



*Congratulations to Ralph Gibson  
The New Museums Administrator!*



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## Administrator's Notes

2014 May - June Volume 17, Issue 3

### Ralph Gibson

Last summer we started a new offsite exhibit program. We have been installing exhibits in public spaces where people don't expect to see historic artifacts and photographs.

Our first exhibit was in Rocklin's Placer Herald office. We set up two chairs that once belonged to W.A. Shepard, a longtime editor of the



*Placer Herald*, along with photographs and interpretive text. We then went to work on a temporary exhibit in the Domes (the Placer County Administrative Center) where the Board of Supervisors hold public meetings. We installed vintage cameras in a display case in the front lobby as well as historic photographs. It was a concise exhibit that photographically covered all five districts in the county.

Next, we installed an exhibit on mountain sports and recreation in the Placer

County Planning Office in Tahoe City. The latest of our offsite exhibits is in the Finance Administration Building at DeWitt. We have two different exhibits on two floors. On the first floor outside the Clerk Recorder's Office is an automatic voting machine that was last used

in the Placer County election of 1906. On the second floor is a display of office equipment that was used to process and store

information from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up through the 1980s.

Offsite exhibits are a good way for us to showcase objects that might not fit in a regular museum exhibit. It's also a great marketing tool. Many county residents have no idea they own six museums, an Archives and Collections Facility, and an exhibit shop. Through these exhibits, we reach a broader audience and make connections with history lovers. More offsite exhibits are coming soon!

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"This year we have 20 museums that will welcome you with open arms, unless you're not into that kind of public affection."

"Seeing all these people leave is like taking the stays out of your girdle."

"Lyndon Baines Johnson, Pablo Picasso and Betty Grable die, Secretariat wins the Triple Crown."

"Tales of Dreamers, Steamers, Bigots and Rogues"

## A Letter from the Editor



Jason Adair

Dear Readers,  
It's that time of the year again, when spring gets skipped in favor of summer. That's when we know it's time to start working on the Heritage Trail Museum Tour. If you're reading this, I assume you will either be a visitor or a volunteer for the biggest museum

event of the year.



This year we have 20 museums that will welcome you with open arms, unless you're not into that

kind of public affection. Either way, there will be plenty of free snacks on offer as well as unique hands-on opportunities and demonstrations that only happen during the Heritage Trail.

If you're a museum docent or volunteer, sign up to work at your museum August 2nd and 3rd. If you're not, strap on your driving goggles and get ready to visit 20 great museums!

## The Women's Army Corps at DeWitt Army Hospital

*Kasia Woroniecka*

### DeWitt WACs

There were fewer than 7,000 Army nurses on active duty when the U.S. entered World War II in 1941. By the end of the war their number grew to more than 59,000. The first nurse reported for duty at the DeWitt Army Hospital on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944. The nurses were part of the Women's Army Corps. The WAC was a branch of United States Army created as an auxiliary unit (WAAC) in 1942 and converted to full status as WAC in 1943. At one time 262 WACs were posted at DeWitt; by 1945 there were only 93, with many ready for discharge or transfer to



Nursing staff of DeWitt General Hospital during the Activation Ceremony in March 1944. The Army Nurse Corps uniform was changing from dark blue to khaki. The nurses in the photograph were the first to be assigned to DeWitt.

- PCM Archives Collection

other commands, among them Clinton, IA, and Ft. Devens, MS. 1<sup>st</sup> Sargent Verna L. Christenson, who enlisted with the WAC in February 1943, was quoted in the "The Dewitt Miner" regretting leaving her post since "seeing all these people leave is like taking the stays out of your girdle."



WAAC uniform jacket of Sargent Evelyn Frost.

- PCM Collection

The design of the WAAC uniforms went through many revisions. Out of 750 jackets issued to the first contingent of WAAC, 531 had to be altered. They were designed and made by the men's clothing industry and many women who wore them considered them ill-fitting and the fabric too stiff. New and improved pattern

was put into production in 1944.

