

# THE AMADORIAN

A Publication of the Amador County Historical Society

*"Preserving the past and present for tomorrow"*

Fall 2022 – Vol. 15, No. 3

## President's Corner

Dear ACHS Members:

On September 9<sup>th</sup>, we held our annual wine and cheese event. It was a rousing success with about 80 attendees. Due to the heat and smoke, which were both horrendous, the event was moved at the last minute to Teresa's Banquet Room. We thank the Giurlanis for accommodating us at a moment's notice and appreciate all our members and volunteers for their patience and flexibility.

As you walk or drive by the Museum, notice the new and very professional sign on the walkway and the foot high letters on the top of the second floor of the



Above, Eagle Scouts George Consolo, left, and Joe Cooper, stand by the newly installed sign at the ACHS Museum. George installed the new walkway sign and museum sign (right) and re-landscaped the entrance to the museum as part of his Eagle Scout project.

museum. These are from the very hard work of George Consolo for his Eagle Scout project. George has worked every weekend for the past 7 years on the grounds of the



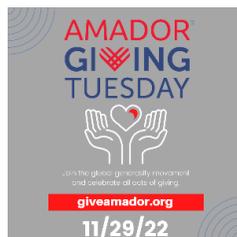
museum with his father, Thorton, mowing, trimming, weeding, and cleaning. We appreciate George and are honored and thank him for deciding to do his Eagle project at the museum.

We welcome our new member of our Board, Marilyn Bustillos. Marilyn, currently, is also President of the Jackson parlor of Native daughters of the Golden West. She will be a great and needed addition to our Board.

The Argonaut Disaster Commemoration, which the Historical Society participated in as part of the organizing committee, went off without a hitch on August 22<sup>nd</sup>- September 25<sup>th</sup>. It was a great historical event with 220 descendants of the victims, rescuers, and miners in attendance from all over the country and hundreds of others from the public. It was a fitting tribute to the lives of the 47 victims lost in the disaster of 1922.

As we wind down the year, I'll just give you a couple of dates to keep in mind. Our annual dinner will be held at Teresa's Place, as usual, on November 6<sup>th</sup>. November 29<sup>th</sup> is Giving Tuesday. Let's hope everyone is as generous as last year. I will be sending out more information on both events soon as the plans develop. Hope to see many of you at the dinner for another great event turnout. With the help of all our members, the events this year have been very well attended. Happy Holidays to all!

Best Regards,  
Cathy McGowen, President, ACHS



Save the Date:  
ACHS  
Annual Dinner  
Sunday,  
November 6, 2022

# Argonaut Disaster Commemoration August 22- September 25, 2022



Above and below, 47 American flags represent miners who died in the August 27, 1922, Argonaut Mine disaster site in Jackson.



Top photo - St. Sava's Cemetery Commemorative service

Middle photo - Catholic Cemetery Commemorative service

Lower photo – Jackson City Cemetery Commemorative service



Above are the granddaughters of Andrew Pierovich, one of the mine rescuers.



Left, Serbian dancers entertain at the commemoration site.



At Vista Point in Jackson, flags, one for each miner who died in the mining disaster, represent the country from which they migrated.



Vaudeville show at the Argonaut Mine Commemoration

## **A Blast from the Past – Jackson Bordellos**

By Karen Dustman

Keep an eye peeled for a patch in the sidewalk outside Jackson's Bank of America next time you visit.

If it looks like something once sat there and has since been removed, well, it *did* and it *was*. All that's left now is a slightly darker square of concrete. But there's a great tale that goes with it!

It was March 1956 when four separate houses in Jackson were raided by agents from the California State Department of Justice. Arrested were three madams and 15 "ladies of questionable virtue." Establishments known as "Dixie's" and "Jeanette's" were located behind today's Bank of America, where there is a parking lot; the "Brookside" was at the end of Logan's Alley, just past the hotel; and "Ace's Rooms" (aka the Drive-In) was near where Mel's Diner is today.

The raid came as an unhappy surprise to local law enforcement; nobody told them the state agents were coming. Gambling and prostitution had been long considered no big deal in town. Even local kids knew where the cat houses were located. Police Chief Guido Tofanelli (who had side jobs as a barber and bartender) was said to confide to one undercover investigator that "the girls made this town" – a statement he later testified that he "just didn't remember." His deputies, Gildo Dondero and James Fregulia, testified they were completely unaware of the existence of the three establishments and "wouldn't walk through dark alleys at night for anyone." Part-time mayor/part-time plumber Robert Smallfield had fixed faucets for the houses in the past.

