

## President's Message: What a Difference a Year Makes

It has been just over a year since RHS opened St Mary's for business. In that time, the chapel has hosted 7 weddings, 3 memorials, a Christmas concert, a piano concert, and various meetings of Rocklin civic groups. We have learned much and continue to do so. From September of last year to the present time we have participated in six Bridal Shows to get the message out about St Mary's. Our Bridal show team is led by Ronna Davis with the unflagging help of Jean Sippola, Holly Clark, Karen Lokey, and Joyce Sherman. We can be proud of the creativity and energy these ladies have put into this program. They are a bright testimony to the breadth and depth of talent in the RHS.

This has been a year of learning how to use St Mary's and tweaking the building itself. After much contemplation and controversy shutters were installed inside on the windows. These shutters protect the interior from the intense southern afternoon sun, allow for far better interior photography, and provide a screen for brides as they walk from the Annex to the front doors. Every bride so far has been insistent they not be seen in their dress until they enter the front doors! Apparently a wedding custom; but who knew? (A male observation).

In cooperation with the City, an alarm system has been installed at both St Mary's and the Museum. Alarm system training at the Museum is in progress.

Outdoor restrooms are now complete for use at St Mary's and we have a key to open them during chapel activities.

We have been very fortunate to secure the services of Betty Gaworski to assist in cleaning both the Museum and St Mary's. I can attest to the pristine condition of St Mary's for our last two weddings.

Thank you Betty!

Our first attempt at minor landscaping in

(Continued on page 4)

## Whitney's Twelve Bridges reflected his wife's affinity for English culture

Gary Day

Much of western Rocklin is astride the southern 12,000 acres of the Spring Valley Ranch of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is property which Rocklin annexed while the city's population grew during the past 45 years.

Historian Richard Miller, in his Joel Parker Whitney biography, *Fortune Built by Gun*, tells us that there were 25 miles of roads on the ranch. One road connected Downtown Rocklin with the ranch's headquarters about 3 miles to the west. This road included twelve granite bridges. Who built these bridges and why? Where are the Twelve Bridges now?

In the early 1870's, Joel Parker Whitney, called Parker then, gained control of the ranch from his father George Whitney who had started the ranch in 1857 with a 320 acre purchase west of what is now Downtown Rocklin. George, Parker, and two of Parker's five brothers, had prospered at the ranch by producing high quality wool from a special cross-



**One of Whitney's Twelve Bridges peeks from its burial on the Sunset Whitney Golf Course. Another bridge is buried nearby.**

**Two unburied bridges are in weedy fields near Mansion Oaks Park. One of these two shows extensive dismantling**

breed of Saxony and Australian Marino sheep. The group had added thousands of acres during the late 1850s and 1860s by pre-emption and by purchasing property from homesteaders and the Central Pacific Railroad.

Parker had become wealthy during the 1860s, mainly from his investments in Colorado gold and silver mines. Gilpin County Colorado records show that Parker was a principal in a mining company that filed ownership on more than 150 gold claims in 1865.

Parker traveled widely and continued to invest wisely in the late 19<sup>th</sup>

century, mainly in Colorado mines and California real estate projects. He also invested heavily in New Mexico mines and ranches but it is unclear whether these were profitable for him.

Parker traveled to and from Europe often, once famously to the 1867 Paris Universal Worlds Fair and Exhibition as an ambassador from the Colorado territory, promoting investments in Colorado mines. He developed a close relationship with Lucy Chadwick in England in the late 1870's and fathered a son, J. Parker Whitney, by her in London in 1878. A second son, Vincent Whitney, was born while the couple was in New York in 1880.

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

By the early 1880s, Parker, now in his mid forties, had been through two childless marriages and was ready to settle down with Lucy and the two children. Although he continued to travel frequently, he decided to establish his permanent residence at his Spring Valley Ranch near Rocklin. He married Lucy in Sacramento in 1882 and embarked on a six year project to convert parts of the ranch into a baronial estate for his family.

