

COLFAX COBBLESTONES

March 2017

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The Towle and Colfax Grammar Schools



Towle School, Towle, California, September 1928. Most of these children lived in Alta, California. **Back Row:** Ray Wartell, Itaho Franchie, Albert Toso, Charles Ramsey Jr., Lawrence Franchie, Eva Nencini, Miss Musso (teacher). **Front Row:** Rose Mae Ramsey, Ben Ramsey, Levea Nencini, Joe Nencini, Jean Baxter, Bernice Ramsey, Ramon Cayot, Calvin Locher. This photo was provided by Jay MacIntyre.

Towle, California, was a company town for the Towle Brothers lumber business, according to local historian Nancy Hagman. In 2012, Nancy wrote about Towle for the *Colfax Record*:

“Three mills were built at Towle in 1865. When a new mill was added 10 years later, a narrow gauge

railroad was built and the rails kept expanding to carry lumber. In its heyday, the railroad was between 35 and 40 miles in length. In the 1870s the 30-dwelling town had a general store, a three-story hotel, a box factory, sash and door factory, and a mill for grinding slash to sawdust, to be used in the manufacture of black powder. Only the butcher

shop, shoe repair shop and the livery stable were privately owned. There was a town hall and a Baptist church. Towle children attended school at Alta until about 1890 when they outnumbered Alta students. An election was held and the school was moved to Towle."

You can read the rest of Nancy's article at the *Colfax Record's* web site, at www.colfaxrecord.com/article/towle-thrived-lumber-town-during-1800s.

The Colfax Grammar School (shown below) was built in 1940 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) building. Later it became the Colfax Elementary School. In 1986, it was acquired by the Sierra Vista Community Center, which offers classes, programs, and community events. It also rents space to local organizations, such as the Colfax Area Historical Society. You can read about the Community Center at its web site, sierravistacommunitycenter.org



Above, the Colfax Grammar School, Colfax, California, year unknown. This photo was provided by Jay MacIntyre.



Left, the Sierra Vista Community Center, in the remodeled former Colfax Grammar School, located at 55 School Street, Colfax, California.

This photo shows the building in February 2017.

Cemeteries of the Western Sierra

March 18 Meeting and Program with Speaker Chris Ward

Chris Ward, an archeological specialist, will give a presentation about the cemeteries of the western Sierra Nevada at the March 18, 2017, meeting, at 7 p.m.

There is no charge. This meeting is open to all CAHS members and to the public. Bring a friend. Visitors and guests are welcome. Refreshments will be provided.

Saturday, March 18, 2017, 7 p.m.

Colfax Passenger Depot
99 Railroad Street, Colfax

Chris Ward is the author of "Cemeteries of the Western Sierra." There will be copies of his book available for purchase.

Ward's publisher describes him as "a contributor to numerous investigatory research projects throughout California. He is a member of multiple organizations dedicated to the conservation of California's heritage, including the Society of California Archaeology and multiple regional and county preservation groups.

"He has spent hundreds of hours with historians, community members, and in the historical cemeteries, historical libraries, and archives photographing and compiling research for this book. He lives and works from Penn Valley."

Ward's book is published by Arcadia Publishing, in its Images of America series. The series is well-known for its use of historical photographs and text written by local experts.

Do You Have Historical Photos of the Colfax Area?

If you have photographs that you are willing to share through the Colfax Area Historical Society, you can either mail a copy to Dirk Gifford at the Colfax Area Heritage Museum, PO Box 185, Colfax CA 95713 or email digital copies to Dirk at dirkgifford@gmail.com. If you mail photos to Dirk, he will mail them back to you after he scans them.

The CAHS Archives Room Is Open by Appointment

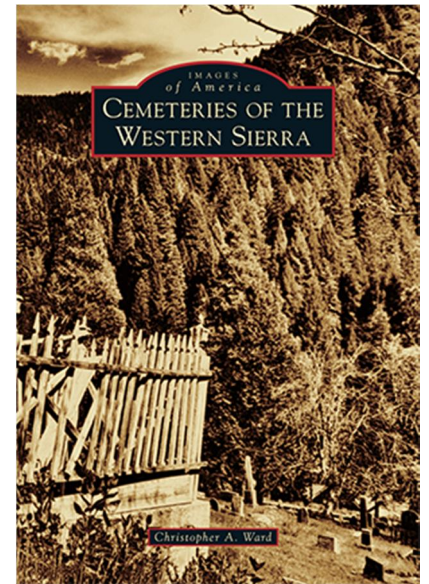
The Archives Room contains local history such as:

- WWII memorabilia
- Books and other historical reference materials
- Cemetery records from 1851 to 1984
- Maps and pictures from 1870 to 1999
- The Grace Hubley Jones Photographic Collection

The publisher describes Ward's book like this:

"Cemeteries are more than final resting places for the dead; they are gateways to an area's shared history. Every hand-carved granite or marble monument, every faded wooden marker, holds a clue. Western Sierra populations boomed with the discovery of gold and often dwindled as gold fever waned.

