

Docents Newsletter

Volume 3, Number 5

Historical Society of Dayton Valley

June 2010

Docents program

By Ruby McFarland

“Happiness consists in activity; such is the constitution of our nature; it is a running stream and not a stagnant pool.” John Mason Good (1764-1827)

Boy, we ought to have a lot of happy people in the HSDV because last month we were plenty active. I'm glad we don't have to do that every month.

However, June is turning out to be plenty busy, too. I've been trying to downsize the STUFF in my life and I'm doing pretty good so far.

There are so many things we collect that we simply can't bring ourselves to get rid of. I know how museums get artifacts. It's because we can't let go of our stuff and eventually, when we are gone to our reward, it's a museum piece. Well, I'm getting rid of all that stuff before I leave, or so I'd have you believe.

There is so much that doesn't mean a thing to anyone but you. I know that, but it's such a treasure! So I'll give it to the rummage sale and hope someone else will think it's just the treasure they were looking for.

There are a few things I'll keep and hope there is someone in my family will find it important enough to keep.

Stand by for the pony express. It will be interesting to see the reenactment of those brave young men – “orphans preferred.”

I hope the weather will hurry up and let me plant a garden. I always wait until the frost is over – hard to tell this year. But I hope you all have a good month.

HSDV's historical lecture series

By Laura Tennant

The first speaker at the HSDV's May lecture series was Nevada historian, Martin Griffith. His story of the tribulations he and his hiking partner encountered when they hiked the entire immigrant trail across Nevada intrigued the audience.

When he hiked the 400+ mile trail across the desert in July, he couldn't believe the hardships pioneers endured. (Morgan Webber made CDs of Martin's talk. I recommend you watch it – it's free).

In the 1990s, when Martin passed through Dayton on the immigrant trail, he learned that locals and old-time natives grew up hearing that Dayton is Nevada's earliest settlement. Martin was intrigued. Soon, he was on a quest, searching for 'primary source' materials relating to Nevada's earliest history.

'Primary source' information isn't reaped from reading history books written after the Gold Rush days, but pertains to studying pioneers' hand-written diaries, old newspaper articles, periodicals, obituaries, birth and death certificates, immigration papers, etc.

Nowadays, those in quest of accurate history have a modern tool to expedite research – that's the Internet. You know, type an individual's name into Google or Ancestry.com and there's so much information that it can be overwhelming, but, at least, if taken from reliable sources, it's factual, not the figment of someone's imagination.

Information published on Dayton's history today is referred to as “new evidence” when compared

- Continued on Page 2 -

to the 19th Century written accounts. Many 19th Century books on Nevada's wild and woolly days are considered "potboilers" or "historical fiction" produced quickly to raise money.

Martin's cohort, former Nevada State Archivist Guy Rocha noted that many potboiler history books have been "discredited by scholars" researching historical records. This is why we take "new evidence" seriously.

Martin has read more than 120 handwritten pioneer diaries, but there was one that jumped out at him written by Lucena Pfuffer Parsons, 1850-1851. This is the only diary he found for that year, and, so far, it's been the most important because it documents Nevada's earliest history.

The diary, entitled "A Woman in a Sunbonnet," is the story of a Wisconsin teacher, Lucena Pfuffer, who marries George Washington Parsons, a farm helper from Illinois. The grueling trek West in a Conestoga Wagon was their honeymoon.

Lucena's wagon train camped 12 days at the mouth of Gold Canyon in May 1851 where she says 200 miners were digging placer gold. She noted that a wagon train party, managed by John Reese, a man on his way to establish Genoa, camped in the canyon while she was there. Since Reese is the man who built a trading post at Genoa in June 1851, her diary indicates Dayton is at least two weeks older than Genoa. (Read her diary – it's fascinating.)

"Who cares," you ask. This is when two weeks makes a difference – it's the history of the Silver State and that's the way it goes. We believe Gold Canyon (Dayton) was continuously inhabited since May 1851. (Read more about this debate in the **Nevada Magazine's** October 1998 issue in the Docents training manual.)

