

Yolo County Historical Society



Prez Says

It's almost, unofficially spring. The trees are blooming, and the flowers are beginning to bud. Daffodils are strutting their stuff and the sun has decided to stay in the sky for a longer period.

This newsletter is one of change, admiration and looking forward into the future. The change occurred with the resignation of our own Dennis Dingemans, Director of the Hattie Weber Museum. I have posted his letter. Dennis has done so much for the Museum, working with the City of Davis to save the WPA building. He has a lot more patience than I would have ever had. The board has accepted Dennis' resignation and has appointed his recommended successors, Merrily DuPree and John Cain as the co-Directors of the Hattie Weber Museum. Congratulations.

The next change is the death of Bob Sommer, our fabulous one-of-a-kind, secretary. What a treat it was to get to know him. I have included his obituary. Here is a link to an interview about his life as an academic (made in 2005) [video.ucdavis.edu/media/
Robert+Sommer/0_nbhq0480](http://video.ucdavis.edu/media/Robert+Sommer/0_nbhq0480). We certainly were all enriched to have him be part of our group.

The admiration part of the newsletter is dedicated to Women's History Month. I have highlighted Gertrude Freeman in our newsletter. Our own David Wilkinson has written a new book titled *Gertrude's Oaks*. It will soon be ready for publication. There is also a display in the front window of the old *Diamond E Store* on the corner of Main and First Streets. Please take the time to see it. It is very clever – done by the Woodland Public Library Teen Advisory Board (TAB). The display honors Louisa May Alcott.

Looking forward to the future, I am meeting with Dino Gay this week to discuss the next steps in creating the museum at the fairgrounds. You will read about more in the upcoming newsletters.

The Society also is working with the City of Woodland to celebrate its 150-year anniversary. Many great suggestions were offered at the first meeting. I am sure we will all be pleased with the results of this endeavor. Again, more information will come in the upcoming newsletters.

Rob Coman has worked tirelessly to gather all the information for the YCHS to participate in the Big Day of Giving. We are now official. Wow! Again, you will hear more later.

Finally, on Saturday, April 3, I will be giving a presentation about China Alley (China Town) in Woodland. I have been working on this research for a long time. I am excited to share what I have discovered.

Remember, As Always,
History Rules!

Kathy Harryman, President



Gertrude Freeman – First Lady of Woodland

*by Tom Gregory, a well-known historian who wrote **The History of Yolo County** in 1913. David Wilkinson, one of our members, has written a book titled **Gertrude's Oaks**. This biography provides a glimpse of who she was.*



The name of Mrs. Frank S. Freeman is as well known in Yolo and contiguous counties as was that of her honored husband, now passed from the scenes of his earthly activities to such reward as is vouchsafed to those who pass their years in love for their fellows and in labors useful to humanity. These pages bear an extended record of his career. Mrs. Freeman owns and occupies the beautiful home he erected on First street, Woodland, many years ago, a residence which has long been held to reflect, in its artistic environment and interior fitting, her own ideals and cultured tastes.

Major Freeman married in October, 1858. Before that date Mrs. Freeman was Miss Gertrude Swain. Her father, George Gorham Swain, died in Michigan. His widow, Ruth (Kimball) Swain, Mrs. Freeman's mother, settled at Woodland and there married Elder Martin and afterward lived near her daughter.

George Gorham Swain was born in Nantucket, Mass., April 2, 1812. When he was fourteen years of age he came to the Pacific coast by way of Cape Horn, stopped at Santa Barbara, California, and went on north to Alaska. He was at the time on a four years' whaling cruise. After making several memorable voyages he settled down in New York state as a landsman, and thence he went west to Michigan, locating in Calhoun county when Michigan was yet only a territory. There he lived out the remainder of his days. He was a descendant of Mayflower pilgrims and of the best New England Revolutionary stock. Ruth Kimball, who became his wife and the mother of Mrs. Freeman, also of Puritan and Revolutionary ancestry, bore him the following children: Cornelia (Mrs. Smith), who died at Woodland in 1900; Erastus Kimball Swain, who died at Woodland in 1882; Emily, who is Mrs. Davidson of Woodland; Florence, who married C. T. Bidwell; Hannah (Mrs. John W. Freeman) of Woodland; Lillian (Mrs. McConnell) of Woodland; and Mrs. Major Freeman.

