

Upcoming Events

For the safety of our visitors and volunteers, the museum is temporarily closed, and sponsored events will be rescheduled when it is safe to do so.

Inside this issue:

- Our New Volunteer & Board Member Nominee, page 2
- Membership Update, page 2
- Rock Canyon Animal Rescue Foundation, page 3
- Bea La Force, page 3
- Annual Meeting and Elections, page 4
- Pomegranates, page 4
- Timeline: 1888–1943, A.L. McNett, page 5
- Membership Application, page 6



JOHN DEWITT MUSEUM

2116 TAVERN ROAD
ALPINE, CA 91901

Open 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
last weekend of each month

Tom & Judy Myers, Editors
619-885-8063

NEW EXHIBITS FOR 2021

We are planning to unveil new exhibits in the Beaty House when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and it is safe to do so. The East Gallery of the Beaty House will feature an exhibit honoring **Women of Alpine** who played pivotal roles in the community from the 1850's to the early 2000's. The West Gallery will feature **Birds & Bees** of Alpine. The long-running Beekeeping exhibit in this gallery is getting a facelift and we are adding a section about the abundant native bees in our area, including sweat bees, bumblebees, carpenter bees and leafcutter bees.

While we were evaluating objects for display in the beekeeping section we noted that many of the artifacts were donated to the museum by **Gage Skinner**, a name familiar to many in Alpine and east county. Mr. Skinner lives in Pine Valley and one of our Directors knows him well, so we asked Corinne if she could help by researching biographical information on Mr. Skinner. We want to share some of that information with our members through this newsletter and hope that you will all want to visit the museum when we reopen.

G. Gage Skinner, aka "Skinner", is a

cultural anthropologist and native of Seattle, Washington.

A graduate of San Diego State University, he has served in various professional capacities with the Peace Corps in Latin America, the Oklahoma State Park system, and the U.S. National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Region. Additionally, he has served as an adjunct university professor at North Idaho College, the University of San Diego, Cuyamaca College, and San Diego State University. Skinner is an avid writer of poetry, including haiku, and has published on a wide range of topics, including beekeeping, the fur trade, and the history of the American West.

Skinner is a long-time beekeeper and is known in east San Diego County as the "Mountain Man", often appearing in his Mountain Man attire in local parades and public speaking engagements. He has an extensive library and collection of objects relating to beekeeping and Mountain Men, and has a deep interest in historical



re-enactment and the Rocky Mountain fur trade of circa 1825 – 1840. He is also a generous donor with many of his gifts going to the Smithsonian Institution Museum of the American Indian, and the Museum of the Mountain Man in Pinedale, Wyoming, and to our own Alpine Historical Museum.

Thank you, Skinner!

OUR NEW VOLUNTEER & BOARD MEMBER NOMINEE



Barbara McCurtis and her husband are new residents of Alpine. She has an obvious fondness for history museums because one of the first things she did after moving here was to contact the Alpine Historical Society and volunteer to help at the John De Witt Museum.

When we met Barbara we quickly realized that she is more than just a history buff, she brings with her

a wealth of experience in the museum field. Barbara recently retired from the position of Director, MCRD San Diego Command Museum, a position which she held for many years. Upon moving to Alpine, she was eager to volunteer her skills and talents within the community and to learn about opportunities here. We are delighted to welcome Barbara as a member and to nominate her for a position on our Board of Directors. We anticipate that when the museum re-opens we will have many more volunteer activities available for her.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

A Warm Welcome to Our New Members:
Robert & Christine Figari

A Grateful Thank You to Our Renewing Members: Dawn & Russ August, Wayne & Cathie Aymar, Marcia Bair, Kathy Balsley, Theo & Jan Bazdorf, Bob & Sharon Beale, Gay Beauregard, Barbara Cater, Rita & James David, Kathleen Fiedor, Marilyn & Marc Fox, David & Lori Fountain, Richard & Vicki Freeman, Mary Fritz, Kim & Steve Hales, Bob & Holly Hull, Chik & Patricia Hylton, Norman & Dolores Kling, Ron & Carol Matzenauer, Cheryl & James Minshew, John & Ann Pierce, Pam & Pat Price, Beverly Ring, Mark & Nancy Ross, Kevin & Alejandra Schumacher, Dave & Donna Smith, Sue Smith, Ray & Betty

Sopfe, Deborah & Joseph Verfaillie, Linda & Adam Whitlock, Jim & Sue Whitt, Genna Yoder