Parker and Lucy were enamored of Lucy's English culture and developed their estate with English themes. Later this affinity for things English would motivate Parker to develop the Placer County Citrus Colony, a project to attract Englishmen to the area to buy citrus ranches north and east of the ranch in Clover Valley, Penryn and Loomis

Parker flattened about 5 acres on a knoll overlooking the ranch's headquarters and started construction of his Oaks mansion in 1884. He built tennis courts nearby and set aside 4,200 acres for English-style fox and rabbit hunts. Later Parker surrounded the Oaks with a golf course. He tended his own garden of vegetables and spices in the style of an English gentleman.

1884 also saw the birth of the couple's youngest child and only daughter, Helen Beryl Whitney.

According to records by Parkers own hand, he spent \$6,826.46 building stone bridges between 1883 and 1888 while he was building the Oaks and his family's estate. This is the only period during which Parker's records show bridge construction. So there is little doubt that Parker built his Twelve Bridges in the mid 1880s.

Neither Parker nor Miller left a map, so the exact route of the road from Rocklin to ranch headquarters and the locations of all of the Twelve Bridges on that road are unknown. However Miller lived at the Oaks as a child and young teenager in the 1930s and 1940s when the ranch buildings and roads were still largely intact. He would have known the locations of the bridges and he would have traveled over them. So there is little doubt that there were actually 12 bridges on the road.

There are at least nine granite bridges visible in Rocklin's landscape, at least six with keystone arches as might be seen in stone bridges of the English countryside.

There is a bridge on the seventh hole of the Sunset Whitney Country Club Golf Course, barely visible in the rough, almost entirely buried during course construction in the early 1960s. This is the bridge closest to Downtown Rocklin and could be the first bridge on Parker's road to his headquarters. There is also a mostly buried bridge on the 8<sup>th</sup> hole, possibly the second bridge on that road

Another bridge is the often photographed centerpiece of Clover Valley Park. This is possibly the largest of the Twelve Bridges. Former Rocklin Mayor and quarry operator Roy Ruhkala recently determined that the granite in this bridge is from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Griffith Quarry in Penryn. None of the known bridges contain granite from a Rocklin quarry.

All of the bridges show rough but skillful forming of their constituent granite blocks. From Parker's notes it appears that he contracted for construction of his bridges with a local quarry operation possibly with Griffith Griffith, owner of the Griffith Quarry in Penryn.

There are three bridges on the Whitney Oaks Golf Course. One of these is in daily use on the twelfth hole. One is in the rough on the thirteenth hole and one is out of sight, covered with vegetation, on the fourteenth hole.

There are three bridges in the Mansion Oaks neighborhood. One is in Mansion Oaks Park. Two are in weedy fields nearby; one of these two shows extensive dismantling. The granite blocks in Parker's bridges are similar to stones used in home landscapes.

Granite was an often-used construction material in our area in the 1880s, so Parker might have built granite bridges in places other than on the road that Miller describes. Because we don't know the exact route of Parker's road we can't be certain that the bridges that we see today are actually among the Twelve Bridges described by Miller, although, the bridges on the Sunset Whitney Golf Course, the one in Clover Valley Park and two in the Mansion Oaks neighborhood are clearly aligned along a route from Downtown Rocklin to ranch headquarters. Nevertheless, at least three of Parker's Twelve Bridges are missing. Perhaps the three have yet to be discovered, or perhaps they yielded to bulldozers as developers reshaped Rocklin's landscape during the past 45 years.

## What have we got to lose?

Gene Johnson

In preparing for a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class I thought of gains made in the past 10 years: the museum, St. Mary's restoration, Huff Spring improvement. All projects that improve central Rocklin and enhance our community's history based "sense of place". Meanwhile, however, we continued to lose elements of our heritage: the Willard house, the Wickman-Ruhkala house, the Tuttle stone barn, the Perkins olive orchard.

Now, we are at risk of losing the Big Gun building - the only remaining quarry structure representative of the 62 granite mining operations that gave Rocklin its name and status as the Granite Capitol of the West. Like St. Mary's, the Big Gun building has demonstrated a remarkable ability to survive. Battered by wind and steadied by a single pair of cables, the basic structure stands while roof tins and weathered siding have fallen away. Like St. Mary's, there will be a move for demolition (in this instance justified by the building's contribution to blight in central Rocklin). The community can let demolition happen or, as we have shown with St. Mary's, we may be able to work together to save and make the most of this historic facility.

Why Save Big Gun?

