

Docents Newsletter

Volume 1, Number 3

Historical Society of Dayton Valley

April 2008

History to share

By Donna McElroy

Thanks to Historical Society of Dayton Valley Board Member and Writer Laura Tennant, we now have several copies of the magazine "Reflections" to share. While sorting through her collection, Laura found these priceless items and has been kind enough to share them with the docent program. They are in my care and anyone wishing to borrow and browse may do so. Of special interest is an article complete with wonderful pictures of Ray Walmsley and his family. The article includes many of Ray's early family who were the first to settle in Dayton. You will also be pleased to find a wonderful article about the renowned Ricci Ranch complete with beautiful pictures of our own Grace and her husband in earlier years. There are many photos of the family and their wonderful ranch as well as some of the amazing farm animals that they raised. We even have a copy of an original newsletter that was one of the first composed by the Historical Members at their inception. It is with much pleasure that I sincerely "Thank" Laura for sharing the past with those of us who are anxious to learn. Anyone wanting access to any of these materials, please contact me.

Our lending closet is brimming with wonderful clothing for our docents to borrow. I will be working on cataloging the items and

cleaning the area that they will be stored in. Anyone who would be willing to assist me in this endeavor, please contact me. Thank you.

Docent doings

By Patrick Neylan

Fellow docents, the program accepted by the Historical Society of Dayton Valley about a year ago, of which you are a major part, has now blossomed into a major force. Not a force like an army, but a force of expanded information. Through the effort of our mentor, Ruby McFarland, all of us have been exposed to more, better, detailed, precise and focused information about the simplest of all places in Nevada, Dayton. Because of this process, we have all learned of the "real" importance of our little town of Dayton. We have learned that it really is not just a little town, but the Gateway to the Comstock. The beginning of one of the events that changed the history of the world, and that is not an exaggeration. The Comstock began in Dayton!

With this in mind, we, the Docents of the HSDV, should be poised to move forward and we should be ready to do so soon. Many calls to action will be coming. Operate the Museum on Saturdays or Sundays throughout the spring and summer season. Man the Museum on a daily basis in May, Nevada History Appreciation Month. Participate in the Lecture program in May dealing with the Depression and New
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Deal and how it affected Nevada and Dayton.

The good news is that we are a Family. When asked to help, if you are not comfortable, let us know, and then come to the Museum and hang out with someone who is. If a lecture is coming up, ask to sit in on preparations.

Both the Historical Society and the Docent program within it, has only one goal, and that is it should be a learning experience for all of us. The oldest of the old timers, and the newest of the residents of Dayton, all want to learn something NEW. The Society gives all of us that opportunity. Take advantage of it!

As Docents, you will be asked to help, to volunteer, to talk, to do something, and soon. Please accept the challenge, step up to the plate, volunteer for the dates offered. Be a part of the history of Dayton. The new history starts tomorrow; be a part of it! Be remembered a hundred years from now! How do you think History happens?

Book review

By Linda Adams

Among the finds in the Schoolhouse/Museum Gift corner:

While looking at the many selections of gift books we have for sale in our gift shop I came across one book, "Our Days on the Desert," a collection of short stories by Ada Quilici Bommarito about her own upbringing on her family ranch in the Dayton area.

Since I'm from Southern Italian heritage, my parents are foreign born, I was fascinated to read about the lives of northern Italian families in the rural far west. In Brooklyn, New York, we had no northern Italians in our midst and we were many moons from real-life. When I was old enough to realize that Italy had a north and

south, I was told that the northern Italians lived in the western part of the U.S. Italians in the eastern seaboard for the most part came from southern Italy or Sicily.

When I picked up "Our Days on the Desert" little did I know that this book would answer most of my questions about how the Italian ranching families lived in the Dayton area in a time when Dayton was truly rural. The bonus was that the history extends from the 1920's to the 1940's.

While reading this book it felt like I was watching a family reunion. I sometimes couldn't differentiate family and friends since friends were often treated like family. It seemed if you were from northern Italy and ranched in this part of Nevada you were also considered extended family. Much of the traditions brought back memories of my own Italian heritage.

This is a great little gem for anyone who would like to take an arm-chair tour on an Italian family ranch during the 1920's to 1940's in this area. I found it to be a fascinating retrospective on what ranch life was like including history on our little town of Dayton during that era.

One of the stories is titled "Ghost and Bedbugs." This is worth the read just for the innovation of wallpaper, flour and cayenne pepper. I'll let the reader be the judge, however I'm sticking with Ada's take on the outcome.

Check out the high school (page 12) where you showed off your Ford coupe with the leather-covered rumble seat (page 14).

Reading about how the WWII affected the area is a well worth read in itself.

In "They Paved the Way," Ada shares the history of why these Italians came to the arid desert of Nevada.

Consider this book for your reading enjoyment and gift giving. The photos are fun and the story inspiring!

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Dates to remember

April 5: Schools and Newspapers, with Laura Tennant, 11:00 at the Museum.

April 12: Scales, with Bob Foster, 11:00 at the Museum.

April 16: General Meeting, Noon at Makin' Coffee

April 19: Minor Ranch, with Del Minor, 11:00 at the Museum.

April 24: Evolution of Canning and Bottling, with Loren Love, 7:00 p.m. at the Senior Center.

April 26: Indians, with Stony Tennant, 11:00 at the Museum.

Given the turnout of folks at the St. Mary's in the Mountains tour, Ruby is considering a second visit to the church in Virginia City for those who might want to go again, and to give those who were unable to attend an opportunity to get in on this exceptional tour by Patrick Neylan. If you're interested in another visit to Virginia City, let Ruby or Donna know. This is an opportunity we should take advantage of as quickly as possible, given that the tourist season will be upon us within a few weeks.

As noted in a previous issue, DVD copies of each week's lecture are available at the museum by the Saturday following each event. For anyone wanting to borrow a copy for viewing at home, be aware that there is a 30-day time limit on returning the DVD you borrow. Keeping that DVD for longer than 30 days means you now own it for a charge of \$5.00 per DVD.

Many of us know the year one or another of the railroads was built within hailing distance of Reno, Carson City or Virginia City. Prior to the railroads, however, freight and passengers would have been transported across the Sierra Nevada by wagon road. Over the past couple of weeks, as time permits, I've been looking on the Internet for freight or wagon roads that might have been in use between Sacramento or Marysville on the west side of the mountains to Reno, Carson City and Virginia City on the eastern slopes. Four or more roads existed at various times, including Henness Pass Road, 1948-50 (Dog Valley in Verdi); Old Placerville Road, including a portion of the Mormon Emigrant Trail, 1848; Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road, used by the Central Pacific in building the railroad over the Sierras, 1864; and Pacific Turnpike. There may be several others as well. Now to find one or more books that might document those roads.

Garden party!

By Donna McElroy

I have been considering a "Gardening" party at the museum and was wondering if there is interest from the docent group to help with this project. I will be contacting the Parks District to gain permission prior to proceeding, but would like input from the group as to interest of this item. Please let me know your thoughts!

This 'n that

By Bob Wallace

Ruby McFarland advised earlier this month that Gary McElroy's mother, Donna McElroy's mother-in-law, had fallen at her home in Napa, necessitating surgery to insert pins in hip and wrist, both of which were broken in the fall. Our thoughts and prayers go out to them while the woman Donna refers to as "Mom" recovers.