Many thanks to the following for their generous financial donations: Wayne & Cathie Aymar, Marcia Bair, Theo & Jan Bazdorf, Bob & Sharon Beale, Gay Beauregard, David & Lisa Celeste, Barbara Cater, Rita & James David, Kathleen Fiedor, Robert & Christine Figari, Mary Fritz, Kim & Steve Hales, Chik & Patricia Hylton, Ron & Carol Matzenauer, John & Ann Pierce, Beverly Ring, Mark & Nancy Ross, Kevin & Alejandra Schumacher, Sue Smith, Ray & Betty Sopfe, Deborah & Joseph Verfaillie, Linda & Adam Whitlock

Warm Welcome to our New Life Member:

Rock Canyon Animal Rescue Foundation

Special Thanks of Appreciation for renewing their Business Memberships for 2021:

Bert Fuller VFW Post No. 9578

Hitech Screen Science Co.

Kamps Propane

RPL Electric, Inc.

West Cal Die Co.

RECOGNITION OF OUR CURRENT LIFETIME MEMBERS

Carlette Anderson • Deborah Anderson • George & Joan Anderson • Mark L. Anderson
Roy & Willa Athey • Franklin R. Ball • Pat & Joe Brunold • David Carey • Lisa & Dave Celeste
Ted Christensen • James H. Cleland • Peggy & Jim Easterling • Beverly Falor • Katie & Brian Ford
Vincent Fritts • Paul Gonya • Gail Wilson Guth • Janet M. Harris • Linda Harshberger • Ann Hill
Leslie Holben • Ken & Denise Hujing • Ben Johnson • Bill & Diane Keltner • Jill & Shawn Killion
John Krempp • Barbara Lea LaForce • J. Clayburn LaForce • Joanne & Martin Marugg • Carol Morrison
Tom & Judy Myers • Helen Porter • Kurt Scherbaum • Albert Simonson • Donna Sisson • Virginia Sisson
Anne Tarr • Elma Terry • Rodney & Guille Tuttle • Paul & Carol Walker • William & Joan Waterworth

RECOGNITION OF OUR LIFETIME BUSINESS MEMBERS

Brabazon Alpine Paving and Trucking • John Garbaczewski Family Foundation
Ewiiapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians • Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians • RGT Charitable Trust
Rock Canyon Animal Rescue Foundation • Turvey Granite Pit • Chris Wiley—Primary Residential Mortgage

CURRENT MEMBERSHIPS: Life Members ~ 49, Supporting Members ~ 68, Members up for Renewal ~ 40

Our New Nonprofit Life Member . . .

ROCK CANYON ANIMAL RESCUE FOUNDATION



ROXIE

Welcome our new nonprofit Life Member, the *Rock Canyon Animal Rescue Foundation*, a 501C3 animal rescue organization located in Alpine.

Many of you know Tim Petersen as the owner of the Rock Canyon Vine-

yards. In addition to his winemaking operation, he and his fiancée, Wendy, are also animal lovers, having rescued many cats and dogs, a Clydesdale horse named “Bella”, several donkeys, and a mini-pig over the years.

I asked Tim what gave them the inspiration to start their foundation. He said they saw an announcement that a person in Alpine had a pair of donkeys adopted from the BLM that needed a forever home. It seems that their braying was a bit too much for the neighborhood. Tim came to the rescue to give a home to “Bonnie” and “Clyde” – not knowing that Bonnie was secretly



carrying a little one inside. So when “Roxie” was born, the two donkeys became three.

Tim and Wendy have a love for all animals and decided to start an animal rescue foundation with the goal to provide aid to other rescue organizations though a grant program and provide forever homes for animals in need or who are hard to place.

We are delighted to have the Rock Canyon Animal Rescue Foundation join us as Life Members.

www.rockcanyonanimalrescuefoundation.org



BELLA

BEA LA FORCE

While assembling the Alpine’s Women exhibit, we found that although Bea La Force wrote about other people, she didn’t write about herself. So we contacted her son, Clayburn La Force, Jr., and he has graciously provided her biography:



Beatrice Maureen La Force (nee Boyd) was born on June 9, 1908, in St Louis, Missouri. Her mother was Carrie Boyd (nee Concannon) and her father was George L. Boyd. Beatrice was the second of eight children. This large family probably moved to San Diego during or shortly after the First World War where George, a master carpenter, found work in the growing city. Beatrice married James Clayburn La Force in 1923 and by 1928 had given birth to Carolyn, Alice, and James Jr.

Though she lacked a formal education, Beatrice was fiercely determined to become an author, reading voraciously, and composing poems and short stories even before her marriage. The growing family lived in a home on the east edge of Balboa Park. At the back was a small building that she turned into a writing studio called “The Shack.” As the years went by, her drive to write increased exponentially.