As we develop Central Rocklin we can save by capitalizing on what we already have - exploiting what is uniquely ours - our history and artifacts.

Preserved, Rocklin's Big Gun facility will be a destination interpretive center illustrating the historic relationship between the availability of high grade granite and the building of the transcontinental railroad and western cities. Located at the edge of the huge Big Gun quarry, the derricks, buildings, granite mining and railroad equipment will constitute an outstanding display of the crafts of granite mining and processing. First and foremost the Big Gun Interpretive Center will serve the Rocklin community by providing recreational opportunities and a learning experience relative to the community's heritage. With its proximity to Sacramento and South Placer population centers, and ready access from the railway and Interstate Highway, it is clear that Big Gun can also play a large role in Placer Valley tourism.

Clearly this is a challenging project - one that will require the support of property owners, the city, and the community at large. If we, as a community, do nothing - the oppor-

(Continued on page 4)

## Rocklin's 1930s Tourist Attraction

Gay Morgan

While growing up in Rocklin the 1930's, my family lived on Pacific Street right across from the Ruhkala Quarry (Union Granite, later Big Gun Mining). Pacific Street was part of historic Highway 40 that stretched from coast to coast. It meandered its way through almost every little town on its way to the Bay Area. Our house was conveniently located next to a Texaco Service Station/bus depot/ice cream parlor/soda fountain where travelers stopped to fill up on gas and ice cream treats. (Gas was only about 20 cents a gallon.)

Our family used to sit on the porch and watch the cars and trucks go by. We knew who got on or off the Greyhound buses. Ladies going shopping in the big city of Sacramento usually dressed up and wore hats and gloves. It was great fun to watch George Nelson our only traffic policeman, shake his finger at the speeders he stopped. Thanks to George, many people referred to Rocklin as a "Speed Trap". The Quarry whistle was part of our daily routine as was the "bing" of the hose in front of the gas pumps that alerted the proprietor of a customer's arrival.

Mr. And Mrs. Birkner, (I think her name was Frankie, I don't remember his.) the couple who owned the station, lived next door in a Victorian style house that was surrounded by a beautiful garden (The house has since been moved to Front Street.) Water lilies grew in the two serene goldfish ponds. Magnolia and fir trees shaded the manicured lawn. A row of tall, fragrant eucalyptus trees marched along one property line. It was like a small park, a cool and shady oasis tucked along the highway. Travelers would stop for gas, have soda and tour the little park and mini zoo.

They had many colorful small birds in an outdoor aviary as well as beautiful, exotic peacocks that strutted regally around the grounds. At night they made unearthly, screeching sounds. The pens for their pet monkeys were located between the station and the house. Jocko was the biggest meanest monkey and we loved to tease him, knowing he couldn't get to us. He would bare his teeth, rattle the wire of his pen and make loud noises. There were three or four other monkeys in the pen with silky gray-brown hair. They gave off a peculiar odor. One small special monkey didn't live

chievous behaviors that I won't tell you about.

When I asked Rubin Ruhkala what he remembered about the place, he recalled he once helped to put out a fire at the gas station. Mr. Birkner rewarded him with a pair of very nice binoculars.

Later the Birkners decided to travel and they sold the place to H.C Scribner and his wife Edith. They sold and repaired appliances, and they kept the gas station and the bus depot. The monkeys, all except Rosie, found a new home at the Royer Park Zoo in Roseville. The grounds were still lovely and many a graduation, birthday or card party was held there.

The monkey pens were now empty but the neighborhood kids continued to play in the monkey pool and on the grounds. One of the more creative kids wrote plays and the other kids performed them in the monkey pens for their parents, providing a bit more entertainment for the unsuspecting travelers that stopped for a break and got more than they expected at the roadside attraction.