The birthplace of Mrs. Freeman was Marengo, Calhoun county, Mich. When she was fourteen years old, she began to teach school, and so successful was she that she was complimented, two years later, by engagement as an instructor in the Woman's College at Lansing, Mich. Her maternal grandfather, Erastus Kimball, had come to California during the gold excitement of 1849 and had become one of the owners of the old Haywood mine on Sutter creek, and she had heard many wonderful tales of the coast regions, which had aroused in her a desire to visit the West. So, when Clark W. Crocker returned from California and married her mother's sister she sought and obtained the consent of her mother to accompany the couple to the land of the setting sun.

They started on a November day - it was Thanksgiving Day - in 1856 and came by the Nicaragua route. Immediately after her arrival the young educator was employed to teach a school at Negro Hill, near Folsom City, and at once entered upon the discharge of her duties there. In March, 1857, she resigned the position and left Sacramento county for Yolo City (now Woodland), where she took charge of a school in a two-story building on the site of the Southern Pacific railroad depot. Except for a term taught in the preceding year by the Rev. J. Pendegast this was the pioneer school in the village. At times it numbered as many as sixty pupils, some of whom came from homes six miles away, either walking or on horseback - two or three on a horse.

Continued on next page

Gertrude Freeman - continued

The young teacher was very popular, and when, in 1858, she became the bride of Major Freeman they were reluctant to give her up. Some of the young people whom she fondly called her "boys" and "girls," afterward became prominent, but none of them ever forgot their school days or ceased to remember their teacher with gratitude and admiration. It was her good fortune to impart information in an interesting manner, so that her pupils made rapid progress in their studies without experiencing the drudgery that, under another teacher, might have been inseparable from their acquisition of knowledge. In spite of the greater advantages of young people of today, it is doubtful if any of them learn more rapidly or enjoy study more thoroughly than did those pioneer lads and lassies who gladly came each morning, two or three on the back of a horse, or perhaps on foot, to the little school in the new town where Gertrude Swain labored so conscientiously to prepare them for their duties politically and socially in the part that would be theirs in the development of the future great state of California.

It was in October, 1858, that Miss Swain became the wife of Major Freeman. She bore him three children, Lillian (Mrs. John Eakle of Point Richmond, Cal.) and George and Curry, both of whom are deceased. Mrs. Eakle has a daughter Gertrude, named in honor of her grandmother. In all the years of her womanhood Mrs. Freeman has been actively interested in the spread of education and the advancement of women. She was one of the founders of the Woodland library and the first president of the Woodland Library Association. She and about a score of other women established and maintained the library until they turned it, its books and its cash on hand, over to the city when the time was ripe for its perpetuation at municipal expense. She is past Matron of Yolo Chapter No. 60, O. E. S., and was in 1887 and 1888 Grand Matron of the Grand Chapter of California. As a communicant of the Protestant Episcopal Church she takes a helpful interest in the religious and charitable work of the community.

As narrated in the biographical notice of her late husband, it was Mrs. Freeman who gave to the village - now city - of Woodland the appropriate name by which it is so widely known.

Patrons

Thanks so much to the following for supporting the *Yolo County Historical Society*.
We could not run this organization without your additional help.

Starr and Jeff Barrow	John and Kathy Harryman	Meg and Tom Stallard
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Become a patron by contributing \$100 or more.

Please support these local businesses.
They support the Yolo County Historical Society.

**The House Dresser
Corner Drug
Local Inspirations**

**Simas Family Vineyard
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Hattie Director, Dennis Dingemans Retires

Dennis Dingemans, Director of the Hattie Weber Museum, submitted the following letter to the City of Davis and YCHS Board of Directors on February 12, 2021.