In 1943, the family moved to Alpine’s Rancho del Sequan, a 140-acre ranch south of the town center. While she continued to write and publish plays and short stories, she found time to become Alpine’s Librarian and to form an organization of local writers, known as the “Script Teasers,” who met regularly to read and critique their plays. Soon after moving to Alpine she began to amass historical materials that became the basis of her substantial history of Alpine: *Alpine, History of a Mountain Settlement*.

In the late 1940’s, Beatrice and her husband bought a 40-acre property in Alpine, which they called “Sky Mesa” and began building a new home, constructed of adzed redwood railway ties from the defunct railroad that ran along the Mexican border from San Diego to Imperial County. They moved into the half-finished structure after their Rancho del Sequan home burned to the ground in 1950. In a small structure behind the house (once again, “The Shack”) on “Sky Mesa” she continued writing and publishing plays, children’s books, and *The Alpine History* until she passed away in 2004.

ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTIONS

It's that time of year when we again host our Annual Meeting and Election of Officers. The meeting will be on Sunday, February 21, 2021, beginning at 1:00 pm. We will have a year-end financial report from our Treasurer, and an update on current projects at the John DeWitt Museum. And that's about all that will be "normal" this year.

In February, we are approaching the one-year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic in California. As of this writing, cases of the virus are surging faster than ever before, but there is hope that vaccinations, wearing masks, and maintaining distance from others will lead to a reduction in the spread of this disease. In the meantime, we anticipate that the County will still prohibit public gatherings indoors, so we will adapt to a new way of doing things. Here's the plan:

1. **ELECTION:** done by mail and results announced at the Annual Meeting
2. **MEETING VENUE:** ZOOM video conference
3. **DATE & TIME:** Sunday, February 21, 2021, at 1:00 pm
4. **LUNCHEON:** On your own, at your home or office, it's a BYO!
5. **KEY AGENDA ITEMS:** Annual Report, Financial Report, Election Results
6. **PROGRAM:** Speaker & Topic "to be announced"

We are fortunate that all of the officers and directors elected in 2020 have agreed to serve again in 2021. Our new member, Barbara McCurtis, has agreed to serve on

the Board of Directors (see her biography on page 2).

Nominations for the vacant Board position are encouraged prior to voting. Persons interested in the vacant position can call Tom at 619-885-8063, or send an email to info@alpinehistory.org.

In late January, ballots will be mailed to all voting members. To be counted, ballots must be received at the museum P.O. Box 382 by February 13, 2021. Voting members include all current supporting members and Life members.

Since the Annual Meeting occurs 5 days after Mardi Gras, all are invited to wear Mardi Gras masks, beads, and attire (purple, green & gold), making this a festive occasion. *Sorry we can't serve Hurricanes or King Cake this year!*

SLATE OF OFFICERS FOR 2021

President: Tom Myers

1st Vice President, Programs: Corinne Lewis

2nd Vice President, Membership: Judy Myers

3rd Vice President, Property: Dave Smith

Secretary: Janet Harris

Treasurer: Lisa Celeste

Director, Archivist: Carol Morrison

Director, Social Media: Jennifer Tschida

Director-at-Large: Norm Kling

Director-at-Large: Vikki Coffey

Director-at-Large: Barbara McCurtis

Director-at-Large: ___[vacant]_____



We ran across a story about pomegranates in the book *Alpine, History of a Mountain Settlement*, written by Beatrice La Force. Perhaps we should not be surprised that they were planted in early Alpine—a little research reveals that the pomegranate is one of the world's most ancient fruits. According to an old Egyptian proverb, "Eat a pomegranate and visit a bath; your youth will haste back." The word pomegranate

comes from the medieval Latin words pomum granatum, meaning apple of many grains or seeds. Although it seems to have originated in Persia, the pomegranate quickly spread throughout the Mediterranean region to China, where it was called the "Chinese apple".

We also found reference to the pomegranate in the July 27, 1961 edition of *The Alpine Echo*. The article, *Plant Pomegranates for Flower, Fruit and Foliage*, opens with

this musing: "You might wonder at times whether God created pomegranates for food or show. And you can only assume both. For if its succulent fruit refreshed the weary traveler of Biblical times, its decorative good looks are what we most appreciate today."