Nurses at the DeWitt hospital took care of patients with many different injuries sustained in the European and Pacific theaters of war. The first patients arrived in January 1943, before the official March opening of DeWitt. The nurses had



DeWitt General Hospital officers and nurses quarters.

- PCM Archives Collection

their work cut out for them with 1852 beds. Sgt. Verle D. Hull, for example, landed in Ward 107 after a sniper's bullet in Germany hit him in the left shoulder and left him paralyzed. Technician Fourth Grade Arnold Duby of Portland, OR, was the first patient from the French invasion to arrive. A member of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, he landed in Normandy on D-Day and was injured on June 13, 1944. Another techni-

cian, Frank Dobashi, was injured in France when he tripped a wire of a German S-mine, also known as "Bouncing Betty." There were also patients who were treated for facial wounds, brain surgery, missing limbs and post-traumatic stress.

As the war was coming to an end in 1945 the patients were discharged or transferred to other hospitals. The hospital officially closed on December 31, 1945.



Ambulances from DeWitt Hospital at Auburn Depot. Most patients arrived by train and were transferred from the train station to DeWitt. Others were flown to Sacramento and driven to Auburn.

- PCM Archives Collection

## The Scoop

### Not Your Average Day at the Cemetery

Most of the time, the Old Auburn Cemetery is used for powerwalking, dogwalking, or just plain old fashioned walking. While it is a really nice place to walk, what's overlooked by those getting their daily constitutional is the depth of history that surrounds them. The docents and volunteers of the Placer County Museums mean to rectify that.

On Sunday May 4<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 pm we'll be hosting our second cemetery tour, *Historic Haunts: A Tour of the Old Auburn Cemetery*. This time we'll be focusing on the second wave of California immi-

grants who arrived in the 1860s.



The tour will last about an hour and includes 18 notable plots. Also, the Native Sons of the Golden West will have their restored 1860s hearse and 1890s mudwagon on display for photographs.

The first tour begins at 1:30 and the last tour will start no later than 3:45. You do not need to reserve

your tour, simply show up and register and we'll organize everyone into tour groups. The tour will start at the back left side of the cemetery as you walk in the main gate. This is a rain or shine event, so please dress accordingly and wear comfortable shoes. Free bottled water will be available.

The Old Auburn Cemetery is located at 170 Fulweiler Avenue across from the Placer County Administrative Center where you may also park. Please remember that there are no restrooms in or near the cemetery, so plan accordingly. The tour is FREE!

## Placer County Historical Foundation's Day of Giving

The Placer County Historical Foundation is a part of the Placer County Historical Society. The foundation was formed in 1971 to obtain and restore the Bernhard House and give it to Placer County for a museum.

Since then, the foundation has contributed to other restoration projects, published books, helped fund the printing of the Old Town Walking Tour among other things.

They also contracted with the county to fund and arrange the Placer County Museum Gift Shop in the courthouse from 1995 to 2005.

More information about the foundation is on our website below.

The foundation is participating in the Day of Giving to raise awareness and funds to further our mission.

The Day of Giving is a regional partnership with Placer Community

Foundation, Sacramento Region Community Foundation, and Yolo Community Foundation.

To give, on May 6 starting at 12:00 midnight visit the website [www.givelocalnow.org](http://www.givelocalnow.org) to make a gift of \$25 or more to Placer County Historical Foundation. You have 24 hours to make your donation.

Thank you for your participation.

Hal Hall, President

# Placer County Historical Society News

## President's Message

*Michael Otten,*  
*President*

### Ralph Roper Rides Again!

Ralph Roper's smile seemed wide as the renowned Foresthill Bridge on Wednesday, April 16, 2014.

It was déjà vu some 730 feet over the American River on California's highest bridge.

With son Harvey riding shotgun, the 93-year-old Roper piloted his 1921 Model T Roadster across. It was the first car to cross the bridge after the rededication ribbon cutting to celebrate the state's highest bridge's \$74 million overhaul.

