

Docents Newsletter

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Historical Society of Dayton Valley

August 2010

Docents program

By Ruby McFarland

“I love my job – it's the work I hate.” Unknown

Work, work, work, and it's all my fault for suggesting a display for the State Fair. I'm beginning to get panicky now to have the display done on time. It will happen but it's a grind getting it done. Bless Ron Rowe's heart, he has done a good job cutting out the figures. It's been very hot in the depot but we have been toughing it out in the mornings.

The logistics have been a worry, there are so many things to think about. We have 25 days to get this all together. My, how time flies when you're having fun.

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We had a lot of fun on our outing to St Marys of the Mountain. As usual, Pat Neylan was a wonderful guide. It's nice to see the beautiful building back in shape. We had lunch in beautiful downtown Virginia City. There were nine of us on the tour. Wish you all could have been there, too.

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The month flashed by because I was so busy. The next time I suggest anything – ask me why.

I know it sounds like complaint, but what else would I be doing. It's been fun for me so far. I'm sure we will have a wonderful display we can be proud of and people will be impressed with Dayton folks and want to visit.

Docent doings

By Patrick Neylan

Whew! Talk about growing! The Society's membership has, the Docent program has, and the *really* exciting part is tidbits of our history, coming in, has! Through the efforts of all you members, and your enthusiasm, little by little more Dayton history is being discovered! Judy Harris reports our membership at 105 before renewals were sent.

Member Rube Erickson is working on research concerning the Baroni family in Dayton, Odeon owners and then some. Genee Nell from Florida has sent some “Misfits” period photos, a couple of which we did not have before. Her parents owned the Odeon for a short time in 1961 ... a missing link! What else is out there? I can answer that! Our latest new member, Robert Gracey! He recently joined because he wants to be a part of our Depot Restoration! His father worked for the C&C/SP. He was born “on the line,” and has a lot of information to share with our Society about the railroad. Bob lives in Reno but has attended our last two general meetings, and wants to know when we have our “set up day” for the State Fair. He intends to be there.

Dayton is important! The Society is important! Neither would be without you! Please just keep doing what you are doing! BUT, if you have a little extra time, a little curiosity for history, just show up!

In the next few weeks, you could become a part of the State Fair, Dayton Valley Days, the 50th anniversary of the filming of “The Misfits!” Just call: Patrick Neylan, 246-3527, or email me at: virginiacitypat@sbcglobal.net Whatever you can do, whatever extra time you have, we need you!

**Dayton Valley Days
September 18 & 19
Old Town Dayton**

Dayton's commercial center ravaged in 1866 conflagration

By Laura Tennant

One of the worst fires in Dayton's history occurred in July 1866. Needless to say, the cry of "fire" in any of Nevada's old mining and milling towns meant disaster.

"Dayton to ashes with losses of over \$100,000," said the *Territorial Enterprise* newspaper headlines in the July 3, 1866 edition.

The hellish fire started on Main Street's business sector at the Empire Hay Yard, located near the Carson River Bridge crossing (same bridge location today). Racing west (toward the cemetery), the fire swept through town. At least 27 dwellings, primarily businesses, perished, including a brewery, clothing, groceries, dry goods, restaurants, cigars/tobacco shop, shoemakers, saloon, barber shop and residences.

"The Lyon County Sentinel" office also burned. The owners saved little, reported the *Enterprise*, noting it was due to "their [owners'] endeavors to arrest the progress of the flames to save others' property."

"It's supposed to have been the work of a drunken fellow. The hay, wood and abundance of other combustibles about the premises, all in a perfectly dry state, fed the fire and in a short time, it spread so it was perfectly uncontrollable, sweeping everything before it, the buildings being principally of wood."

Townspeople had recently formed a "Hook and Ladder Company," but their efforts were of little avail. "The conflagration leaped onward from house to house in a manner perfectly appalling to behold. The terror-stricken inhabitants did all they could with buckets of water from wells around town but couldn't arrest the furiously raging flames, goaded onward by a strong wind."

All residents could do was try to save belongings, throwing them outside on the streets or into fireproof cellars.

A building on Main Street, owned by Sigo & Hazeltine, said to be fireproof, was ablaze when dry wood and materials stored in the rear of the building ignited. The intense heat and flames spread to the north side of the street, taking the stately "Roberts House" (located at the corner of Pike and Main Streets).

"The fire was in full force on both sides of Main Street, burning structure after structure to the westward with nothing to stay its determined march of destruction. The flames reached Birdsall's (today's Dayton Justice Court site) fire-proof store, which withstood the flames, but everything around it of inflammable nature burned," noted the *Enterprise*, saying it "flashed around the

Birdsall store onto Doyle's Theatre Hall, "perhaps the largest frame building in town, soon it was also in ashes."

In what seemed like moments, the buildings on both sides of Main Street were smoking piles of debris, leaving families destitute.

"Such a clean sweep was made of the provisions that hardly enough was left to feed the people. All their stoves and cooking utensils were destroyed. Sheriff Cummings was seen hunting among bakers for bread to send to those who were suffering," noted the reporter.

The Odd Fellows Hall building on Pike Street was scorched but saved, as were buildings on the north side of Main Street from Pike towards the bridge.

Running out of gas

By Patrick Neylan

I have worked for Ruby before, on the Dayton School House Float, used for Dayton Valley Days and the Nevada Day Parade a few years ago. Again, Ruby has come to the fore and has created a most remarkable concept for Dayton's first display at the Nevada State Fair. The Fair Committee has created a new theme, Nevada History and Heritage. They made a presentation to our Society, and after a major pause, Ruby said "We can do that!" For all of you working on this, you know it is not only going to happen, it is going to be Busby Berkley/Vegas Mirage spectacular. Come work on the display, come man the booth, or just come to the Fair and be proud of Dayton. Your Society makes all of this possible!

So why am I rambling? Just a personal note. We finished our work on Friday. Ruby was "out of gas," and we all left the Depot. For my part, I waved goodbye to all, and then drove down Pike Street in my 1953 Cadillac and then, it "just stopped." I called Mark, my wonderful mechanic, who drove in from Mark Twain, and after investigation, informed me I was out of gas! The Cadillac, not me!

Dates to keep in mind

By Bob Wallace

Activities all around the area in this month of August. HSDV, C&C Working Group, and the State Fair in Reno.

August 18: HSDV General meeting, 12:30 p.m. at the library, followed by the C&C Working Group. A docents meeting may be included.

August 25-29: State Fair in Reno, including the HSDV display to be staffed by HSDV members.