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## Administrator's Notes

2015 March-April Volume 18, Issue 2

*By Ralph Gibson*

As some of you may have heard, we changed the name of the Gold Country Museum to The Gold Rush Museum. We are building a new museum in the historic Auburn Depot and we thought this fresh start deserved a fresh name. If any of you had the opportunity to walk through the old Gold Country Museum before we closed you may recognize some of the displays in our new museum once they are installed. We are keeping some the same, making changes to others, and will add brand new exhibits as well. We wanted to cover all aspects of the Gold Rush and our old museum had some glaring omissions.



One new exhibit will interpret the effects of the Gold Rush on local American Indians, both the Maidu and the Washoe. This exhibit will help us address a significant curriculum standard for many grade levels.

Another new exhibit will focus on the issue of slavery. California was admitted to the Union as a Free State as part of the 1850 Compromise. Though no Slave State was added to the Union as part of the compromise, the South received

something they had wanted for a very long time; the Fugitive Slave Act. Further, some southern men immigrated to California with their slaves in tow. Though their numbers were never that great, they were here in Placer County.

We will also have an exhibit interpreting the singers, comedians, dancers and acting troupes that entertained the gold hungry Argonauts. Archives researcher John Knox has compiled a huge binder of entertainers and performances throughout the 1850s in the Auburn area. Knox discovered that famous thespian Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes Booth, performed in Auburn in 1856.

This Gold Rush Museum has endured many delays and it has become a trial of patience for us all. But we still hope to have a soft opening later in the spring with a grand opening in the summer. Be sure to check our Facebook page for updates.

**facebook.com/placercountymuseums**  
You can also follow us on Twitter (@placermuseums) where we will regularly tweet photos of our progress.

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"Affected by the horrors of war Walter wrote his mother from Camp Winfield Scott in Pennsylvania on April 19, 1862"

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"It is better to be in debt than be a murderer."

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"The City of Rocklin owns Big Gun now."

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"Our toothpaste tube shaped county wasn't created until 1851"

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"Baked Ham, Scalloped Potatoes, Seasonable Vegetables, Salad, Rolls, Desert."

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## Colonel Walter Scott Davis

By Kasia Woro-



Two artifacts from our collection, a soldier's cape and a kepi, are part of the Civil War exhibit now on display in the Treasury at the historic courthouse in Auburn. They belonged to Colonel Davis - Who was he? And what was his experience in the war?

Walter Scott Davis was born on July 15, 1837 in Milton, MA. He graduated from Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall college preparatory school in 1854. He enlisted in the Union Army on August 10, 1861 as a Second Lieutenant. He was 24 years old. He was commissioned into F Company, 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Reg-

iment of Massachusetts Volunteers. The 22nd Massachusetts was organized by Senator Henry Wilson (future Vice-President during the Ulysses Grant administration) and was therefore known as "Henry Wilson's Regiment." The regiment saw its first action during the Siege of Yorktown in April 1862.

Affected by the horrors of war Walter wrote his mother from Camp Winfield Scott in Pennsylvania on April 19, 1862:

*"O Mother, you know nothing of the sufferings of these people about here. The agriculture is at a stand-*

*still, and what makes it look more sad is to see the trees in full bloom and the season passing for the seed to be sown." (...) Before you receive this I think the great battle will have commenced, probably it will be the largest ever fought on this continent and whoever lives to see it ended will have a sad story to tell. Do not be anxious dear Mother about me, if I fall it will be in good and glorious cause and there will be no one suffering for bread on account of it. The time (although it be a hundred years) is not far distant when we shall all meet in heaven. I am proud to fight on the same field that Washington*

*and our forefathers fought on. I should not want to live in this country if it was not free and if all at home feel the same why should I not be willing to lose my life that they should be happy."*

Walter Davis was promoted to First Lieutenant on June 28, 1862. He was wounded on July 1, 1862 at the battle of Malvern Hill near Richmond, VA. Also known as the Battle of Poindexter's Farm, it involved over fifty thousand soldiers from each side, hundreds of pieces of artillery and three gunboats. The battle was part of the Peninsula Campaign's Seven Days Battles. Walter wrote his mother on July 6, 1862:

*"It would be impossible for me to give you full accounts of all that I have been through with. Pen cannot describe the scenes I have been eye witness to and wish if it could it would be wrong for me to relate them to the loved ones at home. You have troubles enough of your own and I will not burden you with more." (...) I was slightly wounded by a shell, but that is not worth speaking of, when I was surrounded by danger for eight days. I have had many a narrow escapes but I am still safe, thanks God."*

Walter Davis was promoted to Captain on October 18, 1862. He was appointed aide de camp to

General J. H. Martindale and aide de camp to General James Barnes in 1862. He wrote his mother from camp near Falmouth, VA on November 26, 1862:

*"It seems to me impossible for the people at home (in the north) to realize the extent in which this unhallowed rebellion is steeping our country in blood and draping our households in mourning. It may be that all our sufferings are blessing in disguise intended by the Father of Mercies for our ultimate good."*

As the war raged on Walter wrote in an undated letter:

*"I am now commencing my third winter in the service; how little we at first supposed the war would last so long, but I can see the advantages now that at first little supposed would be advantages. Thousands upon thousands of men are just getting their eyes opened; they wonder why this institution of slavery has been allowed to live so long when they and just such men before them have done all in their power to support it. This war is costing us an immense sum of money, but what is that. It is better to be in debt than be a murderer."*

Walter Davis was promoted to Major in 1864 "for gallant services at the battle of Jericho Ford, VA" and became a Lieutenant Colonel in September 1864 "for gallant services at the battle of Peebles's Farm, VA."