When one of the fifteen "working girls" was hauled before justice court Judge John Begovich on prostitution charges, she reportedly greeted the judge with a grin and a cheerful, "Hi Johnny."  
"Babs, is that you?" the judge is said to have responded.

A dozen years later, a local group calling themselves the "Filthy Five," decided the now-removed outposts deserved belated recognition. The site they chose for a plaque, today's Bank of America sidewalk, had previously been home to the Bridge Cabin, and a cluster of "old frame dens" once stood just behind it near the creek. The group created a heart-shaped bronze plaque declaring:

*"The World's Oldest Profession flourished 50 yards east of  
this plaque  
for many years until this most perfect example of  
free enterprise was padlocked by unsympathetic  
politicians."*

Trouble was, they signed it with an acronym derived from their artfully selected name: "Environmental Resources Enabling Committee To Investigate Our Necessary Services."

Jackson Mayor Pete Cassinelli gave permission for the group to plant the plaque in the sidewalk, and a dedication ceremony was arranged, complete with band, program, and speakers. The plaque was cemented in the sidewalk, awaiting its unveiling on February 14, 1968—appropriately, Valentine's Day – and temporarily shielded from view with a wooden cover. *Continued page 4*

Somewhere between 50 and 100 attendees showed up for the ceremony. The Filthy Five participated in festive frock coats and derby hats. Stockbroker Duff Chapman donned an eyepatch just for the occasion and gave a speech nostalgically celebrating the “full and enlightened economy” of the old days. The president of the local PTA was said to have mused that the plaque might have something of an uncertain effect on local children, “...but it sure will help tourism!”

The plaque enjoyed the bright light of day for all of about one week. Outrage quickly followed. The wording itself was tame enough, but the acronym from the group’s carefully chosen title didn’t fly with the townsfolk in 1968. Local clergymen predictably led the charge, and a local judge termed it “vulgar.” The Sacramento Bee and other newspapers happily covered the controversy.

The City Council meeting, five days after the unveiling, was swamped with outraged citizens, expressing their unhappy opinions. Surprisingly, the council voted to let the plaque stay. But pushback continued. Red paint was splashed on the offending heart-shaped memorial by some unhappy citizen, and the word politicians detest the most, “recall”, began to be bandied about.

Seeing the writing on the wall, the Filthy Five quietly exhumed the plaque under cover of night on February 20<sup>th</sup> – hence explaining the current patched square in the sidewalk. A brief attempt was made to reinstall it later with the offending acronym scaped off and a new attribution substituted: “Western Historical Organization” (WHO). The city considered okaying the plaque with this change but eventually declined following rumors that two further letters (“RE”) were initially planned. And so, the heart-shaped plaque remained quietly under wraps in protective custody of its promoters for the next two decades.



Time went by, and the surviving members of the “Filthy Five” began searching for a final resting place for the historic plaque. They finally found it on July 30, 1993, a quarter of a century after the heart’s unveiling in the sidewalk: Amador County’s Museum accepted the plaque as a donation to its permanent collection.

The original heart-shaped plaque is said to be safely stored, out of sight, in the Museum’s vault. Plaster-cast replicas, however, can be seen in the window of the Amador County Visitor’s Center and above the bar in the Whiskey Flat Saloon at Volcano, California.

*\*Special thanks to Frank Tortorich, who kindly shared notes from a speech he prepared on the tale of the heart-shaped plaque. ~Karen Dustman*

*Update: The plaque is now on exhibit in the Bordello Room at the Amador County Museum on the second floor. Come up and see it some time. ~Cathy McGowen*

Below is the first installment of a paper written by Frank Tortorich titled:

## **Maiden's Grave, or Not!- The Truth, The Myth, The Legend and Other Convoluted Stories by Frank Tortorich**

### **The Grave Next to the Highway**

When driving California State Route 88 (aka Carson Pass Highway, Alpine Highway, Route 8, etc.) east from Jackson, California, in approximately 45 miles you will see this highway sign. Signs like this alert people that there is a point of historical interest ahead; in this case it reads MARKER 500 FT AHEAD.



