

Docents Newsletter

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Historical Society of Dayton Valley

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Docent doings

By Patrick Neylan

The ongoing update project at our Schoolhouse Museum is coming along well. Its scope expanded beyond any of our original plans or intentions but has led to a most remarkable conclusion and that is an even better museum display than any of us anticipated. At times the path got a little bumpy, the self-imposed time constraints got more than a little stressful but the end result will be and actually is better than any of our members had hoped for. It is not finished; it may not be finished for some time, but it sure is vastly improved.

As our “business” is history we have been able to build on the sound “business” foundation laid in the early days of the museum by its founders. The roots they laid down actually facilitated the transition to the museum that the public will view in the coming summer season. The blending of the old and the new, both in the items displayed as well as the people working on the transformation has paid great dividends.

When the dust settles, and we made plenty of that, there will be a museum as well as a Society that every member can be proud of; and every member is a part of, whether they worked on the museum project itself, supported our events, or worked in the background on the nuts and bolts that keeps the Society functioning.

When we open to the public on March 3 and 4 there will be a striking new look at our most important theme, gold discovery as well as the facts about Nevada's first settlement and the importance of the Chinese to Dayton's early history. Not only will the museum be visitor friendly but it will be much more docent friendly also as the displays are much better organized,

better labeled and much more informative. In addition there is a totally new gift shop that will highlight the items we have available for sale. Not every detail will be ready for the weekend, but soon the fine tuning will be complete and everyone who has visited the museum in the past will be amazed and impressed, and for those who are visiting for the very first time, well, they will just think that the folks of Dayton have always been brilliant!

Dayton takes the continent by storm!

After a chance meeting last summer with a delightful museum visitor from Germany, our docent Jack Folmar has been instrumental in bringing the town of Dayton, the HSDV and our museum to the attention of TV viewers in France and Germany. The nice lady Jack showed around our museum turned out to be a film director doing research for a film project about back roads and sights across the United States. A five-part special with the first part already complete, she and her crew arrived in Dayton on Thursday to interview several of our veteran citizens about life in Dayton over the years. This is all part of life along Highway 50, the loneliest highway in America, but with an additional interest in the Pony Express and the TV series Bonanza, both items of ongoing interest to Europeans. Jack has been coordinating with them for several weeks and arranged for them to see the highlights of Dayton.

In the early stages of their planning Dayton had not even been considered for inclusion, but now it may well have an interesting part. Time will tell. In the midst of all the rearranging, future building and display labeling the crew interviewed Grace Ricci, Laura and Stony Tennant, Julie Sutich Rita Quilici Selmi, Nancy Sbragia, and “newcomer”

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Jack Folmar himself. There were great anecdotes about the Misfits, the Pony Express, the cast of Bonanza, as well as the fine points of Dayton's history including the "dispute" with Genoa.

After the crew lunched at Compadre's they also visited with Sharon Anderson, toured the Dayton cemetery, the Pony Express wall and other Dayton landmarks. No one knows what the outcome will be, but it just goes to show that through all the efforts of the Historical Society, Dayton may soon lose its reputation as the "forgotten one" in Nevada.



A group picture of the "veteran citizens" of Dayton taken on the steps of the Schoolhouse Museum. Photo courtesy of Pat Neylan.

More Dayton history comes to life

By Donna McElroy

Last December our phone rang and my husband answered it. Imagine my surprise when I heard him say "You would like information on whom? He said, "Manly Johnson?" He told the person on the other end that he could hand the phone to a

woman who portrayed Manly's wife in Chautauqua's at our local schools! This began nearly a half-hour conversation with Patricia Johnson of San Francisco, CA. She is the great-granddaughter of Mary Emma and Manly Lawrence Johnson who lived here in Dayton in the 1800s.

Manly Johnson's son, Lawrence Westerfield Johnson, was her grandfather. Lawrence Johnson's sister, Kathleen, although in frail health, is 101 at this time (February 2012).

