with the other half. (To get an idea of how much gold that might be, stop by the Placer County Courthouse and peek into the safe and its nearly \$400,000 gold collection). A Wells Fargo posse intercepted the returning bandits. George Skinner was killed in a gunfight. Only half the money was recovered as the secret to the rest died with Skinner.

Okey Ellison of Auburn wrote a wild account for *True Treasure Tales*, republished in the

Auburn Sentinel June 22, 1990, that averred that after Dick and Cyrus Skinner escaped from the Auburn jail they managed to recover the buried gold. Ellison contended Dick took the readily identifiable bullion and gradually exchanged them for 2,000 \$20. gold pieces which he buried in three rawhide pouches near Junction House. (Where Raleys' Market is today on Lincoln Way at the Foresthill I-80 exit).

The writer speculated that Dick, whose body was found by a stagecoach driver coming from Iowa Hill near Junction House, was on his way to retrieve his gold. Ellison contends one of the bulldozer operators working on the I-80 interchange (no year given) while pulling down an old oak tree, discovered the buried gold and quietly disappeared with most of the \$20. gold pieces.

How much of the varied stories is fact? I would agree with the assessment of Carmel Barry-Schweyer, Placer County's recently retired Curator of Archives, "not much". And she recounted as such in an article about Rattlesnake Dick for *The Placer* in 2007.

Robert Baker Elder, a PCHS member and former Auburn Journal reporter who died last year at the age of 92, turned the story into a 1954 novel, "Rattlesnake Dick," using the real names and some of the historical incidents and using dialogue to fill in the holes in the historical record. Elder, whose home across from the Auburn Carnegie Library is

being converted into retirement housing, called Rattlesnake Dick one of the most celebrated outlaws of the Gold Rush era.

Your PCHS in its 1988 Junction House marker at Raleys noted it as the scene where Barter's body was found. An earlier marker is at the Martin Park fire station at the upper end of High Street. It notes that was the area where the gunfight ensued that left Martin dead.

Another respected newsman, the late Bill Wilson, called William McDowell Crutcher, a deputy sheriff who may well have shot Rattlesnake Dick in the gun battle, a man of destiny. Crutcher went on to become a prosperous Auburn businessman who operated a water works system, a sergeant at arms for the state Assembly and even an Assemblyman.

Dick was buried in the old cemetery on East Street with his remains supposedly reinterred in 1893 to the northwest corner of the Old Auburn Cemetery on Fulweiler. A splendid headstone was donated in 1969 by the Auburn Whiskerinos. (One account credits the Native Sons).

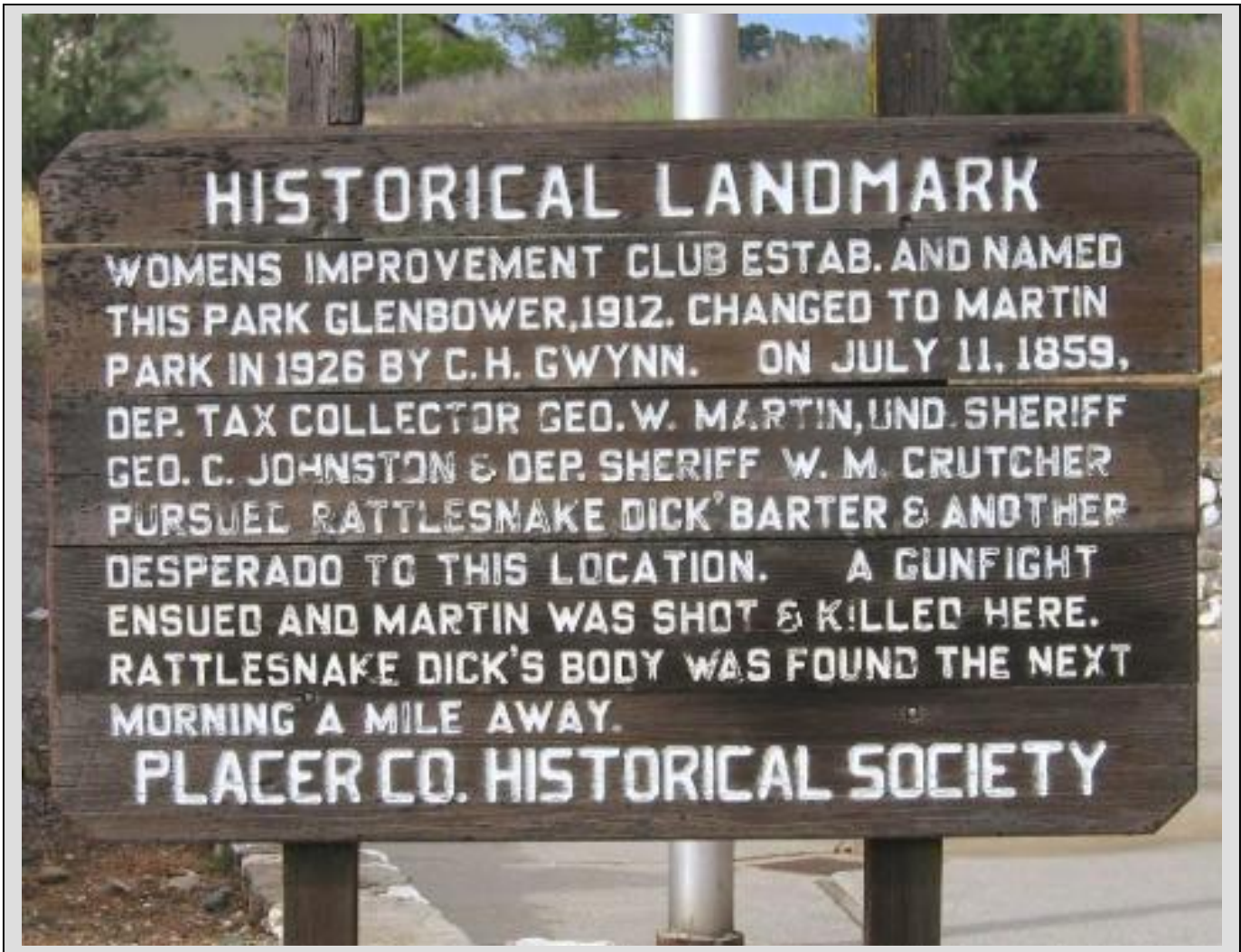
For some more about Rattlesnake Dick, check out the PCHS website, www.placercountyhistoricalsociety.org, its pamphlet, "Infamous Crimes and Criminals in Placer County History," the Thompson & West 1882 "History of Placer County" and the W.B. Lardner and M.L. Brock "History of Placer and Nevada Counties".