If we have the time to stop to see what this sign is inviting us to discover, this is what we will see.



As you can see there are three markers.

I quote from the *California Historical Landmarks*, California Department of Parks and Recreation publication. No publication date is listed. Continued page 6

This is the text for Maiden’s Grave, Historical Landmark 28:

*NO. 28 MAIDEN'S GRAVE - It is said that in 1850 a young girl, Rachel Melton, native of Iowa, was accompanying her parents on a journey West via covered wagon train when she became violently ill. Camp was made and every effort was made to cure her, as she was the joy of the party, but she passed away and was buried on this spot.*

It is curious to me, as a historian, that there is no reference as to the source of this text. But it does begin our study as to what other text versions offer in our search of the “truth.”

I will begin with taking a closer look at each of the three markers in the sequence as to when they were installed.

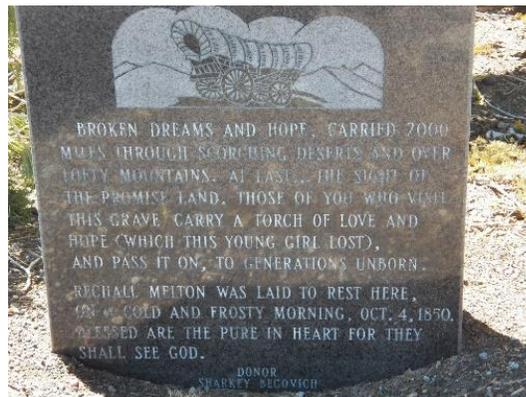


This was the first of the three markers placed at this site. The inscription sets the stage for the rest of this paper.

It reads:

*Rachael Melton  
Died  
Oct. 4, 1850  
Native of Iowa  
Erected by Guests  
At Kirkwood  
1908*

Second marker:



The second marker was erected sometime in the 1990s. Note it was donated by Sharky Begovich, raised in Jackson, CA, a resident of Minden, NV, who did not apply for a US Forest Service permit. He just thought it was something nice to do.<sup>1</sup> We have no source documentation for the information on this monument.

Continued page 7

<sup>1</sup> Personal interview with Sharky Begovich by Frank Tortorich, Jr.

Now lets us look at the third marker.



The text reads:

**WHO IS REALLY BURIED IN THE MAIDEN’S GRAVE?**

*Who is the maiden? Who is buried here if not the maiden?*

*Maiden’s Grave is a popular roadside stop that commemorates the death of a young woman during the overland migration in 1850. Around 1900 an elderly woman looking for the gravesite of her daughter started a series of events that identified the wrong grave as that of her daughter.*

*At two different times, two headstones were installed at a location along busy Highway 88. The site came to honor the maiden and many others that died on their journey to California. Historical research in 1989 disclosed that a young man was buried here, and that the young woman or maiden was buried in a meadow two miles to the east.*

*On October 4, 1850, William Edmundson wrote in his diary,*

*“After Traveling 6 miles we came to Tragedy Spring ... After traveling two miles further, we came to a trading post about noon where we camped having come 8 miles today. A young man from Henry County, named Allen Melton died at this place during the night.”<sup>2</sup>*

*Allen Melton was buried near here. No one knows the actual location because of highway realignment when the rocks marking the original location were moved. This memorial commemorates the life and death of Allen Melton of Henry County, Iowa, and all the others who suffered and died during the great western migration.*

*Please take a moment to reflect on the hardships they endured to follow their dreams.*

*Dedicated October 4, 2004*

*Marker dedicated jointly with the Amador County Sesquicentennial Committee*

*United States Forest Service*

*Amador County Historical Society*

*Oregon-California Trails Association*

This next photo appears to show the original location on the grave before several realignments of the highway. By observing the trees from the first photo to this one, it is obvious that these are different locations.

Continued page 8

<sup>2</sup> William Edmundson, *Crossing the Plains in 1850*, Annals of Iowa (1908). 534-535



Courtesy of the Amador County Archives, date unknown

With the Edmundson journal eyewitness account, it becomes obvious that there is no maiden buried here, but rather a young man.

So how did this misidentification happen?

We must go back to the early 1900s when an elderly woman came to the area looking for her daughter's grave.