Shortly before Christmas, Patricia called to say that she was in Reno and would like to come to Dayton and visit the Museum and talk about Manly and Mary Johnson. I called Vicki Kinney and Jack Folmar and we met her and a friend, Jim Blaney, with much eagerness! Upon their arrival we presented her with a drawing done by Afton Fredricks of the "Assay Office" which her great-grandfather had worked in. We gave her a tour of our museum and were very happy with the visit.

Since that visit there have been many emails and phone conversations between Patricia, Pat Neylan, and myself about Manly and Mary Johnson. We are exchanging the information that we each discover about the family of the Johnsons. This has proved to be a very interesting adventure. We are always finding out new bits of information to add to the story. I will endeavor to keep you informed.

Here is a bit of the history of the Johnson family from the 1800s:

The Johnsons had a two-story home just behind "Compadre's" restaurant here in Dayton. They had ten children: seven boys and three girls.

When Manly first arrived here in Nevada he was a boy of 11 and an orphan. He arrived by wagon train from his native Illinois with the Wallrod

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Party. Manly worked as a stable boy at the Bowers Mansion for some time and went on to help build the road from Dayton to Mound House. Manly had a stagecoach and freight line that brought items from the V&T Railroad to the town of Dayton. He transported items to stock the restaurants, hotels, mercantile, hurdy gurdy houses, saloons, dental offices, and many other places in need. In turn he hauled freight items from the town to the rails for distribution to Virginia City and beyond. He also discovered the gypsum deposit in the city of Moundhouse.

In later years Manly worked in an Assay shop in downtown Dayton. He was a very kind man and would allow his customers to give him items to hold in lieu of payment until they made their strike. His rafters were filled with the chairs of miners hoping to strike that gold vein and make enough money so they could retrieve their prized family possessions. Low and behold many failed and Manly ended up with an over abundance of chairs of many sorts and styles! Patricia Johnson shared with us the photos that show two of the chairs that her great-grandfather was given in exchange for services rendered in assaying for the gold they might find. These chairs are over 130 years old and a find example of the kindness of Manly in allowing these men their dreams.

The Johnsons were very involved in their children's education. Manly served on the school board for several years. We have found records of several of the children having been on the honor roll at school. Both Manly and Mary were active in the community. Mary was vice president of the Literary Club here in Dayton. Manly belonged to the Masonic Lodge.

Manly died in 1930; his grave can be found in the Dayton cemetery. The gravesite for Mary Emma is unknown. There is a grave of one of their children beside Manly in the cemetery. It is believed to be their daughter who died in her youth.

We will keep you informed as we develop more details concerning this interesting family from Dayton's early history.

Closing notes

By Bob Wallace

A very big "thank you!" to Patrick Neylan and Donna McElroy for sending along their input for this issue of the *Docents Newsletter*. Your editor is currently on the road in Riverside, California, with our "four-wheel suite." Internet connections move all the data back and forth.

This issue may look slightly different, due in part to the display screen on my laptop computer giving up the ghost several weeks ago, requiring a visit to a computer repair shop in Riverside while we were on our way further south for ten days. The good news is that the display screen once again is in working order, else this issue would not be completed yet. The one difference you may note is that the text is in a font resembling the Times New Roman preferred for putting this newsletter together.

While talking with Tom Parcels via telephone last week it was learned that someone back east is interested in making a miniature Dayton Depot for display in town, and that a Dayton resident is willing to construct a diorama to display that miniature depot. Perhaps we can locate some small track and a boxcar to go with it? Putting all of that together would give some idea of where we're going eventually with both the depot and the boxcar.

Over the past week we've been busy visiting small museums in Ramona and Julian, CA., both of them including historical items we found to be most interesting. Conveniently for us, each is located on the highway through (Ramona) or on the way into town (Julian), each with parking close by and, as of this writing, no parking expense.