"Cemeteries of the Western Sierra uses the lens of the cemetery to glimpse a rich and disappearing history. Displaced indigenous populations, miners, dueling newspaper magnates, Chinese pioneers: all are part of the mosaic of history represented in a historical cemetery. From solitary graves in the forest to almost forgotten graveyards near the center of a town, cemeteries tell a story not just of who may have died but also of who lived and what was meaningful in their time."



Please provide as much information about each photo as possible, such as the names of the people shown in the photo, names and other details about the buildings and streets, when the photo was taken, and who took the it. If you don't know all of these details, just provide the information you do have.

- Chinese ceramics and baskets

The Archives Room is open by appointment, Tuesdays from 9 a.m. – noon. To schedule an appointment, call the Colfax Area Heritage Museum before your visit, at (530) 346-8599. The Archive is located at 55 School Street, Colfax, in the Sierra Vista Community Center.

A Profile of Mel Couchman, *Cobblestones* Editor

Mel Couchman has served as an editor of the *Colfax Cobblestones* for 5 years. In 2016, I was invited to join him as an editor, which I've enjoyed. For this article, I emailed Mel questions about him and his wife Lynda: how did they become involved in CAHS, how they chose Colfax, and so forth. Mel wrote back with lots of details, and I present the questions and his answers here.

When asked what his favorite experiences as the editor have been, Mel said, "Working with contributors in finalizing articles and also the phone calls and notes I used to get complimenting me on some aspect of the latest issue." Mel said that the people he's met and worked with are what he has enjoyed most about being in the CAHS. —Dirk Gifford

How did you and Lynda meet and when?

Mel: We didn't. We just knew each other. Let me explain. At age 11 or 12, I got to know Lynda's cousin Bill through 4-H activities. His family's ranch was right across the road from Lynda's family's ranch – their mothers were sisters. While in college Bill started bringing Lynda along when we guys would go for pizza and beer. So we bunch of guys got to know her, kind of like the group "little sister." She was much younger (3 to 4 years) and none of us ever thought of dating her. Bill and his sister, Carol, threw an 18th birthday party for her and Bill invited 4 or 5 of his friends so that he wouldn't be the only college student there.

After a while the bunch of us decided to abandon all the high schoolers there and we went off to a local bar (I was underage). After some time at Roddy's Boots and Saddles the rest of the group decided to go off to another bar, one know for getting raided and like I said, I was underage. It was still early. I didn't want to call it a night. I decided to go back to Lynda's party, I don't know why. After a while, I noticed that nobody was dancing with Lynda and as any good "big brother" would do I asked her to dance. After a couple of dances we were standing there talking and she gave me the Smile, and I was a goner.

Three years later we were married. Today, when she wants something that Smile will always work.



Lynda and Mel Couchman. Mel became the *Cobblestones* editor in 2012, and continues to be one of its editors.

Have you belonged to other historical societies or groups?

Mel: Henry Rengstorff was an early immigrant to Mountain View, California, from Germany. He arrived almost penniless but became quite wealthy. In 1857 he built an Italianate-Victorian, largely from wood from his own lumber mill in the Santa Cruz Mountains, hence redwood. It was, at that time, one of the finest homes in the entire area and is the oldest remaining house in Mountain View.

About 40 or 50 years ago the Rengstorff family heirs sold the house for \$1 to the City of Mountain View, where we were living at the time. It was the oldest and

most historically significant house in Mountain View. The city just let the house go. Homeless people camped in the house and campers built fires right on the hardwood floors. Eventually, the City decided to let the Fire Department burn it down for practice. The Mountain View Woman's Club decided to go to war to save the house and a group called 'The Friends of "R" House,' was formed to save the house.

Lynda got involved because her family had significant involvement with the Rengstorffs in the past. Her great-grandfather and Henry Rengstorff jointly owned 520 acres in the east foothills of San Jose in an area then called Evergreen but now known as Mt. Pleasant.

