

Yolo County Historical Society



MARCH 2015

Pres Says:

Whenever March rolls around, I know it is time to begin preparing for all our third grade students who come to visit the Schoolhouse. Martha Brashear has already sent me her schedule of visits and Marilyn Scholz will begin calling our retired teaching staff. We have several new teacher possibilities, so we will begin training. Thanks to our wonderful group of teachers, the Society is able to provide a wonderful experience for our students in the county.

I have also been in contact with another retired teacher who expressed a desire to start a history club at Beamer Elementary School. In the last newsletter, you read a thank you from Rachael Zur and the students from Dingle. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had another history club? Remember my motto.....History Rules!

The Yolo County Historical Society Board has directed me to speak to all the county supervisors regarding the proposed use of the County Courthouse. Dennis Dingessmans and I met with Dwayne Chamberlain last week. We shared our desires about having a presence in the Court House. What that presence will look like is still under discussion. There are several possibilities, but I would like to hear your thoughts. If you have any suggestions, please e mail me at khwoodland@aol.com. I would be more than happy to bring your suggestions to the Board so we can discuss them. During the next few weeks, I, along with someone from the Board, will meet with the remainder of the supervisors.

Our next presentation will be in Winters at the Winter's County Library on March 22 at 2:00. Joanne Larkey is our presenter and she will give us an overview of the Winter's History Project. That

group is doing some wonderful things to promote history.

In April, we will be headed to Bryte to learn all about the Portuguese in Yolo County. So save the date....April 26.

Remember, History Rules!

Kathy Harryman



Business Buddies

The following businesses in town have financially supported the Yolo County Historical Society. We would like you to support them and keep your money local:

**L & S Printers, Main St.
The House Dresser, Main St.
The Gifted Penguin, Main St.
Corner Drug, Main St.
Dennis Dahlin
Zamora Hills Ranch
Richard Berteaux
Historic Woodland Downtown
Business Association
The Home Improvement Group**

If you know of any business that would like to join our support list, contact me. Businesses pay \$50.00 per year for advertising.



Society publications available for sale at a variety of locations. For more information on book sales, contact Mary Aulman at 666-0743.

Museum to Celebrate Arbor Day March 14th

Yolo County Historical Museum will highlight Arbor Day celebrations, to be held at 512 Gibson Road on Saturday, March 14 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in conjunction with “Walks with Warren Roberts” in the gardens, a special succulent workshop and an early plant sale hosted by the Gibson Gardeners.

Back this year by popular request will be longtime Superintendent of the University Arboretum Warren G. Roberts who will offer free, informative tours of the 158-year old historic museum gardens at both 10 and 11 a.m. A museum spokesman notes that last year’s participants in Robert’s Arbor Day tours learned that the museum not only has a very rare tree from Mexico in its Woodland garden, but that the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to the new United States of America in 1776 was a Muslim Monarchy that has since maintained friendly relations and that this story involved correspondence between George Washington and the relevant monarch and a tree. Come hear the rest of the story, he suggests.

Signups for the 11 o’clock Succulent Workshop will be taken in the Museum’s Plant Shop, where participants will be given a soil-filled 6-inch pot, a selection of cuttings and instructions on the care and feeding of succulent gardens. A \$5 materials fee is requested for this event.

Meanwhile, a wide selection of potted succulents, herbs, flowers, shrubs, trees, native plants and more will be offered for sale throughout the day. Visitors are also invited to tour the Gibson House mansion and exhibit buildings, view the newly re-planted Herb Garden and other areas of this 2.5-acre Yolo County Park.

Arbor Day will be observed at 11:30 a.m. behind the Dairy Building, where children will help plant a golden toyon, *Heteromeles arbutifolia* ‘Davis Gold,’ a native plant that was developed at the University Arboretum.

Free picnic tables and parking will be available. Snacks will be sold. For further information, call (530) 666-1064 or www.gibsonhouse.org

Hattie Happenings

There’s a hush around the Museum these days. We are all holding our breath, metaphorically speaking, awaiting the Annex (aka WPA building) renovation construction estimate. The estimate is part of the plan to be submitted by the architect. Once we have that, we can begin fundraising in earnest and approach the City Council with a proposal to retain the 1956 addition to the building. Retention is consistent with preservation guidelines, will save money and will yield additional storage space.

Meanwhile, we have applied to be part of the “Big Day of Giving” in May and are starting to apply for grants to help with the project. Suggestions for funding sources are more than welcome at this point.

Our February ArtAbout, “Davis: Little Big Town” photography by Ben Tuason, was well attended and has been enjoyed by later visitors. It will make way for our Pig Day celebration on March 7. Pig Day, a little known national holiday designed to focus attention on our porcine friends, is a big event at the Davis Farmers Market, our Central Park neighbor. Robert Stevenson generously loans us part of her remarkable collection of pigs in many sizes and mediums. The star of the show is Percy, whose welcoming singing and dancing are becoming a Davis legend (almost)!

On a more serious note, we are working on enlarging our Native American exhibit. We need additional artifacts, especially Patwin baskets. The one we have turns out to be of Washoe origin and a recent donation is Apache. Arrowheads, stone tools and other artifacts would also be most welcome.

In the last few weeks we have been touched by the number of donations in honor of Jim Becket. We miss him terribly but we can almost see his grin as we count contributions to be used to renovate his “precious potty”.