Feeling optimistic Walter wrote his father on September 27, 1864:

*"We all feel now that the war is nearly at an end and I am as certain of success as I am that I shall die."*

He would have to wait seven more months before the war ended in May of 1865.

After the war Walter Davis was involved in wholesale leather and wool business. He married Ellen S. R. Larkin of Boston in 1871. They moved to California in 1875 and for the next four years grew oranges in Anaheim. They lost their entire crop after a bad freeze and decided to move the family to Auburn in 1879. Ellen went ahead of the family and purchased 20 acres with a hard finished house in Auburn. They finished the shingle style home in 1889 and called it El Toyon. Walter also bought the Mammoth Bar Mine near the American River confluence and the mine proved a success. Walter Scott Davis died of heart failure in 1908 in Auburn. He was cremated and buried at the Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA.

## Artist Highlight: Diane Bell

By Gary Day

Rocklin artist Diane Bell creates contemporary works flavored with the memories and artifacts of her family's granite mining history. Bell lives on Winding Lane, close to several long-abandoned quarry pits, most of them in weedy

work is mixed media and I am currently exploring work in encaustic and cold wax with oil. I've created assemblage pieces by combining the wax with rusted metal and other found material." she said.

Bell named one of her new pieces "Message from a Quarryman" in memory of her dad.

"My art has evolved from years of studying with inspirational teachers at Chouinard Art Institute



fields near Downtown Rocklin. She works with materials gleaned from the landscape: pieces of quarry shed roofing and siding, rusty metal and other scraps of an industry that slowly died here during the twentieth century. "I like to contemplate the mystery and history of the metal and old wood which I pick up from around the abandoned granite quarry sites near my home," she said. "I combine paint, bees wax, wire and nails to create assemblage pieces that can be hung on the wall."

Bell said that she loves sorting through her collection of found materials, adding and removing things, nailing and painting and just experimenting. "Most of my

Bell is the granddaughter of Matt Ruhkala who emigrated from Finland in 1889 and established the Union Granite Company which controlled four of Rocklin's 62 quarries during the twentieth century. One of the four is now under the westbound lanes of highway 80. Bell's father Ben Ruhkala was one of four brothers among Matt's eleven children who operated the Capital Quarry, now called Big Gun, from 1933 until 1977.

The City of Rocklin owns Big Gun now. The property is off limits but a spectacular view is available from the second floor exterior stairwell of the Rocklin City Office building.

in Los Angeles and several northern Californian colleges and workshops around the country," she said. Her work is in collections throughout the United States and also in Finland, India and France.

Bell will be on hand to display several pieces of her work on February 28 and March 1, from 1 pm until 4 pm both days, at the Rocklin History Museum, 3895 Rocklin Road. Admission is free.

Website: [dianeruhkalabell.com](http://dianeruhkalabell.com)

# Placer County Historical Society News

## President's Message

By Michael Otten

Yeah, I know the days of a two-bit meal and the nickel beer with an all-you-can-eat buffet are among the stories from the so-called good old days.

So, as your president, it is my duty to inform you that the cost of dinners will be \$15 starting April 2 with our annual meeting and election of officers. The tab is still a bargain when you consider the price increases at stores and restaurants.

Also, if you have prepaid, or made a reservation and cancel after the Sunday prior to the dinner, you will be responsible for payment. The caterer must be paid based on the count we have as of the Sunday prior to the dinner. The Society tries to keep the costs down to break-even. The costs include set up, clean up and various incidentals, including providing dinner for the speaker and guest.

Our membership chair Barbara Burdick reminds me you can save on postage to pay your dues at the April 2 meeting for the coming year. Our dues, the foundation of any organization, are still as low as \$10 a year. They keep us going in carrying out our mission of supporting and preserving local history.

### Who was Placer County's first sheriff?

If you said John Pole, Robert B. Buchanan or Samuel C. Astin,

you're right.

When California became a state in 1850, there was no Placer County. Our toothpaste tube shaped county wasn't created until 1851, being carved out of two of the state's original counties: Sutter and Yuba.

Pole was Yuba's first elected sheriff and Buchanan was Sutter's first. Placer's first officially elected sheriff was Samuel C. Astin (1851-55). I understand that Buchanan's middle name was Bloomer. Could that be the source of the name "Bloomer" Cut on the Central Pacific Railroad route through Auburn?

