

# COLFAX COBBLESTONES

November 2017

Issue 29.4

[museum.colfax@gmail.com](mailto:museum.colfax@gmail.com)

[www.colfaxhistory.org](http://www.colfaxhistory.org)

[www.facebook.com/colfaxmuseum](http://www.facebook.com/colfaxmuseum)

(530) 346-8599

## Finding Baby Amelia

**Amelia Jane Leonard was one of approximately 65 children buried in the Iowa Hill area during the Gold Rush**

**By Robin Yonash**

The Gold Rush era was hard on children. Of the almost 500 known burials in the Iowa Hill area, 13% are children age 12 and under. A third of them were less than a year old.

Amelia Jane Leonard was one of these children. She died 160 years ago on November 16, 1857 at age 2½ and was buried near her home in the former mining town of Bird's Flat (across Indian Creek from Iowa Hill). She was the daughter of John and Nancy Leonard.

Sadly, 10 years later her brother John G., age 7, was walking home from school with his mother near Monona Flat, where they were living at the time, and dropped his lunch bucket. As he was trying to retrieve it, he fell in a mine shaft and drowned while his mother stood helplessly by. He and his father are buried in the Iowa Hill Protestant Cemetery, but their graves are no longer marked.

Many years ago Bob and Sharon Balmain acquired a photo of baby Amelia's grave and mounted it on a cenotaph in the Iowa Hill Catholic Cemetery, looking towards the grave site. Over time, the photo has deteriorated from weather and Tom McClure, President of the Iowa Hill Community Cemetery Board of Directors, has been on a quest since 2014 to find the grave again and take a fresh picture.

Recently Tom connected with some residents of the Iowa Hill area who know the property owners, and together they finally found the grave this August. *(continued on page 2)*



The grave marker of Amelia J. Leonard, who died on November 16, 1857, at the age of 2 years, 7 months, and 7 days.



Baby Amelia's grave is located on the Morning Star Mine property (note that this is private property).

The grave is only about 30 feet from the edge of the hydraulic diggings and was nearly washed away during the Gold Rush era. On the other hand, Tom discovered that logging crews in the recent past marked off the grave so that it was protected from bulldozers and falling trees.

The grave marker is in surprisingly good condition after 160 years, as shown in the photographs. The inscription reads "Kind angels watch her sleeping dust 'til Jesus comes to raise the just. Then may she wake with sweet surmise and in her savior's image rise."

Amelia has two entries on the Find a Grave memorial web site. The main one is #4314004, and the other at #108561741 is for the cenotaph located in the Iowa Hill Catholic Cemetery. To view these memorials, go to [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) and enter the number (without the #) in the "memorial ID" search box.

A history of the Iowa Hill Cemeteries, with numerous photos, is included in the book *Cemeteries of the Western Sierra* by Christopher A. Ward, which is available at the Colfax Area Heritage Museum and on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

An extensive chronicle of the Iowa Hill area is provided in three books written by Robin Yonash. These are *Gold and Fire: A History of the Iowa Hill Divide*, *Towns and People of the Iowa Hill Divide*, and *Schools of the Iowa Hill Divide*. Copies are available at the Museum and on Amazon. Museum copies are signed by the author.

### **Volunteers Are Needed at the Museum and Chamber of Commerce**

The Colfax Area Heritage Museum needs docents in order to keep the museum open seven days a week. Docents at the Museum answer local history questions, make the museum available to the public seven days a week, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and greet visitors and travelers. If interested, please call the



A close-up photo of Amelia's grave marker.

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, 99 Railroad St., Colfax, California.



# Pat Jones' Histories of Local Towns

*Local historian Pat Jones (May 5, 1921– July 28, 1997) was the author of The Colfax Connection: A History of Colfax, Chicago Park Connection, and other books. Her writing included short histories about dozens of local towns, from Alta to Virginiatown. We will continue to print her town stories in future issues of the Cobblestones.*

*She was the news editor of The Colfax Record from the 1960s through the '80s. She published articles in both national magazines and local publications. A monument and plaque honoring her contributions is located at 25 Church St., Colfax.*

## Alta

Alta, located 12 miles east of Colfax, was established as Alta Station on the railroad in the late 1860s. The name is said to have been chosen because the Alta Californian, a San Francisco newspaper, had been favorable to the Central Pacific Railroad. It was once a sawmill town of importance, and connected with Towle mills by a narrow gauge railroad that will be discussed in a report on the town of Towle.

In the 1880s and 1890s the citizens of towns along the Central Pacific took the train to visit other towns along the line almost as easily as we take city buses. I haven't been to Alta recently, but the last time I did I took the opportunity to sit on a bench outside the store and chat with locals. It is a charming little town nestled in pines and well worth a visit.

## Applegate

Applegate, now located 10 miles northeast of Auburn off Interstate 80, was originally located at the present intersection of Placer Hills and Crothers roads. It was founded in 1849 by Lisbon Applegate and was named Lisbon. A post office was established there in 1855 with Lisbon's son, George Applegate, as postmaster.