SUBJECT: Change in directorship of the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis

This note is to inform the City of Davis — owner of the museum — and the Yolo County Historical Society — manager of the museum — that after 10 years Dennis Dingemans is stepping down from the position of Director of the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis. Stepping up to replace Dennis at the same time will be our new team of Co-Directors, Merrily DuPree and John Cain, effective February 21, 2021. Serving twenty years at the Museum, ten as director, has been an honor and a wonderful way to contribute to our community. I would continue in the position, but my health prevents it. I wish to continue to serve the Museum as an ordinary volunteer/docent and anticipate that I might be most useful in helping to implement our use of the recently completed "Museum Annex."

Two of our most experienced staff have agreed to share the directorship. Merrily DuPree came to the Museum while pursuing a successful tenured career of teaching and research in the English Department at University of Nevada Reno. Her Ph.D. in American Literature and Culture is from Syracuse University. She has been a Hattie docent for ten years, most notably in charge of designing and mounting museum exhibits and co-leading our project to renovate the WPA-funded restroom for museum storage space. John Cain had a long career as a professional librarian in the San Jose Public Library and has been a Hattie docent for several years, beginning not long after he moved to Davis. Merrily and John will provide experienced and enthusiastic leadership following myself, Jim Becket, and Phyllis Haig in the director's job.

The museum is an important preserver and presenter of local history, joining the several books about Davis written by Joann Larkey, John Lofland, and others. The Library Club building that houses the Hattie Weber Museum is part of a set of preserved structures, including the train depot and the Dresbach house, that tell important Davis stories. By adding the WPA annex, another era of local history is preserved through significant public buildings.

I wish to thank the City of Davis and the Yolo County Historical Society for the opportunity to serve our community. Among the joys of leading the museum has been the chance to meet hundreds of residents and visitors who came through the museum doors to learn about Davis past, present, and future.



MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

In celebration of Women's History Month, please enjoy this unique creation honoring author Louisa May Alcott made by members of the City of Woodland's Teen Advisory Board.

Materials were collected by TAB member Mia Piazza with her grandmother Savina Guardado. Former Teen Librarian Rhea Gardner with Mia, Evelyn Mandujano and Alexa Arredondo created the skirt from old book pages and various Little Women book covers.

These members worked diligently on this tribute last year and were excited to display the art work at the Woodland Public Library during the month of March, 2020... but they had to change their plans due to the pandemic.

March is a month full of celebrations commemorating women of history in Yolo County. This year the theme is "Valiant Women of the Vote: Refusing to be Silenced."



LOUISA MAY ALCOTT was an American author known for her books for young readers. She wrote the autobiographical *Little Women* (1868–69), which was an immediate success. Based on her recollections of her own childhood, *Little Women* describes the domestic adventures of a New England family of modest means but optimistic outlook. The book traces the differing personalities and fortunes of four sisters (Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March) as they emerge from childhood and encounter the changes of employment, society, and marriage. *Little Women* created a realistic but wholesome picture of family life with which younger readers could easily identify. [Encyclopaedia Britannica]

Louisa was born November 29, 1832, in Germantown Pennsylvania. She died March 6, 1888, in Boston Massachusetts.





WOODLAND PARLOR 30th NSGW
PRESENTS

FREE Woodland FREE History Tours

OLD CHINA TOWN

history by Kathy Harryman of the Yolo County Historical Society

9 TO 10 AM AT 444 DEAD CAT ALLEY

SATURDAY APRIL 3 2021

and other events in the Historic Downtown

OPEN HOUSE / HEADQUARTERS + 444 DEAD CAT ALLEY + 9 TO NOON
WOODLAND OPERA HOUSE + INFO TABLE + SECOND & MAIN + 9 TO NOON

OLD TOWN HALL + TOUR + 702 MAIN + 10 TO 10:30

WOODLAND GOLD & SILVER + POSTCARD SHOW + 619 MAIN + 10 TO 4
GHOSTS ON THE BLOCK + TOUR + 444 DEAD CAT ALLEY + 11 TO 11:30