After a while Lynda started to drag me along to the meetings. Anyhow, the battle was won and the house was saved. It was moved to a site at Mountain View's Shoreline Park and fully and accurately restored. An agreement was negotiated between the City and the Friends of "R" House where the City, which owns and maintains the house and paid for its restoration, would continue in that role as owner with responsibility for providing all maintenance for the house and the Friends would furnish the house and be in charge of the acquisition, documentation, cataloging and display of appropriate artifacts, as well as other associated activities. The Friends annually put on a number of events at the house.

I was the second president of the Friends, serving two terms. This was the period when we became "legal"—formalized the agreement with the City, completed the Articles of Incorporation, by-laws, and obtained our tax exemptions, etc.

What are your and Lynda's backgrounds?

Mel: Lynda is a third-generation Californian and I am fifth-generation. We both come from families of some minor local historical prominence. Lynda has German, Irish and Swedish ancestry and I am almost totally of English background. As I have said, we both grew up on ranches in rural San Jose, Lynda in the east foothills and I on the south side of San Jose. We both went to James Lick High School and San Jose State.

When did you move to Colfax? What made you pick Colfax?

Mel: We moved here in 2004. We picked Colfax for several reasons. First, we have dear friends that had retired to Auburn several years earlier and had been working on us to move up this way. Second, our older daughter and family live in Gardnerville, Nevada, and our younger daughter and family live in Hillsborough, California, just

above San Mateo, and we wanted to be somewhere in between. Lastly, Lynda and I both grew up on ranches and I like the more rural atmosphere of Colfax. Also, one gets more house for the money in Colfax than in, say, Auburn or Grass Valley.

Where else have you lived? Do you miss not living in a more populated area?

Mel: I was born in Gilroy and lived my first four years in Morgan Hill. Up until a year after we were married I then lived in San Jose where Lynda had always lived. After that time we have lived in Annandale and Springfield, VA; Pleasanton and Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA; Fort Lauderdale and Plantation, FL; Gaithersburg, MD; and Mountain View, Cupertino, and Colfax, CA. Eight moves (career) in the first 18 years of our marriage and two moves after that. We celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary last August.

As I mentioned before Lynda and I both grew up on ranches so we don't mind living in a less populated area. Also, rural San Jose was not that populated when we were kids.

How did you become the *Cobblestones* editor?

Mel: The previous editor, Teri Andrews-Murch, put a note in the *Cobblestones* that she would like to find a replacement. I mentioned to Helen Wayland, for whom I was working at that time, that I was interested in being the new *Cobblestones* editor and she urged me to go for it. Later, in talking with Swend Miller, who mentioned to me that it looked like he was going to be the next president of the Society, I told him of my interest in being the editor and that was all it took.

What kinds of work and other activities have you done?

Mel: Lynda was principally a housewife and mother until our youngest daughter left for college. After that she has worked at, among others, the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce, a leather goods store, and the Foothill – DeAnza Community College District. At age 22, I started as a nuclear physicist at General Electric Nuclear Energy Division, then, after 3 years, I left GE for one of the world's leading nuclear power consulting firms for another 10 years. After that I transitioned into the computer business, in software development and sales and marketing, with such companies as Control Data; System Engineering Labs, where I was Director of Worldwide Marketing; Intel; and General Magic. Much of my career I was an International Consultant, mostly with Systems Control, Inc. I also had my own software consulting business for 7 years.

Local Businesses and Organizations That Support CAHS

The Colfax Area Historical Society (CAHS) and the Colfax Area Heritage Museum appreciate the support and services that local businesses provide.

The following local businesses and organizations are members of the CAHS, and we appreciate their support.

We invite you to support them and other local organizations and businesses.

CAHS works with the Colfax Area Chamber of Commerce to promote interest and support in the Colfax area. The Chamber of Commerce has been serving Colfax, Dutch Flat, Alta, and Gold run since 1951.

The Museum and the Chamber of Commerce are both located in the Colfax Passenger Depot, located in the former Colfax Amtrak passenger depot at 99 Railroad St., Colfax, California.