Looking for an old article published in the newsletter or upcoming events? Check it out on our website. www.yolo.net/ychs

“An Inspiration for Long-Time County Residents: A Scrapbook History Describes Fires and Fire-Fighters in Davis, 1934 to 1940”

By Dennis Dingemans, Director, Hattie Weber Museum of Davis

A “treasure” of local history came to my attention recently. It is a 162-page self-published book relating the history of the Davis Fire Department during the years that Jack Miller was its Chief. It is mostly in the form of a scrapbook that contains all Davis Enterprise articles concerning fires fought by the city fire department (and the university’s). It is especially useful for local historians because it systematically and legibly duplicates the complete text of each news article. Thus, reports on many City Council action of the era are here – as are community-life details where fires are major topics of discussion because arson or deaths or major losses have happened. Our region’s history would be better preserved if more of our senior citizens would write and publish their memories in this manner.

It is also useful as a biography of a notable local family. The Chief was John D. “Jack” Miller, Junior. Born near Fresno in 1895, he studied engineering, joined the faculty as an engineer at UC’s Davis Campus, owned a Yolo County business (Miller Electric/Engineering Company), and joined the City’s volunteer fire fighters in the early 1920s. He was appointed the (un-salaried) Chief in 1934 and is described as having served with distinction as an effective and popular figure that was elected President of several associations for fire chiefs. His premature death in 1940 (from a heart condition that was revealed when he tried to serve in WWI) came shortly after he was appointed to a state board that required rigorous travel for on-site inspections.

The book’s author was Jack’s son, Charles Richard “Dick” Miller. Born in 1925 on Picnic Day in their house at 101 First Street, Dick had the credentials of a “true blue-and-gold Aggie.” He died in 2004 after retiring from a 34-year career at the campus Agricultural Engineering unit. But, he is not an uncritical fan of campus leadership or elected

officials. There is a sprinkling of colorful and unflattering remarks and names are named and butts are kicked. Dick describes his dad as “squeaky clean honest” and “straightforward in his business dealings” but “he did not like Politics” and “he was soon to learn that even in a town of less than 1000 people, ‘Politics Ruled’.” Both father Jack and son Dick advocated for money-saving consolidation of the county’s fire departments (including the town and the campus departments).

The book can be read at the UCD Library (Special Collections), the Davis Branch Library, and the Hattie Weber Museum. In all three places, it is not permitted to check out the book. What follows below are details of the five top fires during Jack Miller’s tenure as Chief. They illustrate how much the town has been under the threat of fire. Notable fires before 1934 destroyed major downtown hotels, major churches, and much of Davisville’s Olive Street (G Street) main street; the lack of adequate water supply for fire suppression was a big reason why the City finally incorporated in 1917. Before 1917 there wasn’t a well-organized fire fighting force and a bell tower at 2nd and G near the train station was a major community investment (to be rung “in case of fire”). During Miller’s tenure as Chief, the fire fighting force was all-volunteer and the most he was ever compensated for his expenses was \$25 a month. During his tenure, the City built a proper firehouse at the corner of 4th and F.



BIG FIRE ONE: July 1st, 1934. The old Catholic Church. At the n.e. corner of 3rd and I, the structure dating to the 1870s had been abandoned for over a year when a vagrant-started fire was detected at 1 a.m. D.F.D. volunteers saved the adjacent homes. But “when returning to the fire house near the corner of 3rd and F the whole rear end of the Studebaker fire truck fell off.”

BIG FIRE TWO: August 19th, 1934. Nicholson Chevrolet Garage. Southeast of 5th and B, a fire in the office was detected at 3 a.m. It rapidly destroyed \$10,000 worth of the building and its contents. The D.F.D. saved adjacent buildings. Explosions from the gas tanks of 11 vehicles made it a lively scene. Two months later, on October 14th, the nearby Davis Hotel (an 1870s building moved to that site to face US 40) burned at 4:00 a.m. with \$5,000 in losses. That one coincided with a dangerous north wind. Both structures were on the block being acquired for the new City Park – so suspicions were raised about arson by park advocates.

BIG FIRE THREE: January 1st, 1937. Davis High School Gym at B and 6th. An arson fire did \$36,000 in total-loss damage in a blaze discovered at 3 a.m. The Chief and another of the Firefighters were in serious danger during episodic flare-ups and falling

walls. The building was just 7 years old and was being expanded at the time. Fully insured, the value was regained.

BIG FIRE FOUR: April 9th, 1937. Standard Oil Plant. The fire was discovered at 11 a.m. by professor Roy Bainer near his farm south west of downtown at the edge of town by the rr tracks. There was \$20,000 in damage from the billowing grease-fueled flames. Arson was suspected, following mysterious fires within the year in Davis, Woodland, and Roseville. Two suspects were jailed in Fairfield within a day (but never convicted).

BIG FIRE FIVE: April 4th, 1937. Davis Community Church. The fire discovered “late Monday night” did \$30,000 in damage after burning from two starting points to a decade-young church structure worth an estimated \$110,000. The arsonist redirected the church organ’s blower motor to spread the flames. The kitchen stove’s gas burners had been turned on. This third of three Presbyterian Church structures since 1871 was the second to have a major blaze within a decade. Later in the century a million dollar arson blaze struck the reconstructed and expanded building which still today occupies the block of C/D/4th/5th.



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Vision Statement *The Yolo County Historical Society strives to preserve, protect and acknowledge the diverse history of Yolo County through education, communication and advocacy*

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