Ralph Roper had the same honors in the same car on Labor Day 1973. That day an elephant and a donkey were brought in for the dedication show to symbolize bipartisan political support. The bridge was a key to completion of a dam that would create Auburn Lake. At maximum the level would have been 138 feet below.

Roper was 52 when the legendary Wendell Robie persuaded him to drive his Model T across. Roper is the 1956 founder of a jewelry store that bears his name as well as a much honored community icon

with fondness for pre Depression vehicles, parades and public service.

What was Placer County like in 1973? Most of us weren't here. Population was 90,000, a quarter of todays. Auburn had half as many and the state had 20.6 million.



The bridge cost \$14 million. There was a controversy over using steel from Japan to save money over American steel.

Life in 1973: A car cost \$4,052, gasoline, 39 cents, house, \$35,500; minimum wage, \$1.60; average annual salary, \$13,622; postage, 8 cents; milk, \$1.36 a gallon; bread, 27 cents a loaf; gold jumped \$40 to a record \$97 an ounce.

Ronald Reagan, Governor; no Proposition 13 tax break, Viet Nam War ends, VP Spiro Agnew resigns; President Richard Nixon

declares "I'm not a Crook."

Oakland A's win World Series. "The Sting" wins Academy Award. Lyndon Baines Johnson, Pablo Picasso and Betty Grable die, Secretariat wins the Triple Crown.

April 16 was déjà vu for Don Anderson too and his "love in the sky." He was the Bureau of Reclamation's resident engineer during the initial four year construction.

Anderson termed the project his one in a million shot to be the engineer. His slide show on the construction is not to be missed.

Star reporter Gus Thomson, despite

being on vacation, brought his daughter on the public tour. Thomson has written about the joys and sorrows of the bridge during much of his 25 year Auburn Journal career. The Thomsons joined in on a rare walk on the catwalk grid underneath.

Whether there is ever an Auburn Lake or an Auburn Dam, we have The Bridge of Hollywood fame, a draw for BASE jumpers and tourists alike and a shorter commute to Foresthill.

[otten@ssctv.net](mailto:otten@ssctv.net)

## Placer County Historical Organizations

**Colfax Area Historical Society**  
Helen Wayland, (530) 346-7040  
[colfaxhistory.org](http://colfaxhistory.org)

**Donner Summit Historical Society**  
Bill Oudegeest, (209) 606-6859  
[donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

**Foresthill Divide Historical Society**  
Sandy Simester, (530) 367-3535  
[foresthillhistory.org](http://foresthillhistory.org)

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

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

**Historical Advisory Board**  
Glenn Vineyard, (916) 747-1961

**Old Town Auburn Preservation Society**  
Lynn Carpenter, (530) 885-1252

**Lincoln Highway Association**  
Bob Dieterich,  
[bobd@iname.com](mailto:bobd@iname.com) or [lincolnhwy.org](http://lincolnhwy.org)

**Lincoln Area Archives Museum**  
Elizabeth Jansen, (916) 645-3800  
[laamca.org](http://laamca.org)

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

**Loomis Basin Historical Society**  
Karen Clifford, (916) 663-3871  
[ppgn.com/loomishistorical.html](http://ppgn.com/loomishistorical.html)

## Placer County Historical Society Dinner Meeting

*Addah Owens, Vice President*

**When:** June 5

**Time:** 6:30

**Where:** Auburn Veterans Hall  
100 East St, Auburn

**Cost:** \$14

**Menu:** BBQ chicken and ribs, camp beans, potato salad, green salad, corn bread, and lemon bars.

**Mail Check to:** PCHS, c/o Betty Samson, 8780 Baxter Grade Road, Auburn, CA 95603

**Program:** *Sierra Stories: Tales of Dreamers, Steamers, Bigots and Rogues* Sierra College historian and Loomis resident Gary

Noy, will present an illustrated lecture on unusual and lesser known stories of Sierra Nevada history, with a focus on Placer County events and personalities. The presentation is based on his book, "*Sierra Stories: Tales of Dreamers, Steamers, Bigots and Rogues*" which will be available for sale and signing.

