

*THE ALPINE SUN SHOPPER – September 1, 2011*  
*Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society*

**HONORING DR. SOPHRONIA NICHOLS**

One of Alpine's legends, Dr. Sophronia Athearn Nichols, will be honored at a ceremony to be held on October 8, 2011, at the Alpine Historical Society's museum, 2112 Alpine Boulevard. The De Anza Chapter of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), is hosting this important event in Alpine's history—the dedication of a marker that will be placed on Dr. Nichols' former home. The ceremony is the culmination of over a year's work coordinated by Historic Preservation Chairman Nancy Eggert-Boone and Alpine Historical Society's President Carol Morrison. Barbara Cater, a member of the Society, performed the valuable genealogical research that was required in order for the DAR to consider the application. Barbara spent an enormous amount of time and energy on this project and her efforts resulted in a positive outcome.

In order for the DAR to consider someone a person of historical significance that person must be a descendant of a Revolutionary War Soldier/Patriot. Dr. Nichols' maternal grandfather, Reverend Joseph Thaxter, was born April 23, 1744 in Hingham, Massachusetts. He graduated from Harvard in the class of 1768 and taught school for a time in Hingham. At the outbreak of the Revolution, he joined the patriot forces at Concord, served later at Cambridge and was Chaplain of Colonel Prescott's regiment at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Reverend Thaxter studied medicine at Harvard and throughout his life he served as a physician and surgeon while simultaneously serving as a clergyman. It is from her grandfather that Dr. Nichols' interest in medicine was conceived.

Dr. Nichols graduated in 1874 from the Boston University Medical School—the only woman in her class. For a woman to obtain a medical degree at that time was extraordinary. Holding California medical certificate #26, Sophronia Nichols overcame community prejudice at a time in the history of our country when few women aspired to, or reached, such goals.

Alpine's third graders learn about the history of our community each year and, as a part of their studies, visit the museum that once was Dr. Nichols' home and office. Each year, the stories about Dr. Nichols are favorites with the children as they stand in her home and go into the attached building that once served as Alpine's first one-room schoolhouse. Some even say they can feel her presence—and I, for one, don't dispute that for a minute!

Beatrice LaForce, Alpine's legendary historian, weaves tales of Dr. Nichols in her book *Alpine—History of a Mountain Settlement*. One can picture the rainy night, in 1897, when a young lad was sent out to summon the doctor to assist his mother with the imminent birth of his sister. Ralph Walker, of the Willows' Walkers, was that lad and his sister, Dorothy Walker was delivered that night. When Ralph arrived at Dr. Nichols' Tavern Road home, the sixty-two year old doctor hitched up her buggy and drove over the rough country road in the middle of the night to the Willows—where she stayed for days until mother and baby were thriving. She not only saw to their medical needs, but assisted with the housework as well!

Mrs. LaForce describes Dr. Sophronia as, "...a strong and resolute character." She goes on to say, "Dr. Nichols, militant suffragette, had "bobbed" her hair and was known to smoke cigarettes. 'But,' says George Stephenson, 'she was a cracker-jack of a medical doctor.'"

On the other hand, her softer side is shown in the many letters she wrote to family members through the years. Her sister, Carrie Foss, who was the first in the family to move to Alpine, saved these letters and when the last of the Foss family passed away and left the Foss possessions to the Alpine Community Church, the invaluable correspondence was passed along to the Alpine Historical Society.

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*Dr. Sophronia Nichols*