

# Docents Newsletter

Volume 6, Number 4

Historical Society of Dayton Valley

May 2013

## HSDV monthly meetings venue change

By Bob Wallace

Effective with the April 17, 2013 date, monthly meetings will be held at the Dayton Valley Community Center, 170 Pike Street. No change in time for future meetings, still being held at 12:30 PM on the third Wednesday of the month.

Given that it's been some number of months since last mention was made of the other monthly meetings, here comes a reminder for those:

**C&C Working Group**, first Wednesday, 1:00 PM at the museum.

**HSDV Board**, second Wednesday, 10:30 AM.

**HSDV General Membership**, third Wednesday, 12:30 PM at the Community Center.

**Museum Docents**, fourth Wednesday, 10:30 AM at the museum.

Meetings noted above will generally be held on the day and at the time and location given above. On rare occasions, a meeting day may need to be changed due to unforeseen circumstances.

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## Docents program

By Ruby McFarland

“A mind always employed is always happy. This is the true secret, the grand recipe, for felicity.”

Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826)

I'm happiest when I'm busy. It's getting harder

and harder to stay busy because of aches and pains of old age. No excuse, however, as the mind stays pretty active. I think about working in the garden and yard work is getting done. As usual, the weather dictates how much one can do about planting. I see people buying tomato plants and I chuckle, knowing they are bound to be back to buy more tomato plants. Jack Frost sneaks around Dayton until after the first of June. And then he sometimes doubles back and gives the garden a late whack that makes most folks upset.

Bet you're wondering what all this has to do with history. Well, Emma Loftus kept a detailed account of gardening in Dayton from 1917 – 1958. That's history. She told of her trials and errors with her gardening. She also kept a record of the weather daily – a good forecast for future planting. She lost gardens from putting them in too soon. Her daughter-in-law, Helen Barton, had her share of failures, too. The two women competed for gardening skills, and both were successful in raising huge gardens. But gardening in Dayton is the old days was a must if you wanted fresh produce. Victoria Predare's father had an extensive garden and sold his vegetables and fruit in his store on River Street. There are still apple trees in that area that her father planted.

Water was always a problem then. Wells and water from the Chinese ditch was what they had. Sometimes the farmers took the water and Dayton had none for days. Emma tells of filling water jugs at Sutro to drink. There were a few hand-dug wells around, but they went dry in the summer.

So you see gardening has its place in the history of Dayton. I have kept a journal for years and I can prove that the best time to plant a garden is after the first of June.

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## Docent doings

By Patrick Neylan

When I was a teenager I was very involved with “Hollywood” and the “entertainment industry.” I was “the” doorman at the Park Theater in Lafayette, California. When you entered my theater, I tore your ticket in half and said: “smoking in the side sections only.” That's how long ago it was! My other duties included keeping the pop corn machine full, filling in for the janitor on his night off, and, most importantly, changing the “Marquee”! This was done the night before the feature changed. This was not easy or necessarily pleasant. It was always late at night and often in the cold or rain. I had to crawl through the little space to the back of the marquee and select the proper letters, size and color and pull them back through the crawl space and arrange them properly on both sides of the marquee. The stars, the title, the times! In the '60s, I got a break. The epic movie of the decade was about to come out. Everyone knew who was in it. Everyone understood the importance! Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton would appear on the screen together! All I had to do was crawl through that hole and pick out nine letters in the largest size – red, of course – and put up: CLEOPATRA! Nothing else had to be said! The line went around the block on opening night.

Well, working with the Society recently, all of these memories have come flooding back! We are in the midst of another epic! A moment when nothing else has to be explained. Everyone understands, knows and appreciates. Nothing more need be done or said!

If the Dayton Museum had a marquee on its roof, I would climb up there, crawl through that tiny opening again, pull out only five letters this time, in the largest size – red, of course – and spell out “DONNA”! Everyone's prayers and thoughts are with you! We are closely watching “coming attractions” for your comeback!

## First impressions of Dayton and its history

By Margy Bethers

As I drove into Dayton a few years ago, I was impressed with the many historical monuments that lined the highway. How could there be so much history in a town with a strip mall, three casinos, a gas station, a few old buildings, yet have this many historical monuments? The first night's dinner with my sister and dad, both of whom were here a few years longer, I was amazed at the “who's older, Genoa or Dayton” story (but who cares, I secretly snickered). Little did I know that only a short time later that I, myself, would be so completely obsessed with not only this story, but dozens and dozens of other stories of Dayton history?