Noy will recount more than 60 hidden tales of Placer County figures such as Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau, John Conness, Joseph B. Starkweather, as well as obscure stories of local events such as the building of the Bloomer Cut and the 1924 silent film "Greed".

**Roseville Fire Museum**  
Shari, (916) 538-1809  
[rosevillefiremuseum.org](http://rosevillefiremuseum.org)

**Maidu Museum & Historic Site**  
Glenie Strome, (916) 782-3299  
[roseville.ca.us/indianmuseum](http://roseville.ca.us/indianmuseum)

**Native Sons of the Golden West, Parlor #59**  
Dave Allen, (530) 878-2878  
[dsallen59@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dsallen59@sbcglobal.net)

**Newcastle Portuguese Hall Association**  
Aileen Gage, (530) 885-911

**Placer County Historical Society**  
Michael Otten, (530) 888-7837  
[placercountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://placercountyhistoricalsociety.org)

**Placer County Museums Docent Guild**  
Tom Innes, (530) 888-8969

**Rocklin Historical Society**  
Jean Sippola, (916) 652-1034  
[rocklinhistory.org](http://rocklinhistory.org)

**Roseville Historical Society**  
Phoebe Astill, (916) 773-3003  
[rosevillehistorical.org](http://rosevillehistorical.org)

**North Lake Tahoe Historical Society**  
Javier Rodriguez, (530) 583-1762  
[northtahoemuseums.org](http://northtahoemuseums.org)

**Placer County Genealogical Society,**  
Toni Rosasco, (530) 888-8036  
[pcgenes.com](http://pcgenes.com)

## Calendar of events

### May

1 2:00pm

Placer County Historical Society Board of Directors meeting, Room 10, City Hall, 1225 Lincoln Way, Auburn. (530) 888-7837

4 1:30pm

Community Education Program Cemetery Tour, Old Auburn Cemetery, 170 Fulweiler Ave. Auburn. (530) 889-6500

13 4:00pm

Roseville Historical Society meeting at Carnegie Museum, 557 Lincoln St., Roseville. (916) 773-3003

19 6:00pm

Forest Hill Divide Historical Society business meeting, at the Forest Hill Divide Museum. (530) 367-3535

19 7:00pm

Rocklin Historical Society Meeting at Old St. Mary's Chapel, 5152 Front Street, Rocklin. (916) 624-3464

21 6:30pm

Loomis Basin Historical Society meeting at the Loomis library. (916) 663-3971

22 7:00pm

Placer County Genealogical Society general meeting, in the Beecher Room, at the Auburn Library. (530) 885-2216

### June

5 6:30pm

Placer County Historical Society Dinner Meeting and Gary Noy. Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall, 100 East St., Auburn. (530) 885-5074

10 4:00pm

Roseville Historical Society Meeting at the Carnegie Museum. 557 Lincoln Street, Roseville. (916) 773-3003

16 7:00pm

Rocklin Historical Society Meeting at Old St. Mary's Chapel, 5152 Front Street, Rocklin. (916) 624-3464

18 6:30pm

Loomis Basin Historical Society Meeting at the Loomis Library. (916) 663-3871

18 5:30pm

Historical Advisory Board Meeting at the Bernhard Museum Winery, 291 Auburn-Folsom Rd. Auburn. (530) 889-6500

21 10:00pm

Jump Into Summer, 19th Century Kids Games at the Bernhard Museum. 291 Auburn-Folsom Rd. Auburn (530) 889-6500

26 7:00am

Placer County Genealogical Society general meeting in the Beecher Room at the Auburn Library. (530) 885-2216

**Placer County Museums**  
101 Maple Street  
Auburn, CA 95603