This is how a California State Highway engineer described the event in his memo dated September 26, 1916.<sup>3</sup>

*For more than half a century there has existed a legend that somewhere along the trail was a grave of a young maiden who had succumbed to the rigors of the journey across the deserts and was buried beside the trail.*

*Well intentioned people subscribed to a fund to mark the grave and had a granite block prepared for that purpose. About two miles west of Tragedy Springs (there is only one spring) is a grave of a man who died and was buried in 1850. The grave was marked by a cairn of stones, and a board taken from a wagon-box, upon which the man's name, Allen Melton, nativity, and date of death were cut with a knife.*

*In the absence of a woman's grave to mark, the granite stone was engraved with the information appearing on the headboard above described, substituting a woman's Christian name, Rachel Melton, for the given name cut on the board. The monument bearing a woman's name was then erected at the grave of a man.*

*Prior to the marking of the grave as above related, a citizen of Amador County was encamped at the meadow near Tragedy Springs, when a very old woman appeared, having driven by a team from Jackson. She stated that in 1850 when she and her family came that way with an immigrant (emigrant) train. Her daughter died and was buried on the meadow at Tragedy Springs, the grave being at the foot of a large tree. She had come to remove the remains of her child and give them Christian burial. She recognized the campground but unable to find either the grave or the tree she thought marked it, went away disappointed. No one thought to inquire her name of whence she came. Continued page 9*

<sup>3</sup> Copied from the original in the California State Library, Sacramento.

*Some years later, and after the monument had been placed as above stated, the foreman in charge of work on the State Road, Stephen Ferrari<sup>4</sup> by name, cleared the meadow by burning the logs which encumbered it.*

*When one log, lying in the vicinity of where the woman had searched for her daughter's grave, was reduced to ashes, there were exposed the outline of a grave marked with stones, with a mound of rocks at the head.*

*Recently the grave has been marked by a rude wooden cross, on the arms of which are cut the words; "The Maiden's Grave". It is believed that this is the true Maiden's Grave of the legend, the one sought by the aged mother who was unable to visualize the fir tree in the prone log covering the grave from sight.*

*Signed: P.M. Norboe*

*September 26, 1916*

The last installment of *Maiden's Grave, or Not!* will continue in the next issue of *The Amadorian*

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<sup>4</sup> Proper spelling is Ferrari.

## ***ACHS Life Members***

Eugene & Christina Ammann ~ Kathy Allen & Frank Axe ~ Richard & July Allen ~ Joseph and Iris Aparicio ~ Ed & Mary Lee Arata ~ Caryl Arnese ~ Dan and Pat Asvitt ~ Evan Bass ~ Michael Bell ~ Heidi Boitano ~ Mark, Lorie & Matthew Bowlby ~ Ray & Barb Brusatori ~ William Burger ~ Paul & Claudine Burnett ~ Jerry Cassesi ~ Robert J. & Susan L. Chandler ~ D.E. Collins ~ Thornton & Paula Jo Consolo ~ Robert M. & Lorraine M. Cooper ~ Mary Cowan ~ Jeannine & Patrick Crew\* ~ Jean Louise Dahl ~ Robert Davis ~ Christopher & Cori Dover ~ Kathleen Du Bois ~ John Ellyson, MD ~ Carol Emerson ~ Katherine Evatt & Pete Bell ~ Brian Ferdani ~ Robin Field & Carol Mischer ~ Wayne Garibaldi ~ Phillip & Jenny Giurlani ~ David & Linda Gonzales ~ Jim & Teresa Guidi ~ Ray & Cheryl Herndon & Bobby Keeling ~ Curtis & Denise Hollis ~ Patricia Huberty ~ Jeana (Cova) Hultquist & Marshall Cova ~ Judy Jebian ~ Ida Ruth Johnson ~ Marilyn Jones ~ Richard & Pat Jones ~ Gretchen Kingsbury ~ George & Joan La Ponsie ~ JoAnn Levy ~ Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Little ~ Gary & Jaimie Little ~ Stan Lukowicz ~ Doug & Susan McElwee ~ Allen & Karen Martin ~ Jeremy & Shirley McCarty ~ Doug & Susan McElwee ~ Frances Melusky ~ Marshal Merriam ~ Joe & Alicia Miller (Giurlani) ~ Jean Mueller ~ Ron Oliverro ~ Mary O'Neal & Gary Arnese ~ Katherine & William Orescan ~ Alan & Peggy Piccardo ~ Hazel, Jeffrey & Amy Powell ~ Marian & Leonard Randolph ~ Jeanne C. Russ ~ Martin Ryan ~ John H. & Patricia Scott ~ Norm Seid ~ Beverly Smallfield ~ George P. Smith ~ Rose Marie Smith ~ John Solaja\* ~ Marie-Louise Solaja ~ Audrey Souza ~ Charles J. Spinetta ~ Ray Stacey\* ~ Jesse & Denise Stephens ~ Steve & Linda Stocking ~ Suzanne Erickson Stroy ~ Keith & Gail Sweet ~ Ed & Margaret Swift ~ Karen Vaira & Steve Gallant ~ Russell & Mary Beth VanVoorhis ~ Violich Farms ~ Grant Vogel & Pam Sharp ~ Fraser & Teddy West ~ Sutter Creek Promotions Committee ~ Volcano Community Services District \*Benefactor

