

ARNOLD WAS ALPINE BENEFACTOR

Almost everyone in Alpine has heard about Benjamin Rice Arnold—a leading figure in the development of our community in the late nineteenth century. Barbara Cater, one of the Alpine Historical Society's dedicated volunteers, has recently completed an extensive research project on Mr. Arnold. I thought I'd share some of Barbara's findings with you this month. What an interesting life he had, and how lucky the settlement of Alpine was that he sought relief from his asthma condition and moved to the area!

Mr. Arnold was described as having a strong character, yet he was gentle in manner and very approachable—a man with many friends and few enemies. Born in Kent County, Rhode Island on September 22, 1822, Benjamin Arnold's roots grew deep in that area of the country. His ancestors immigrated to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635.

He was engaged in the East African Trade with his brother and uncle and dealt in ivory. Already a very wealthy man, he and his wife, Harriet, moved to this area and began acquiring land. During the great land boom of 1887-1888 he bought several lots, known as the Horton Addition, in downtown San Diego and built a mansion on the corner of 5th and Juniper Streets, an area known as Florence Heights.

In 1889, the Arnolds visited Alpine, liked it and soon purchased property in the center of the settlement. He built a large home named Los Robles and from then on he and his wife divided their time between Alpine and their home in San Diego. The home was in the area that later became Dinosaur Park, just west of 2400 Alpine Blvd. During her research at the San Diego Historical Society, Barbara located a picture of the Arnold home in Alpine, which was destroyed by fire. The Alpine Hotel was built in 1890. Upon his death, the hotel was bequeathed to its first manager, Mrs. Rose Campbell.

Mr. Arnold was responsible for the building of several significant public buildings in Alpine. The Alpine Center School was built in 1890 and the Parsonage in 1893. Land for the Alpine Cemetery on Victoria Drive was donated in 1899. Also in 1899, he advanced half the cost to build a Town Hall. Alpine's first corporation, The Hall Company, Inc., was formed with \$600.00 in shares sold to stockholders. The Town Hall became the village's social and political center. The Town Hall and the Parsonage still stand today—a constant reminder of the many contributions Mr. Arnold made to the Alpine community. The Town Hall is now the Alpine Woman's Club building and the Parsonage is Kasitz Kastle Retirement Home.

In addition to buildings, Mr. Arnold made significant improvements to the "terrible road" from Lakeside to El Cajon and took over the stage line and added more horses, better equipment and additional stops.

Benjamin Rice Arnold died on August 24, 1899 at his home in San Diego of heart failure. He was buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery in San Diego, California. Mrs. Arnold died on June 11, 1902 in Rhode Island. That same year, Mr. Arnold's remains were moved to Swan Cemetery in Rhode Island where he was buried next to his wife.

"That he was loved by the people of the mountain settlement he had adopted is accepted, and that he loved them and their village can be assumed by what he did while here." ...quoted from *Alpine, History of a Mountain Settlement*, by Beatrice LaForce.

If you have stories to share about Alpine history, or need to know something about it, please e-mail or call me and I'll pass stories along and research questions.

Carol Walker and her husband Paul lived in Alpine for 19 years. Carol is the Membership Chairman of the Alpine Historical Society. She can be reached at cwalker@alpinehistory.org or 301-7562.



This is a picture of Benjamin Arnold's first house in Alpine which was destroyed by fire.