The settlement was on the road between Illinoistown (the forerunner of Colfax) and Auburn. The Applegate Ranch soon became well-known for its orchards, its nursery and its excellent wine. The post office closed on Nov. 30, 1866, more than a year after the Central Pacific rails reached the present location of the town that was renamed Applegate. A new post office was not established until November of 1875. The railroad brought summer visitors to Applegate, which became noted as a fine summer resort area.

Nothing remains to mark the site of Lisbon. Some buildings in Applegate had to be moved in the 1920s to

make room for the Sacramento to Reno Highway improvements.

The Civic Center Club now occupies the school that was built in 1928 to replace one that burned on the same spot.

There is an interesting story about the Esoteric Society that was established in the Applegate area by a man named Butler in the later part of the nineteenth century. However, my notes lack any more information on this philosophical society.

## Bath

Bath, located about one and a half miles northeast of Foresthill, was founded in 1850 by John Bradford. It was first called Volcano, then Sarahville, before getting its more permanent name, Bath. Little marks the spot that was for a while a booming gold town.

## Blue Canyon

Blue Canyon was named for the bluish smoke that hovered over the canyon, produced by campfires of lumbermen and wood choppers. There were mines in the area, the Lost Camp, Blue Canyon, and the better known Rawhide Mine, but the town was basically there as a railroad town. Before trains had diners, it was a meal stop. For many years Blue Canyon was a division point on the railroad. While a second track was being laid next to the original one over the Sierra, Blue Canyon boasted a population of 600, but after the double tracking was completed and the crews moved on, and the SP moved its terminal in 1926, the population decreased rapidly.

In 1891 there were two flourishing hotels, a store and an Athletic Club. The Blue Canyon School was organized about 1868. Shortly thereafter, a woman who lived next door to the school paid men to move it away from her house to a spot near the railroad tracks, where it stood for 56 years. In 1924 a replacement was built that was abandoned after the Blue Canyon and Emigrant Gap districts merged in 1962.

Pride of the community is the jail, built near the present Blue Canyon Inn during double tracking days. It is claimed it has never held a prisoner.

The town now has a small population the year around, which swells in summer, when vacation homeowners are in residence.

## Camp Far West

Camp Far West was a military post, set up in 1849 by the government following an Indian attack in which a Nevada County sawmill owner was killed and other incidents. It was abandoned in 1852 because of mismanagement and the desertion of soldiers, who preferred mining to soldiering.

The remnants of the camp's cemetery are now on private property, but Camp Far West Reservoir, about 10 miles north of Lincoln, provides space for water sports, fishing and camping.

## Cisco

Cisco was founded in 1864 as a stop on the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road. First called Heatons, it was renamed for U.S. treasurer John J. Cisco.

## Clipper Gap

Clipper Gap, seven miles from Auburn, was once the shipping point for iron ore, mined in Christian Valley. It is described in an 1875 directory as a community where extensive beds of limestone were mined and shipped by Gwynn and Holmes. J. Hoagland was the postmaster and kept a general store. Mrs. McEnenry kept a saloon and boardinghouse.



Colfax Hotel. Postcard ca. 1950. This image was copied from <http://www.route40.net/page.asp?n=1258>.

## Colfax

Colfax was created by the Central Pacific [Railroad] in the fall of 1865. "The original site of the town was Illinoistown, which now straddles Interstate 80 in the vicinity of Dingus Magee's and [the] Kingdom Hall [of the Jehovah's Witnesses]. [Dingus McGee's closed its Colfax location in 2002, and reopened in Auburn in 2011.] Early in 1849 settlers arrived there, calling the place briefly Alder Creek, then, after a corral was built, Upper Corral.

In early summer that year three trading posts were built to serve the miners who were swarming along the American and Bear rivers.

In September of 1849 the miners had a feast at Pierson's store, and as the emigrants from Illinois outnumbered the others, "by acclamation and a bottle of whiskey, they named the camp Illinoistown." As it was on a flat at the end of the crude wagon road from Sacramento, it was known as the "head of navigation." At Illinoistown, supplies for the many gold camps higher up the



mountain and along the rivers were transferred onto mule trains to complete the journey.

In September of 1865, when the Central Pacific rails reached the area, the businessmen from Illinoistown built new stores on the main street of the new town, beside the tracks. The new location was named for Schuyler Colfax who was then Speaker of the House. Lincoln had sent him west to report on progress of the railroad. In 1868, Colfax was vice president under President Grant.

Illinoistown businessmen, the Egbert brothers and partners, erected the first commercial building in Colfax in 1865, which still stands and is [now] the Colfax Market at the corner of Main and Grass Valley streets. [The ] owner of the Blue Wing Saloon and Billiard Parlor in Illinoistown, Jake Keck, built a general store that is now Parsons Hardware, and a saloon next door that now houses the Iron Doors Restaurant. These three buildings were all brick and survived a couple of devastating fires in the early days that wiped out everything else.



Colfax Hotel. Postcard ca. 1950. This image was copied from <http://www.route40.net/page.asp?n=1258>.

The Masonic Lodge, Illinoistown Lodge No. 51, was organized in 1854 and had a modest hall in Illinoistown. In 1868 the present hall was built on Main Street.

The Methodist Church at Church and Culver was built in 1868.