But let's return to Bea La Force's story which took place during a drought year when crop yields were light. William Stephenson "was pretty desperate to get a few

nickels, down at Nathan Company in San Diego, and he picked what we had—a few peaches and a few apples and still had quite a number of empty lug boxes. Well, along our place there was a hedge of pomegranates just for ornaments, great big husky things, so he snipped those off and filled the empty boxes and he said 'if they don't want them, you can just throw them out'. But, my, we got a fancy price for them."

TIMELINE: 1888–1943, A. L. McNETT

Born in Springfield, Illinois, in 1860, A.L. McNett later moved to Kiowa, Kansas and then in 1888 moved to Alpine. McNett is an often repeated name in the pioneer history of Alpine, with numerous references by Beatrice La Force in her book *Alpine, History of a Mountain Settlement*. The following story comes from her book:

About three months before Sheriff A.L. McNett, (called "Link" by his intimates) was born in Illinois on his parents' farm, a tall skinny candidate for President of the United States walked into their place one day on a campaign trip through the state, alone and un-trumpeted. Accepting the couple's invitation to supper and a bed for the night before continuing on his way, he talked with them of his hopes for the Nation, of his Faith and beliefs. When he left next day, the young wife said to her husband, "I think he's going to be our next President. If he is, I aim to name the baby after him".

He was the next President and the baby was named Abraham Lincoln McNett.

Sheriff McNett, as he is most often called by people who talk about him, was a man remembered by all who knew him as



Wife Lora May, daughter Josephine, and Sheriff McNett (notice his handlebar mustache)

a strong and very dependable character, up to any emergency—runaway horses, tough City boys, eloping juveniles, roistering drunks, or take the case of the town well and the gold watch. . . A City man, all dressed up in a suit and vest with a gold watch on a gold chain draped across his proud chest, went, while his team of horses rested, to look into the old well. As he leaned over [the well], his gold watch fell in, chain and all, disappearing in the cool darkness below. Villagers stood around pondering the problem, lowering the bucket on its pulley time after time in a vain effort to dig up the gold watch. Finally someone said that Sheriff McNett was the man who could get that watch out. A rider was sent galloping up the road. Sheriff McNett came galloping down, bailed out the well and recovered the watch.

Sadly, his first wife (Lora May) died, leaving him with four children, Burnham, Lea, Josephine and Mable. Later, when his children were almost grown, he married Susie Littman, a widow with four children of her own. They lived on a large farm located east of the Lazy A Ranch, west of the Willows, with the present day I-8 and Alpine Blvd. to the north and Rancho Palo Verde to the south.



McNett Adobe Ranch House, 1908, Josephine on chair (left), Lora May at window (right)



McNett milked 30 goats a day and the milk was delivered to the village, mostly to sick people whose prescribed diet included goat's milk. His step-daughter, Eva Littman, was one of the delivery "boys". After the death of Mr. Walker (the butcher), McNett became the village butcher, dressing out a cow almost every week to sell around the community from his wagon. He chaperoned the Saturday night dances at the Town Hall, keeping an eye out for suspicious strangers and local "toughs".

A.L. McNett and his large family played many key roles in the development of the new community called Alpine. He was a member of the school board for the Alpine Center School, and served as a deputy sheriff in Alpine for 35 years. In 1894 the McNett family were charter members of the Alpine Community Church. Mr. McNett was Vice-President and later President of the Alpine Cemetery Association and an original stock-holder of the Town Hall Corporation.

Eva Littman Gallagher remembers her step-father as a fine man who never smoked, drank or ate onions. McNett passed away at 88, never losing his old-time sheriff dignity or his handlebar moustache. He is buried in the Alpine Cemetery.



Sheriff McNett (with handlebar mustache) and Susie

Alpine Historical & Conservation Society
P. O. Box 382
Alpine, CA 91903-0382

Address Service Requested

**ALPINE
HISTORICAL &
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY**

P. O. Box 382
Alpine, CA 91903-0382

619-485-0625

E-mail: info@alpinehistory.org

We're on the Web!
www.alpinehistory.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: _____ Date: _____

Street Address/P.O. Box: _____

City/ST/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Send Newsletters via: E-mail U.S. Mail

Membership Category (Please check one):

- Student \$5 Individual \$25 Nonprofit \$30 Business \$50
 Senior (1) \$15 Family \$35 Nonprofit Life \$600 Business Life \$1,000
 Senior (2) \$20 Life \$500

Amount Enclosed:

Membership \$ _____

Donation \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Volunteer Opportunities:

- Museum Open Houses History Day
 Programs & Events Oral Histories
 Exhibit Development Archival Data Entry
 Garden Maintenance Other _____

Please complete this form and include your check made payable to the Alpine Historical Society, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.