### ***Welcome to new members:***

**Tom Baldwin, Marilyn Bustillos, Mike & Susan Lauro, Emily Tirapelle**



**Our list of donors is growing, making the new Livery Building Project possible. Listed are donors of \$500 or more:**

Amador Community Foundation ~ Joe and Iris Aparicio ~ Evan Bass ~ Paul & Claudine Burnett ~ D.E. Collins ~ Marshall Cova ~ Jean Louise Dahl ~ Barry & Sue Duncan ~ Wayne Garibldi ~ Phillip & Jeny Giurlani ~ Linda & David Gonzales ~ Larry & Jeana Hultquist ~ John James ~ Don & Judy Jebian ~ Richard & Pat Jones ~ Ron & Kris Katzakian ~ JoAnn Levy ~ Marla Lowe ~ Stan Lukowicz ~ Kim & Cathy McGowen ~ Jeffrey & Hazel Powell ~ Beverly Smallfield ~ Charles Spinetta ~ Anders Stenstedt ~ Karen Vaira & Steve Gallant ~ Russell Van Voorhis ~ Violich Farms

*Your generous donation will help build the New Livery Building which will replicate the California-style of rural agricultural buildings. Learn more at [www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org)*

**Amador County Historical Society Board  
of Directors**

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Sue Duncan, Vice President

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Grant Vogel

Frank Tortorich

Leonard Williams

*Board Meetings are held on the 3rd  
Wednesday of each month at 3:00 p.m.  
225 Church St., Jackson (Amador County  
Museum).*

*Members and friends are invited to attend.*

**ACHS Mission Statement**

The society was formed for the purpose of identifying and preserving items of historical interest of Amador County for its residents and the general public and to educate and increase public awareness while at the same time enlisting public support for historical preservation in Amador County.

The Amador County Historical Society has also partnered with the Recreational Railroad Coalition Historical Society in owning and operating the Amador Central Railroad, a great part of the county's history.

**Support**

**Amador County Historical  
Society by signing up for**

**Amazon Smiles at**

**smile.amazon.com**

*The Amadorian* Editors:  
Cathy McGowan,  
Hazel & Jeffrey Powell

## ***About the Amador County Historical Society***

The Amador County Historical Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the research and preservation of Amador County heritage and history.

The organization brings together people from diverse backgrounds to work towards these goals. We invite all interested persons to attend our monthly meetings and encourage your suggestions and active participation in Society events and endeavors.

We also welcome guest articles for our newsletter. Unfortunately, due to limited space we can accept only those pertaining to local history. If you have any questions regarding ACHS please contact the office at (209) 257-1485.

**If you would like to become a member of the Society**, please fill in the membership form below and mail along with the appropriate dues to the Amador County Historical Society, P.O. Box 761, Jackson, CA 95642-0761

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**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check one of the following Memberships:**

**ANNUAL**     **Individual \$25.00**     **Family (2 or more) \$40.00**     **Students \$15.00**

**LIFETIME**     **Family (2 or more) \$400.00**    **SPONSOR**     **Benefactor (\$1,000 up)**  
 **Patron (\$500 to \$999)**  
 **Associate (\$250 to \$499)**  
 **Other** \_\_\_\_\_

The Amadorian  
A Publication of the Amador County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 761  
Jackson, CA 95642

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