Other varying accounts about Rattlesnake Dick over the years were written by the famed Wendell Robie, Norman McLeod and many others.

Certainly, if Auburn wants to maintain its historical heritage and remain known as such rather than become a place like everywhere else with its franchise and big box operations it should continue to commemorate such figures as Rattlesnake Dick with the return of Rattlesnake Dick days and such. Of course if you have a Rattlesnake Dick story or insight to share, I would love to hear from you.

--Michael Otten,
otten@ssctv.net





Rattlesnake Dick Gunfight Site



Junction House Marker

Placer County Historical Organizations

Colfax Area Historical Society
Ed & Nilda Duffek
(530) 305-3209
www.colfaxhistory.org

Foresthill Divide Historical Society
Sandy Simester,
(530) 367-3535
www.foresthillhistory.org

Friends of Griffith Quarry
Doug Brown, (916) 663-1837

Fruitvale School Hall
Community Association
Lyndell Grey,
(916) 645-3517

Golden Drift Historical Society
Jim Ricker, (530) 389-8344

Historical Advisory Board
Tracy Falk, (530) 889-6500

Joss House Museum and
Chinese History Center
Richard Yue (530) 346-7121

Lincoln Archives Museum
Shirley Russell, (916) 645-3470

Lincoln Highway Association
Norman Root, (916) 483-8669
www.lincolnhwy.org

Loomis Basin Historical Society
Dot Shiro, (916) 663-3892
www.ppgn.com

Newcastle Portuguese Hall
Association
Aileen Gage, (530) 885-9113

Old Town Auburn Preservation Society
Donna Howell, (530) 885-2891

Placer County Genealogical Society
Alice Bothello, (530) 885-2216
www.pcgenes.com

Placer County Historical Society
Michael Otten, (530) 888-7837
www.placercountyhistoricalsociety.org

Placer County Museums Docent Guild
Sandi Tribe, (530) 887-9143

Rocklin Historical Society
Barbara Chapman,
(916) 415-0153
www.rocklinhistory.org

Roseville Historical Society
Michael Bryant, (916) 773-1520
www.rosevillehistorical.org

Artifact Highlight

Kasia Woroniecka

Wheelchair

Wheelchairs similar to the ones used today have only been around for about four centuries. In 1595 a wheelchair (called an invalid's chair) was made for King Phillip II of Spain. The chair had a quilted back, hinged arms and ratchets to adjust the back and legs. In the mid 1820s John Joseph Merlin introduced the Merlin Chair with full size wheels and light outer wheels that enabled the occupant to control it without getting his or her hands dirty. The wheelchair from our collection dates back to 1900. Wooden wheelchairs with caned seats and backs appeared around the mid-19th century, especially in the United States where these types of wheelchairs were in use by veterans of the Civil War. The chairs were still heavy and impractical, so in 1933 Herbert A. Everest and Harry C. Jennings invented a light weight foldable chair that could fit in a car. The company Everest and Jennings created went on to produce the first electric wheelchair. ♠



Calendar of Events

July

- July 2nd, 7:00 pm** Community Education Program: *They Crossed the Mountains*, presented by Hal Hall in the Bernhard Museum Winery. *Contact: 530-889-6500.*
- July 15th, 6:30 pm** Loomis Basin Historical Society meeting at the Loomis Library. Contact 916-652-7844.
- July 16th, 7:00 pm** Colfax Area Historical Society Program: *The Roseville Explosion*, at the Depot Waiting Room. Contact: 530-305-3209.
- July 20th, 6:00 pm** Foresthill Divide Historical Society Business meeting at the Foresthill Divide Museum. Contact (530) 367-3535.
- July 23rd, 7:00 pm** Placer County Genealogy Society general meeting in the Beecher Room at the Auburn Library. Contact 530-885-2216.

August

- Aug. 8th & 9th** The Heritage Trail with 18 participating museums, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. Contact: 530-889-6500.
- Aug. 15th, 8:30 pm** Community Education Program: *Campfire Storytelling at the Bernhard Museum*. Contact: 530-889-6500.
- Aug. 17th, 6:00 pm** Foresthill Divide Historical Society Potluck meeting at the Foresthill Memorial Hall. Contact 530-367-3535.
- Aug. 19th, 6:30 pm** Loomis Basin Historical Society meeting at the Loomis Library. Contact 916-652-7844.
- Aug. 19th, 6:30 pm** Historical Advisory Board meeting in the Bernhard Winery. Contact: 530-889-6500.
- Aug. 28th, 7:00 pm** Placer County Genealogy Society general meeting in the Beecher Room at the Auburn Library. Contact 530-885-2216.