

# Docents Newsletter

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Historical Society of Dayton Valley

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## Docents program

By Ruby McFarland

“The world is wide, and I will not waste my life in friction when it could be turned into momentum.” Frances E. Willard, 1839-1898.

You don't know how much you need momentum until you have none. When the only way is up. It's also wonderful to belong to a society of wonderful people who expect you to use your momentum to recover.

While I was recuperating from a hip replacement, the physical therapist who helped me is a lady from Dayton. We had a lot in common since she was from Sonoma County where I grew up.

I had a great opportunity to tell everyone how wonderful Dayton is and the people all seem like extended family. Although the therapist, [who] has only lived here three years, agreed, she said, “Yea, people of Dayton even have a secret handshake.” Of course, the two of us would not reveal the handshake. You have to live with the folks in Dayton to know how special you are.

Padre Patrick took me to have my replacement, and brought be home. Thank you, my brother! Just one example of caring people. I received cards and notes from a lot of you which I appreciated.

Rest assured, I came out of the operating room telling people about Dayton and our wonderful museum and the folks who keep it open. I made them promise, written in blood, that they would visit. They all know that Dayton was the first settlement. (I told them I was there.)

I thank all the people who helped me get well at the hospital and the rehab center get back my momentum. I also thank you all for your good

wishes and caring. It's nice to know you all had my back. Just don't reveal our handshake to outsiders!

## Docent doings

By Patrick Neylan

Dayton's history is the story of “firsts” (gold discovery, settlement), the “everyday man or woman (Emma Loftus, Manly Johnson), “unsung” heroes from the fire department or police. We have stories of our glamour in the shadow of Virginia City's glory days; Sutro's days! Dayton, though not known to the rest of the world, has for 163 years been the epicenter of Nevada's history.

For my interest in Dayton's history my epicenter has been Ruby McFarland. I joined the society several years before I would be able to participate (still working!). I knew it. I just wanted to “belong.” Several years before I retired, I led a Cadillac Club tour to Dayton. Had lunch there and led a tour to the “School House” museum ... led by ... guess who ... Ruby! Who else in those days!

Just a few years later, anticipating and “fearing” my possible retirement (what on earth will I do with my time?) I dropped by the Dayton Museum and asked “that nice 'old' lady” (she will kill me for that!) if there was anything I could do to help? *That was stupid!* Never ask Ruby that! Immediately, I was involved in the creation of a “float” for Dayton Valley Days that depicted the school house museum. I am not “handy,” have never been “handy,” had never particularly looked at the “school house” building. I am not kidding! I had never “really” looked outside of the school house,

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but Ruby was instructing me on how to “paint and reconstruct” the stonework on the model that would soon go through the parade! Well, slap me silly! It not only went through the Dayton Valley Days parade that year, but it went through the Nevada Day Parade representing Dayton! And won an award!

Ruby had already “pulled me out of the box” but did not give up there. Ruby had a dream and that was to create a docent program for the museum and have it take over the tours and operation of the Dayton museum during the summer season. That was doable, but first she needed to know that the docents were “comfortable” with making presentations, so “weekly” training sessions were created and continued for several years. Under Ruby's inspiration, the docent program continues, albeit with some gaps, but still serves the Dayton Museum; keeps it open during the summer and for special occasions.

Ruby has recently had to have a hip replacement. I am proud to say she asked me to take her to the procedure at the Veterans Hospital in Reno and just recently allowed me to bring her home after rehab. My instructions were to be there by 1:00 PM. She “would be” discharged, or there “would be” a scene! I had no doubt of her intentions! I was there, the Cadillac was there, and fortunately for the facility, the paperwork was there! Ruby was released at 12:55 PM! No reason to speculate on what might have happened if the clock had struck 1:00 PM!

Ruby rates with the best of Dayton's Pioneers! Her predecessors created Dayton's history, but Ruby has helped save their efforts and makes their contributions come alive and continue Dayton's legacy. Sometimes when you look earnestly into your past to understand your present you need a focal point, and for us in Dayton, at least in my world, that is Ruby McFarland. If you have anything to do with Dayton or our Historical Society, you have something to do with Ruby McFarland! Be grateful!