***This house on Front Street, the home of RHS members Raul and Carla Campos, was the 1930s Pacific Street home of the Birkners and Rosie the monkey. The house was in the midst of a menagerie that attracted Highway 40 tourists to purchase gas at 20 cents per gallon at the filling station next door. The framing is redwood. Strong winds will rattle the windows..***

in the pen. Her name was Rosie and Mrs. Birkner treated her like a baby, carrying her around most of the time tucked inside her blouse. Rosie didn't like kids and she bit many of us to prove it. One boy escaped Rosie's wrath - Aldrick Niemi. He liked Rosie and carried her around as she clung to his neck. Laura Willard Woods said she was afraid of Rosie and stayed out of her way. Homer Davidson clearly remembers some of Rosie's more mis-

Some people see things that are and ask, Why?  
Some people dream of things that never were and ask, Why not? Some people have to go to work and don't have time for all that.  
**George Carlin**



(Continued from page 1)

#### President

the front of St Mary's ended rather dismally with the demise of two large bushes and most of the small flowers. City Parks donated two drip systems to augment the watering requirements which helped. But the big turnaround came when Sally Huseby, Jean Sippola and Gene Johnson took over and replanted the front landscaping. Just in time for our last two weddings!

Currently, and finally, the City is installing sidewalks and angle parking on the east side of Front Street from Rocklin Road to B Street. It is scheduled for completion by the end of October. At about the same time construction of the Bride's Patio located on the north side of St Mary's is due to begin with completion in the middle of December in time for a December 28 wedding. By the end of 2008 the curb appeal at St Mary's will be irresistible.

We started a new RHS year with our annual September dinner; this year a potluck at the Community Center. The food was excellent as usual and the event drew some 70 members and several guests.

RHS has worked hard to bring the St Mary's restoration and operation into reality. I am sure you will be very proud of those efforts as 2009 unfolds.

The RHS has created new history in Rocklin that will be appreciated as such for at least the next 100 years. But that's our business isn't it?

Roger Lokey  
President

(Continued from page 2)

#### Gene Johnson

tunity to preserve Big Gun buildings and artifacts will be lost forever. If we act to the point of creating a vision and obtain stakeholder buy-in, I am confident the vision will be fulfilled in time.

I propose we form a committee of stakeholders (property owners, City, Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce, and Placer Valley Tourism) to develop a vision and determine feasibility of creating a granite mining interpretive center at the Big Gun site.



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Christy Barros  
Publicity Chairman

If you have access to Email, please send me an Email message and I will add your Email address to the roster.

**Christy Barros**  
**christy@inetinc.net**

#### **Are Your Dues Due?**

If you received this newsletter in the mail, please look at the address label on the envelop. If the number after your name is not an 8 your dues are due.

Please send your renewal dues to:

**Rocklin Historical Society**  
**P. O. box 752**  
**Rocklin California, 95677**

**To join the Rocklin  
Historical Society  
call Gay Morgan at  
624-2355**

#### **Mark Your Calendar**

**October 20, 2008**

**7 pm**

**RHS Monthly Meeting**

**Rocklin Library in Springview Park**

#### **"THEY CROSSED THE MOUNTAINS"**

A made for TV documentary about the history of the Western States Trail from Lake Tahoe to Sacramento. This trail was used by Maidu and Washoe native people thousands of years ago and still pretty much follows the original trail. The Western States Association sponsors the Tevis Cup 100 mile horse ride from Squaw Valley to Auburn which follows this trail. Mr. Hal Hall, who is associated with the Western States Trail Association and Tevis Cup, will be the moderator.

**November 17, 2008**

**7 pm**

**RHS Monthly Meeting**

**Rocklin Library in Springview Park**

#### **"THE SACRAMENTO-NEVADA-PLACER RAILROAD"**

Find out what happened in your own backyard. Mr. Chris Graves will speak of the mystery, violence and intrigue that followed this railroad from Sacramento to Folsom and up what is now Auburn-Folsom Road to King Road.

**December 21, 2008**

**2 pm**

**Second Annual Christmas Concert at Old Saint Mary's Chapel**

Join the RHS for an afternoon of carols, beautiful music, and a sing-a-long with the Grace Notes.

Our voices will ring from the rafters at Old St Mary's Chapel

A \$10 donation will be collected at the door.

#### **Docents and Docent Wannabees**

Gay Morgan

For those of you who would like a refresher course or an update on the contents of the Museum, we are planning a light lunch and a Museum review on Monday October 27<sup>th</sup> from 11:30-1:00. Jean Day, Susan Brooking and Gay Morgan will talk about tours and resources available at the Museum. Please let us know if you plan to attend by Friday October 24<sup>th</sup>. Call 624-2355.