Like so many others of my companions in the Historical Society, I can't seem to get enough of the history, and the more I read the more questions I have! Sometimes, asking a few of the locals of their stories, I see some eyes glaze over, so I'm very careful to study on my own. When I have visited lovely people like Grace Ricci, I feel like I've won the lottery. When I can catch Pat Neylan in an unbusy moment, I'd sure like to pick his brain, for I think he knows more about Virginia City than anyone around.

One Saturday in March, I worked the morning shift at the museum. In the afternoon, “Pony Express Rider,” Larry McPherson, arrived for his shift. What a delightful conversation we had about his time as a Lyon County commissioner, life as a pony express re-enactor, etc. My one regret was that we had not one visitor to the museum that day! What a waste! A man with so much history to impart in the perfect setting and not one visitor! Which brings me to another point: How can we lure people to our museum?

When I come into a town, I want to know two

- Continued on Page 3 -

things: Where can I find out about the history and where is a good place to dance? I know where to get my history. Does anyone know of a good place to dance in Dayton? Dancing used to be in the upper story of Spafford Hall's Station back in 1853, but that's long gone!

I'd like to leave you "obsessed history bugs" with a few suggested books I've gathered from our local library. Oh, my goodness! I felt like the Old "Pancake" Comstock finding the Grosch Brothers' mine when I discovered the local history section of our little Dayton Library!

*Picks of a novice from the Dayton Library:*

**"More than Petticoats, Remarkable Nevada Women,"** by Jan Cleere.

This book tells about the lives of 12 Nevada women in history, all born before 1900 and all courageous, vibrant ladies making a difference in their times. I was especially interested in Alison Oram Bowers, or Eilley Orrum, as she was known when she ran her boarding house in Johntown, since she had a history with Dayton as a frequent visitor to Hall's Station.

She was a friend to Hosea and Allen Grosch, as they confided in her upon discovery of their claim, promising her a claim right next to their own.

I was also interested in Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins' life story, as she was also a visitor to Dayton, especially to Hall's Station for the first dance.

**"Sierra Stories, True Tales of Tahoe,"** by Mark McLaughlin.

This is fascinating reading about familiar folks in our area. "The Legendary Mailman Snowshoe Thompson" is one of the stories which very much fits in with Dayton history, since he was the first to deliver ore samples to chemists which were eventually proven to be silver. Later, he delivered mail, newspapers and medicines to miners on the Comstock. Fannie Hazlett mentions Snowshoe in her book, "History of Dayton," (Hardships of Winter, 1859-1860). "No supplies were obtainable

except those that were brought over the mountains by 'Snowshoe' Thompson on his Norwegian snowskates, his load often being a hundred pounds."

Another story involved Allen and Hosea Grosch in "Squaw Valley Squelches Secret to the Silver Strike." Had I lived in Dayton way back then, I definitely would have wanted to become acquainted with these smart brothers who just had a sneaking suspicion the "blue stuff" clogging up gold miner cradles might be a bit too valuable to toss aside!

**"Stories from the Sagebrush, Celebrating Northern Nevada Millennium,"** by Don Cox.

This is one we need in our bookstore! It's a treasure trove of stories from nearly each town in Northern Nevada, including Dayton! What a surprise to see our beautiful Dayton surrounded by so many familiar faces and names, including our own Laura and Stony [Tennant]! I had no idea that Edna MacDiarmid even existed, let alone lived in the Union Hotel and hosted dances for the young people of Dayton. I didn't know that she befriended Marilyn Monroe during the shooting of "The Misfits," and shared taco lunches while they chatted. I was grateful to have the book with me for my trip to Elko with Vicki, as I was able to recognize "familiar" places.

## Happening now:

By Bob Wallace

**May Lecture Series** on Thursday evenings: 2, 9 and 16 at the Community Center on Pike Street, 7:00 PM each of those three nights. Dayton's historic Museum may be open every day this month, provided Docents have time in their busy schedules to sit the museum from 11:00 to 3:00, Monday through Friday, regular weekend hours on Saturday, 10-4, and Sunday, 1-4.

**Coming up on June 14 and 15, the annual Rummage Sale.**