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**Dayton**  
**Where Nevada History Begins**

## Tours for young and old

By Patrick Neylan

The Dayton School House Museum is the “rock bottom” key to the exposure of our Society to the Dayton community. All of the publicity, all of the events, all of the brochures, most of the volunteer hours ultimately point to the “School House Museum.” This incredible museum provides the simplest way to explain the “very origin” of Nevada's history to Dayton locals and world travelers. The dedicated docents that give of their time week after week are the glue that makes this “seemingly simple” activity the very core of the Society's “presence” in the community. The behind the scenes activity from the docents blossomed this week.

In addition to the regular museum schedule, the docents opened our museum on Monday evening for a special tour of Cub Scouts. This qualified for their “official” meeting, for their credit for merit badges for history, community, etc. In addition, your docents conducted special Firehouse/Jail tours in two shifts for the same group.

This past Sunday, your docents welcomed and toured 25-plus members of the Historical Society of Carson City through our museum. They had enjoyed a lunch in Old Town at the Gold Canyon, and then their group walked/drove to our museum. After a tour of the museum, many toured the JohnD barn and the Firehouse/Jail. For many, “as usual,” this was an enlightening experience!

This week for the HSDV our activities encompassed at least three generations!

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## Closing notes

By Bob Wallace

Shortly before the Dayton Railroad Days event in August a question was raised about whether the Dayton Depot was the first to be built along the

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Carson & Colorado Railroad. That query was a good reason to check the HSDV's web site for the time line of events surrounding the building of that railroad from Mound House through Dayton to the Owens Valley in the early 1880s.

The question was somewhat answered to the degree that one date in early February of 1881 noted that the depot construction was to begin the following week. Unfortunately, Mother Nature had other ideas. At the end of January 1881, another of those rain-on-snow events occurred that Dayton has become familiar with over the years.

Weather events along the Pacific Coast began as early as mid-January that may have impacted this side of the Sierra Nevada range as well. Records have been located indicating rain sufficient in California's Sacramento Valley to raise river levels from Redding in the north to the Merced basin below Stockton. That storm system may have left snow in the mountains as it passed through our region. Evidence of whether it was rain or snow may be hiding in someone's diary or journal yet to be located.

By the end of January, two back-to-back storms crossed overhead, at least one of those on our side of the mountains bringing with it the warm rain that brought the snow down with it, flooding all the canyons around Dayton: Daney, Gold, Eldorado and Sixmile. How do we know this? That Dayton time line for the Carson & Colorado Railroad reports that the C&C was tied up for at least a dozen days while crews put the railroad back together around Dayton, repairing trestles, culverts and track, before construction could proceed further south along the line.

That flood repair also kept the depot construction from beginning. Later in that year of 1881, a newspaper report in September indicates that the depot was under construction, but does not give any indication as to how far along the carpenter crew might have been at that time. By September, it should have been nearing completion.

Having visited the USGS web site in search of flood reports for the Carson River basin on

previous occasions, that was the next step in researching the flood of 1881 here in Dayton. Surprisingly, the USGS web site had no information on any flood in this region for that period of time. Interesting!

About that time an inquiry was made of the USGS office in Carson City as to why there might be no record of what appears to be a relatively large flood along the Carson River and elsewhere. Detailing how both Dayton and Franktown had been inundated with a combination of rain and snow at the end of January/beginning of February, relaying details of reports from other areas as far off as Dayton, Oregon, to the California Delta and eastward across the Truckee and Carson drainages, very likely the Walker basin as well, the contact at the USGS office indicated they would begin looking at the information. Franktown lost most of its buildings and a mile of V&T rails when its year-old rubble rock and dirt dam collapsed.

Interestingly, that contact at the USGS office had found the 1881 flood details on the HSDV web site, the very same Dayton-oriented Chronology I'd referenced to get an answer to that question about the Dayton Depot. Also interesting was the 1881 flood the USGS and others did have on the Internet: the "Great Flood of 1881" along the Missouri River basin, that coming two months later and hundreds of miles from us here in Dayton.

## Calendar

**October 3:** Depot working group, 1:00 at the museum.

**October 17:** HSDV general meeting, 12:30 at the Library on Old Dayton Road.

**October 24:** Docents, 10:30 at the museum.

**October 26:** Ghost Walk in Old Town Dayton, late afternoon/early evening.

**October 27:** Nevada Day Parade, Carson City.

**Upcoming:** Thanksgiving Day, November 22; HSDV Christmas Dinner, December 13.