American Legion Colfax Post 192 P.O. Box 311 Colfax, CA 95713	Café Luna 38 North Main Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8833	Colfax Dental Center 120 Whitcomb Avenue Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6244
Colfax Elementary School District 24825 Ben Taylor Road Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2202	Colfax Farm & Country Store 140 North Main Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2600	Colfax Garden Club P.O. Box 1801 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6215
Colfax Market 2 North Main Street Colfax CA 95713 (530) 346-7029	Colfax Record PO Box 755 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2232	Colfax Theater 2 North Main Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-7029
Grace Hubley Foundation 24820 Ben Taylor Colfax, CA 95713 www.gracehubleyfoundation.org	Hills Flat Lumber 1000 South Canyon Way Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8685	Kurtis H. Fox, M.D., Inc. 101 Grass Valley St. Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2281
Mar-Val Sierra Market 575 South Auburn Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8338	Pick-A-Flick Video & Gift Shop 6 North Main Street Colfax, Ca 95713 (530) 346-8808	Sierra Business Services 520 South Auburn St, # D Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2455 barbkelly@foothill.net
Sierra Vista Community Center 55 School Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8726 svcc@colfaxnet.org	Teri Andrews-Murch, Realtor Lyon Real Estate 1900 Grass Valley Hwy, Auburn CA (530) 798-0215 www.FoothillsHotProperties.com	VFW Ladies Auxiliary Post 2003 P.O. Box 1213 Colfax, CA 95713 President: (530) 636-4242

Join the Colfax Area Historical Society

We invite you to join the CAHS and support the work of the Society. You will receive the *Colfax Cobbles* four times a year by mail.

Each issue of *Cobbles* includes articles and photos about local history, CAHS news, reports about presentations at membership meetings, and news of upcoming meetings.

Memberships are for one year, from July – June. Memberships begin on July 1. However, if you join CAHS between October 1 and March 31, your membership will be prorated as explained on the form.

CAHS is now on Facebook

The CAHS now has a Facebook page: “Colfax Area Historical Society.”

Our Facebook username is @colfaxmuseum

You can visit the CAHS page at
www.facebook.com/colfaxmuseum/

CAHS Web Site

Visit the CAHS web site at www.colfaxhistory.org

It contains news and information about the CAHS Museum and Archives, a calendar of meetings, and local history.

Current CAHS Officers

The officers for 2016-2017 are as follows:

President: Jay MacIntyre

Vice President: Swend Miller

Treasurer: Barbara Kelly

Recording Secretary: Joann Geist

Membership Chair: Florence “Chris” Miller

Corresponding Secretary: Lynda Couchman

Archive Director: Helen Wayland

Museum Director: Florence “Chris” Miller

Cobbles Editors: Dirk Gifford, Mel Couchman

To join the Colfax Area Historical Society, fill out this form and mail it with a check to: **CAHS, PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713.**

Your subscription will begin with the next quarterly issue.

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

☐ **\$20 Individual membership** (one person)

If you join between Oct. 1–Dec. 31, prorated membership is \$15

If you join between Jan. 1–Mar. 31, prorated membership is \$10

If you join April 1–June 30, membership is \$20 and will begin July 1

☐ **\$25 Family membership** (including children)

If you join between Oct. 1–Dec. 31, prorated membership is \$19

If you join between Jan. 1–Mar. 31, prorated membership is \$13

If you join April 1–June 30, membership is \$25 and will begin July 1

☐ **\$35 Business or Non-Profit Organization**

(includes an ad in each issue of *Colfax Cobbles*)

If you join between Oct. 1–Dec. 31, prorated membership is \$27

If you join between Jan. 1–Mar. 31, prorated membership is \$18

If you join April 1– June 30, membership is \$35 and will begin July 1

Webmaster: Dirk Gifford

Member-At-Large: Bonnie Wilson

Member-At-Large: Walt Wilson

Member-At-Large: Gayle McClain

How to Contact Us

The Museum’s email and phone number:

- Email: museum.colfax@gmail.com
- Phone: (530) 346-8599

To submit an article or photos for CAHS to use in the newsletter and on Facebook and the web site, contact Dirk Gifford at dirkgifford@gmail.com or at (925) 783-9664.

Docents and Volunteers Needed at the Museum and Chamber of Commerce

Would you be interested in volunteering at the museum one day a week?

The Colfax Area Heritage Museum seeks docents in order to keep the museum open seven days a week.

Docents greet visitors and travelers and answer local history questions. If interested, please call the museum at (530) 346-8599 or drop in and talk to the volunteers on duty.

The Chamber of Commerce also needs volunteers to answer questions about the Colfax Area and its businesses, provide information about train and bus schedules, and help passengers enjoy their stop in Colfax. Drop in for more information about volunteering.

The Museum and the Chamber of Commerce's office are both located in the Colfax Passenger Depot.



The Colfax Area Historical Society

PO Box 185

Colfax, CA 95713