To get a feel for what an early sheriff looked like, visit the sheriff's office of Elmer Gum in the historic Placer County Courthouse, where our program vice president, Addah Owens, serves as a historically-dressed docent at the Placer County Museum.

Addah is arranging for a special program on the history of the sheriff's office for our April 2 dinner. So make sure you reserve a seat by calling 885-5074.



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Auburn City Historian April McDonald is busy working on re-printing and updating a children's coloring book of historic area buildings. The plan is to give these free to visitors at our museums during the Heritage Trail Aug. 15-16 and to make them available at the Placer County Visitors' Bureau (California Welcome Center).

Thus we are looking for cosponsors and advertisers to help defray the cost of printing. If you can help please contact the City Historian or myself. Be a colorful part of history.

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For as little as \$10 you can join or provide a gift membership in the society. See the application at [placercountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://placercountyhistoricalsociety.org)

--[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

### Historical Advisory Board

Glenn Vineyard, (916) 747-1961

### Old Town Auburn Preservation Society

Lynn Carpenter, (530) 885-1252

### Lincoln Highway Association

Bob Dieterich,  
[bohd@iname.com](mailto:bohd@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)

### 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)

### Golden Drift Historical Society

Jim Ricker, (530) 389-8344

### 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

Barbara Chapman, (916) 415-0153  
[rocklinhistory.org](http://rocklinhistory.org)

### Roseville Historical Society

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

### North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Rebecca Phipps, (530) 583-1762  
[northtahoemuseums.org](http://northtahoemuseums.org)

### Placer County Genealogical Society,

Toni Rosasco, (530) 888-8036  
[pcgenes.com](http://pcgenes.com)

## Placer County Historical Dinner Meeting\*

*By Addah Owens, Vice President*

**When:** April 2nd

**Time:** 6:30 Dinner, 7:30 Program

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

**Cost:** \$15 per person

**Menu:** Baked Ham, Scalloped Potatoes, Seasonable Vegetables,

Salad, Rolls, Desert.

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

**Program:** To be announced on the  
 blog. Check in at:  
[avoiceofhistory.blogspot.com](http://avoiceofhistory.blogspot.com)

**DO NOT BRING ALCOHOL.**  
 County directives prohibit it and  
 we can't get liability coverage.

**According to a new board resolution,** beginning with the April meeting the cost for dinners will be \$15. **Note:** if you send a check or have otherwise agreed to attend and cancel after the Sunday prior to the dinner you will be responsible for payment. The caterer must be paid after the count is called in.

## Calendar of events

### March

9 2:00pm  
Placer County Historical Society board of directors meeting, Room 10, Auburn City Hall, 1225 Lincoln Way, Auburn. (530)888-7837

9 6:00pm  
Rocklin Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting at Old St. Mary's Chapel, 5152 Front Street, Rocklin. (916) 415-0153

10 4:00pm  
Roseville Historical Society meeting at Carnegie Museum, 557 Lincoln St., Roseville. (916) 773-3003

16 6:00pm  
Forest Hill Divide Historical Society business meeting, at the Forest Hill Divide Museum. (530) 367-3535

18 6:30am  
Loomis Basin Historical Society meeting at the Loomis library. (916) 663-3971

21 7:00pm  
Colfax Area Historical Society meeting. Michael Kent Murphy's presentation about the Colfax Hotel. At the Colfax Rail Depot.

22 2:00pm  
Sunday Speaker Series. Bill Marble nuclear power expert/historian. Old St. Mary's Chapel, 5152 Front St., Rocklin. (916) 409-9642

26 7:00pm  
Placer County Genealogical Society general meeting, in the Beecher Room, at the Auburn Library. (530) 885-2216

### April

2 6:30pm  
Placer County Historical Society Dinner Meeting. Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall, 100 East St., Auburn. (530) 885-5074

12 2:00pm  
Rocklin Historical Series Presents A Vaudeville Magic Show, with Julio Sevilla. Old St. Mary's Chapel, 5251 Front St. Rocklin

13 6:00pm  
Rocklin Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting at Old St. Mary's Chapel, 5152 Front Street, Rocklin. (916) 415-0153

14 4:00pm  
Roseville Historical Society Meeting at the Carnegie Museum. 557 Lincoln Street, Roseville. (916) 773-3003

15 6:30pm  
Loomis Basin Historical Society Meeting at the Loomis Library. (916) 663-3871

16 5:30pm  
Historical Advisory Board Meeting at the Auburn Depot at 601 Lincoln Way in Auburn. (530) 889-6500

23 7:00pm  
Placer County Genealogical Society general meeting in the Beecher Room at the Auburn Library. (530) 885-2216

Hello gentle readers. I just wanted to drop in here for a minute and let you know that anyone who wants to put museum or historical society related events in the hard copy version of **The Placer's calendar** should email me the details. It's going to be on a first come first served basis since we do have a limited amount of space. My email is [jadair@placer.ca.gov](mailto:jadair@placer.ca.gov)

There are no such space restrictions on the internet, so we can always fit your events there.



**Placer County Museums**

101 Maple Street  
Auburn, CA 95603

