

Docents Newsletter

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Historical Society of Dayton Valley

September 2010

Docents program

By Ruby McFarland

“By all these lovely tokens September days are here, with summer's best of weather and autumn's best of cheer.” Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885)

Are we going to be able to wind down a bit? Not a chance. Dayton Valley Days are upon us and the society jumped in with both feet. When will we learn?

Surely I jest because truth be known I enjoy every minute of it. I thought I wouldn't survive the fair stuff, I did. I really like to promote our home town. I happen to love the beautiful Dayton Valley.

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We had a lot of good help getting the State Fair display together. We repeatedly have a lot of people step up to help make a success of our occupations to promote Dayton. We have more people helping than we have ever had before. Thanks to all the helpful men we have doing the grunt work we dream up for them. Thanks to all those who volunteer to get into the thick of it.

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The HSDV has come a long way since the early days when we had about eight active people. We still have most of the eight folks, but we have added a whole bunch more of great active people. I attribute it to having a lot more interest in doing more community-based work. We are active. We get our hands dirty. We sweat a little. We all get in step and we have fun doing it. When it isn't fun any more, I'll quit.

Thank all of you who make my life interesting and keep my young.

Docent doings

By Patrick Neylan

Our State Fair is a **great** State Fair! That's the title song to the 1962 Pat Boone movie, “State Fair,” and after today I know ten Daytonites who will be humming it for a long time! I am embarrassed to say I have never been to a Nevada State Fair and have lived in Nevada for 24 years, but I am in good company because Dayton has never been to a State Fair either, and Dayton has been in Nevada for over 150 years! Well, by the time you read this, both items will have been corrected, thanks to the Historical Society of Dayton Valley (HSDV).

Today, the Tuesday before the Fair, three trucks, one trailer and ten excited Society members stormed the Livestock Events Center in Reno and transformed part of it into a Dayton diorama. Under the subtle wand movements of Ruby McFarland, like a symphony in motion, the idea that has been in Ruby's head for two months, sometimes “glowing,” sometimes “tormenting,” but visualized by no one else, suddenly blossomed into an incredible reality. Many Society members helped create this masterpiece over the last several weeks, but ten of us had the privilege and fun of helping to set it up.

Like Paul Harvey, this is the rest of the story. Under the military precision of Lois Wallace, the other half of the presentation was set up. Lois, working closely with Donna McElroy and Vicki Kinney, has organized every other aspect of Dayton's presentation. A display of historic Dayton photos (thanks, Morg!), as well as a complete display of Dayton items for sale, including Afton Frederick pictures (thanks, Morg),

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The Fannie Hazlett book, the Carson & Colorado coffee mugs, hats, etc., and the incredible new line of postcards (thanks, Morg!). In addition, the Society will have ample literature and information to give to visitors to promote Dayton history, as well as DVD, the Pony Express, and the C&C RR Depot restoration, etc. Dayton has it all!

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Photo courtesy of Morgan Webber
Dayton docents and spouses line up in Reno after setting up the HSDV display for the State Fair. Left to right: Gary McElroy, Dagmar Webber, Bob Wallace, Donna McElroy, Vicki Kinney, Lois Wallace, Gene Kinney, Pat Neylan.

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Thanks to: Ruby McFarland, Lois and Bob Wallace, Donna and Gary McElroy, Vicki and Gene Kinney, Morg and Dagmar Webber, and Pat Neylan (had to get my name in there) for all your efforts today to create Dayton's first Historical Heritage Display at the Nevada State Fair! Thanks to Jack Folmar for creating "buttons" for this event (and several past).

Miscellaneous Factoids: Our display is on a Concourse probably 100 yards long. There are probably 20-25 booths on each side. Dayton has the largest booth of all! Dayton has 30 linear feet of display area. That is three times bigger than Virginia City, half again bigger than Tonopah or Elko. I did not look for Genoa.

If you did not make it to the State Fair and see the Dayton display, you missed part of Dayton's future history!