INFO ABOUT FREE TOURS AT 444 DEAD CAT ALLEY

on Woodland History Tours Day... behind The Roth, 431 Main — or — at facebook.com/WoodlandParlor30

Save the date... October 3! Stroll Through History home tours and more FREE Woodland History Tours



Bob Sommer

April 29, 1929 – February 27, 2021

Like George Orwell, Bob didn't want to make the world perfect; he only wanted to make it better. He was pleased with his research on mental illness, environmental design, bike paths, farmers markets, urban forestry, and mushrooming.

Bob was born in Manhattan, New York City and grew up there, with summers spent in Stroudsburg, PA where his dad ran a handbag factory. He received his Ph.D. in psychology from University of Kansas in 1956. It was there he met his first wife Dorothy Twente whom he married in 1957. A postdoctoral fellowship took him to Southeast Louisiana State Hospital. He declined to work on a lobotomy project and left Louisiana the day after Mardi Gras.

He found a more imaginative work setting on the Canadian prairie working with Humphry Osmond, mental hospital superintendent and LSD pioneer. Osmond is best remembered today for coining the word *psychedelic*. The hospital became a questioning community, with staff at all levels asking how they could do their jobs better and supplying answers through empirical research. In addition to mental health studies, Bob wrote humor for underground periodicals such as *Worm Runners Digest* and *Journal of Irreproducible Results*. In 1961, he moved to the University of Alberta as Assistant Professor and Director of the Psychological Clinic.

In 1963, he and his young family (there were now three children) came to UCD as Associate Professor of Psychology. He became department chair of Psychology in 1965 and later chaired Departments of Environmental Design, Rhetoric and Communication, and Art. Bob taught at UCD until his retirement in 2003, after which he continued teaching summer school until 2013. He had visiting appointments in architecture at Berkeley and the University of Washington; in design at the University of Nevada, Reno; at Tallinn Pedagogical Institute; and Tokyo Institute of Technology. He lectured at half the architecture schools in the United States.

Bob and Dorothy divorced in 1969, and Bob married Barbara Baker Wulfsberg a year later. He continued to rise at 5 AM to let in the cat, make a pot of coffee, and write. He was author or co-author of 14 books and over 600 published articles. His best-known book was *Personal Space* which went through 25 printings in English and was updated in 2008. With mycologists Mike Davis and John Menge, he co-authored *Field Guide to Mushrooms of Western North America* published by UC Press in 2012. His awards included the first Davis City-University Research Award; California Alliance for the Mentally Ill Research Award; Career Research Award of the Environmental Design Research Association; Kurt Lewin Award from Division 9 of the American Psychological Association (APA); Fulbright Award to Estonia; President 1999-2000, APA Div. 34; the Newman-Proshansky Award from APA Division 34, and an honorary doctorate from Tallinn University.

His partner Barbara was the light of his life, keeping his feet on the ground while occasionally holding them to the fire. The couple enjoyed hiking, drawing, X-C skiing, cooking, gardening, mushrooming, and wildflowers. After retirement, Bob continued to write technical and popular articles and had columns in the *Davis Enterprise* and *Mushroom, the Journal*. He also had an exhibit of his veggie paintings at the International House gallery.

Bob died at home surrounded by his immediate family. Instead of flowers, the family suggested buying a bottle of sauvignon blanc and toasting a life spent with modest success trying to make things better.



Yolo County Historical Society
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Dated Material

Submitting letters and articles

Format articles in Word and send as email attachments to Kathy Harryman khwoodland@aol.com

Change of Address

Please notify Kathy Harryman khwoodland@aol.com of any address changes (it costs nearly \$1.00 to get your correct address from the Post Office and your newsletter mailing is delayed). Or sign up for delivery as an email PDF attachment (see above email).

Vision Statement

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

We are a 5013c tax deductible organization
Tax id number: **23-7086043**

See our website at ychs.org

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