Pony Express re-ride
Old Town Dayton
Wednesday, June 9, 2010
approximately 10:00 AM

George Wingfield Owner and Operator of Nevada

Author: C. Elizabeth Raymond
 University of Nevada Press, 1992

By Patrick Neylan

George Wingfield was the wealthiest and most politically powerful man in Nevada in the 1920s and 30s. His career was varied with beginnings in gaming, mining and eventually virtual control of banking in Nevada. His early association with banker George Nixon from Winnemucca eventually led to an immense fortune. Mr. Wingfield also had an intense desire to improve the economy of Nevada. He was invested in many areas including farming, dairies, in addition to his mining and banking holdings. He also developed the Riverside Hotel in Reno. Bitterly criticized at the time, his influence was responsible for the legalization of gambling in Nevada in 1931 as well as the reduction of the waiting period for divorce, creating the reputation of Nevada as the divorce capitol of the United States.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, coupled with an extreme drought in the West that crippled the cattle industry, led to the collapse of Mr. Wingfield's banking empire as well as his political demise. He suffered a personal bankruptcy and liquidated all his assets in an unsuccessful attempt to ward off his creditors. By now he had acquired many powerful enemies and their pressures prevented his saving his holdings.

Interest in the Getchell Mine, near Winnemucca, led to his financial recovery, but even though he had many political friends, including Pat McCarran, Tasker Oddie and the like, he never regained his political influence. At the time of his death in 1959, Mr. Wingfield left an estate in excess of 3 million dollars. His true legacy to the State of Nevada was his attempt to bring economic growth and stability to a sparsely populated western state with such diverse resources.

This is a brief overview of the life of a fascina-

- Continued on Page 3 -

ting man who people either loved or hated, trusted or viewed with great suspicion. It gives the reader a lot of insight to life and times in Nevada between the boom years of the Comstock and the more recent eras we are all familiar with.

HSDV's DVD collection

By Donna McElroy

As you are all aware, we have a wonderful collection of DVDs available on lectures that have been done over the last few years. There are over 50 of them in our collection to date. They have been made by our own Morgan Webber who is an outstanding photographer and cameraman! The lectures are done by many different people, some descendants of original settlers of Dayton, some with doctorate degrees, and all are interesting.

Our lectures include demonstrations as well. We have one of a Montana cowboy who shows how to make baskets with used lariats. There is also a lecture on the controversy of Dayton versus Genoa, the first Nevada settlement. Textiles, early inhabitants of the Carson Valley, Judge Guild, telephones, arrowheads, and the flooding of the early days.

I would encourage you all to borrow these wonderful tools and broaden your knowledge of our museum, Dayton, and the surrounding Carson Valley and enjoy. You can check out and return the DVDs or purchase them for your own for \$5.00 each.

Robin Darney is a seamstress and is willing to sew period clothing for us. She has a sewing endeavor and makes Bang & Things. I met her at Oodles of Noodles. She will discuss with you your sewing needs. Give her a call at 230-3295. I do have a few patterns that I would be willing to share if someone wants a new outfit.

Pony Express re-ride
Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Newsletter notes

By Bob Wallace

Comments at our May 26 Docents meeting at the museum included how the May lecture series had done this year: very well! Martin Griffith's lecture is covered in this issue by Laura Tennant. Subsequent lectures included Bob Nysten on volunteering, and Mark Jensen discussing the Dangberg Home Ranch Historic Park. A visit to the Dangberg site is being planned for later this year. Also in the planning is a visit to Virginia City on Tuesday, **July 13** (10:00 AM at the museum), and a walking tour of the Rose Ditch.

As was noted by Laura Tennant in her piece on Martin Griffith's lecture, one can easily find information on the Internet, including the Carson River Mills, Carson River floods (USGS web site, including time line and photos of Dayton as well as Carson City), and details of the Carson & Colorado Railroad. Going a bit further afield, one can also find details on some of the emigrant trails that went through the region, giving access to what was then known as the Lower Carson Valley (Dayton area) and Upper Carson Valley, and, in later years, wagon roads used to supply Virginia City during its heyday.

Jack Folmar has put together a Calendar of Events and Programs covering dates throughout the year 2010. Jack suggests that this is still a work in progress, but it looks very good.

Dates coming up:

June 9: Pony Express re-ride, Old Town Dayton, approximately 10:00 AM on Main Street.

June 16: HSDV general meeting, 12:30 PM at the Dayton Library, followed by the C&C Working Group.

June 23: Docents meeting at the school house museum, 10:30 AM.