Great fire of 1870 turns Dayton downtown to ashes

By Laura Tennant

The story of Dayton's first major fire, July 1866, is posted in last month's newsletter. The town had rebuilt after this fire destroyed Main Street's commercial sector when a "greater" fire blazed through town, again in July, 1870, taking more than 50 buildings with damages about \$100,000.

Again, the *Territorial Enterprise* reported: "Nearly the whole business portion of the town was laid to ashes. It left the pretty town of Dayton in a truly pitiable plight; little but a mass of smoking ruins."

This time it started in the upper story of an unoccupied saloon owned by H. Webb. "It started in the upper story and was bursting through the roof when first discovered at 9 ½ o'clock. It was supposed to have been kindled by an incendiary (in this usage, arson was suspected) as the building has long been unoccupied."

A light wind blowing southwesterly spread the fire to adjacent buildings. Although a fire alarm immediately sounded, the town didn't own fire-fighting equipment or have an organized fire department. "Great confusion prevailed and the fire spread rapidly, leaping from house to house, allowing no time for the removal of goods."

With no fire engine, a bucket brigade was forced away by intense heat although there was plenty of water available. "Goods removed from the buildings in advance of the fire kindled and were consumed where they lay heaped in the streets.

"The fire swept along Main Street in the direction of the river and before its progress was stayed, four blocks of buildings were in ruins," wrote the reporter.

He continued: "Had the town possessed a fire engine, the fire might have been mastered before so many buildings were destroyed but to successfully fight such a fire with buckets was an impossibility. The citizens did what they could and worked hard enough to have accomplished

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great things.”

The fire was stopped when residents pulled down buildings; however, it took its own course without measure to fight it.

“We are indebted to Sheriff Cummings of this place, and Dr. John Hazlett of Dayton,” the article noted, adding, “Six brick buildings supposed to be fireproof were destroyed. The fire curled up the iron doors and swept into and through them – the Odeon Hall shared the fate of the majority of the fireproofs. The only buildings that stood the severe test to which they were subjected were the grocery store of Mr. Myers at the corner of Main and Pike streets, the clothing store of Mr. F. Walter on the opposite side of Main Street, and Fox's meat market located nearby.”

A few buildings were covered with fire insurance – a total of \$30,000 was paid by insurance companies, including Northern Ins., Manhattan and Phoenix Cos., Aetna Ins. Co., North British and Mercantile; People's Ins. And Fireman's Fund and Pacific.

After this fire, J.C. Gruber, owner of the Union Hotel (Gruber House) donated \$100 to start a fund to buy the town's first fire engine.

One of Dayton's earliest historians, Fanny Hazlett, wrote about another fire in the early 1870s: “Midgeley's Restaurant, owned by O. E. Nash, burned in the night. It was a story and a half with sleeping rooms over the restaurant. The fire spread so rapidly in the pine-lined and papered rooms that five lives were lost. But for the barking of their big Newfoundland dog, Mr. and Mrs. Nash, sleeping in the front room on the first floor would have perished.

“They barely had time to escape through a window,” she noted, adding: “Dayton was burned piecemeal at intervals ever since the town started.”

Arriving in Dayton in 1862 via wagon, Hazlett's reminiscences of the town's history were published in the *Nevada Historical Society Papers, 1921-22*. Copies of this book of Dayton anecdotes as well as history sell for \$10 at the Dayton Museum, 135 Shady Lane.

Other newspapers report the 1870 fire:

Another accounting of the 1870 fire discovered on the Internet by Dr. Linda Clements: Note the discrepancies in the numbers of buildings lost, the time varying from 9 to 10 p.m., the fire's date in the Daily Alta California, however, local news stories report July 19.

Destruction of Union Hotel/Gruber's Lyon House: The Great Dayton Fire of 1870

(The fire occurred on the evening of Monday, July 18, 1870.)

Daily Alta California (issue owned by LLC)
Wednesday, July 20, 1870, page 1:

NEVADA

SILVER CITY, July 19th – The town of Dayton was destroyed by fire last night. The fire started at ten o'clock, in an occupied building next to Pinschowers.

