

## An Alpine History Mystery:

### The Oldest Musical Instrument in Alpine

September 2015

What is the oldest musical instrument in Alpine? Well, we think we have it in the John DeWitt Museum at the Alpine Historical Society. Now you or one of your neighbors might have an old band instrument tucked away beside your high school yearbook, or maybe you have your grandfather's guitar in the closet or your great grandmother's autoharp in the attic. But unless your instrument was made before the 1890's you'll have to play second fiddle to the instrument in this mystery story.



Alpine became a recognized town with an official Post Office in 1885 and the entire population was less than 100 hard-working souls. Now in those days only the men were allowed to vote and maybe that's why life around these parts wasn't quite so civilized. Then in 1889, a generous couple by the name of Benjamin and Harriet Arnold moved to this mountain settlement to enjoy the fresh clean air and they brought with them some of the more refined ways of the eastern states. Seeing the need for a few civic improvements, the Arnolds paid to fix the road from El Cajon and Lakeside to Alpine and they improved the stage service to Alpine, Descanso and Cuyamaca. They built an attractive and comfortable hotel and then a modern one-room schoolhouse complete with a bell and a belfry. You can see this very same school bell at the DeWitt Museum but it doesn't count as a musical instrument because it can only ring out one note.



Now in 1890, a group of school girls decided the town needed a particular kind of musical instrument that could be used in their school programs, in worship services, and by the town folks for local entertainment. So they hatched a plan to raise money by putting on a show featuring the very best of local talent. And a fine show it was: Mr. and Mrs. Roslin Pennoyer played violin and piano, Grace and Mable Wood played guitars, Bessie and Adelia Pennoyer played mandolin and guitar, Lillian Emery sang and offered readings, and Mrs. William Stephenson also presented readings and acted out pantomimes. The girls decided to charge twenty-five cents for admission and for five cents you could buy a nice piece of homemade cake and if you had five cents more you could get a dish of ice cream.



Well, when Mr. Arnold heard about the girls' plan he told the young ladies that he would match whatever amount of money they raised so they would be sure to have a fine instrument for the town. Then, he recruited lots of his friends and business associates from San Diego to come to Alpine for the event just to make sure there was a big crowd. After the show, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold and the girls went down to San Diego to purchase a lovely instrument made by the Story & Clark Company.



As it turns out, the instrument was a grand addition to this little pioneer town. As far as we know all the other instruments used in the show are long gone, but the new musical treasure purchased by the teenagers in Alpine in 1890 remains. In fact, it is still making music for the community 125 years after it first was brought to Alpine. The History Mystery for you to solve is this: What is the oldest musical instrument in Alpine and where has it been for all these years?