The following business houses are destroyed:

Norton's saloon, Fraul's carpenter shop, Smith's restaurant, Bonhan Bros., the Post Office building, Pinschower Bros.'s dry goods store, Carling's saloon, Brant's variety store, Davis' restaurant, O'Malley's drug store, the Telegraph office, Seaton's grocery, Fisher's brewery, Pratt & Shaw's hay yard, Gruber's Lyon House, Cross' National Hotel, Kean's dry goods store, Gouldin's barber shop, Hamilton's livery stable, Franklin's house, Franklin's saddlery, Higg's taylor shop, Migdley's boarding house, Byron & Crockett's Odeon Hall, and numerous smaller buildings.

Daily Alta California & San Francisco Times
[this letterhead appears only on the last page of the newspaper, page 4]

YESTERDAY'S DESPATCH.

THE DAYTON FIRE.

The following private dispatch was received by Hope, McKillip and Co. of this city.

VIRGINIA, July 19th. – An appalling fire has occurred in Dayton. Forty-five buildings have been burned, and the business portion of the place destroyed.

VIRGINIA CITY.

Virginia, July 19th. – A destructive fire occurred last night, about nine o'clock, in Dayton, which destroyed thirty-nine frame buildings and six brick. Almost the entire business portion of the town is burnt.

Newsletter notes

By Bob Wallace

Before getting too far away from our State Fair display, perhaps we'd best get some background in here before we forget the "why" of it, but also get some information for anyone reading this at some future date without knowing how we got to this point with the HSDV.

Last spring, Rich Crombie, Executive Director of the newly redesigned *Nevada Territory Wild West Fair* approached the Historical Society of Dayton Valley with details on the "new" state fair and what it was intended to look like. He also informed us that every city, town and wide spot was invited to participate with a minimum booth size of ten square feet.

It took maybe five seconds for Ruby McFarland to signal that we were in, that we'd have a static display of some sort, and that we would be ready by the setup date of August 24. A few moments later, Ruby already had a pencil sketch of what we would be putting together, including the V&T's #18, named "Dayton," an Oriental gate with Chinese lettering saying "Gold Canyon" on it, a partial covered wagon with wheels and a fabric cover, a replica of the Lincoln Highway sign and very old "50" highway sign, a pony express rider on his horse, a statue of a gold miner panning for gold, Sutro Tunnel, and, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the filming of "The Misfits" in Dayton with Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable, the cardboard photo of Marilyn next to one or another of the display items.

Within days, material was being gathered to put our static display together. Pencil lines were put on the material to tell Ron Rowe where to cut for this or that display item, hands were put to work painting various items, hardware, letters and numbers added where that was appropriate for the display item.

With all the items put together as intended, it was out on the porch at the depot for a display picture before packing up and going to the Reno Livestock Events Center to set up, finally! The results show up in that picture on Page 2 of this

newsletter, the photo taken by Morgan Webber just before we left for a leisurely lunch and trip back down the highway to Dayton. All in a day's work, is one way to put it, and a job well done!

When the State Fair closes its doors on Sunday evening, the real cleanup process will come on Monday morning when everything has to be taken out of the Events Center by Noon. Then, and only then, will everyone be able to relax, at least for a couple of weeks. The *Dayton Valley Days* event comes up in mid-September on the 18th and 19th when those items will once again be set up, this time in old town Dayton. If you missed the State Fair, look for replicas of Dayton's olden days on the old Lincoln Highway.

Dates to remember

By Bob Wallace

Before starting on the dates for the month of September, congratulations to the HSDV crew who put together the static display for the State Fair. While on an overnight stay in Idaho Falls, Idaho, email messages told us that the HSDV display had won a blue ribbon for best display at this year's event.

And now, on to dates for this month.

September 15: HSDV general meeting and C&C Depot Working Group starts at 12:30 p.m. at the Dayton Valley Library.

September 18-19: Dayton Valley Days in Old Town Dayton.

September 22: Docents meeting at the museum, 10:30 a.m.