Colfax was not incorporated until 1910, but prior to that time, it thrived with a healthy economy based on the railroad, the fruit industry, and gold mining. The Rising Sun and Big Oak mines out Ben Taylor road beyond the high school were the most prominent local mines. The Rising Sun was located in 1866 and closed for good in 1938, following a cave-in. There is nothing left on the

site. At one time a small settlement developed around the Rising Sun.

A roundhouse, completed in 1912 below the present Colfax depot, was a helper station, used to store and service the huge cab-ahead Mallet engines that were hooked into trains there to provide extra push to get them over the Sierra. Extra engines were removed there from westbound trains. The roundhouse closed in 1949 and the services were provided at Roseville after that. The building was razed in 1951.

The present city hall was built as a memorial to World War I soldiers in 1927. It was turned over to the city



sometime after the present Colfax Memorial Hall was built in the late 1940s to honor World War II vets.

In the 1880s Main Street and Grass Valley streets were lined with businesses. There were several hotels, however, the present Colfax Hotel beside the tracks was built in 1903 as the Gillen Hotel.

The town boasted a fine dramatic troop and a baseball team before the turn of the century, both traveling frequently to neighboring Placer and Nevada county towns to do their stuff.

In 1876 the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad was completed between Colfax and Nevada City. It hauled

gold shipments from the lucrative mines of Nevada County to the standard gauge railroad at Colfax.

Fruit was another profitable shipment, until the Narrow Gauge was sold for scrap in 1942 to the Dulian Steel Products Company. Among the rolling stock saved was Engine 9, which was sold to the Navy and shipped to Hawaii.

Youngsters from Colfax had to attend high school in Auburn, traveling back and forth on the Southern Pacific until the [Colfax] high school was built in 1958.

Colfax boomed with packing houses until the 1960s when pear blight ruined the orchard industry.



Colfax Hotel. Postcard ca. 1950. You can read more about the Colfax Hotel at <http://www.calexplornia.com/the-story-behind-the-abandoned-colfax-hotel/> and <http://www.route40.net/page.asp?n=1258>, which is the source of the postcard images.

## CAHS Officers for 2017-2018

The CAHS officers for 2017-2018 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

**Archives Director:** Swend Miller

**Museum Director:** Florence "Chris" Miller

**Member-At-Large:** Bonnie Wilson

**Member-At-Large:** Walt Wilson

**Member-At-Large:** Gayle McClain

**Webmaster:** Dirk Gifford

**Cobblestones Editors:** Dirk Gifford, Mel Couchman

# 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.

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

<b>American Legion Colfax Post 192</b>  P.O. Box 311 Colfax, CA 95713	<b>Colfax Dental Center</b>  120 Whitcomb Avenue Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6244	<b>Colfax Garden Club</b>  P.O. Box 1801 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6215
<b>Grace Hubley Foundation</b>  24820 Ben Taylor Colfax, CA 95713 <a href="http://www.gracehubleyfoundation.org">www.gracehubleyfoundation.org</a>	<b>Kurtis H. Fox, M.D., Inc.</b>  101 Grass Valley St. Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2281	<b>Sierra Business Services</b>  520 South Auburn St, # D Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2455 <a href="mailto:barbkelly@foothill.net">barbkelly@foothill.net</a>
<b>Sierra Vista Community Center</b>  55 School Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8726 <a href="mailto:svcc@colfaxnet.org">svcc@colfaxnet.org</a>	<b>Teri Andrews-Murch, Realtor</b>  Lyon Real Estate 1900 Grass Valley Hwy, Auburn CA (530) 798-0215 <a href="http://www.FoothillsHotProperties.com">www.FoothillsHotProperties.com</a>	<b>VFW Ladies Auxiliary Post 2003</b>  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 Cobblestones* four times a year by mail. Each issue includes articles and photos about local history. 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.

<p>To join the Colfax Area Historical Society, fill out this form and mail it with a check to: <b>CAHS, PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713.</b></p> <p>Your subscription will begin with the next quarterly issue.</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ ZIP _____</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$20 Individual membership</b> (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 begins July 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$25 Family membership</b> (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 begins July 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$35 Business or Non-Profit Organization</b>  (includes an ad in each issue of <i>Colfax Cobblestones</i>)  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 begins July 1</p>
--	---

# November 18<sup>th</sup> Presentation by Roger Staab

## Railroad-related Changes in Colfax over the Years

This month, at our quarterly program, Roger Staab will present a slide show outlining the railroad-related changes that have taken place in Colfax through the years. As part of his presentation, he will also explain ways to estimate the dates of some old photos by using clues embedded in the images.

---

**Saturday, November 18, 2017, 7 p.m.**

Colfax Passenger Depot  
99 Railroad Street, Colfax

---

After the presentation, if there is interest by the group that attends, the group will tour the newly-renovated Colfax caboose, which is located near the Passenger Depot. Roger will explain the plans for interactive displays that will tell the story of the caboose, its occupants, and their role in railroad history.

Roger is a member of the Placer Sierra Railroad Heritage Society, <http://www.psrhs.org/>.

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



Colfax Caboose, Colfax California.  
From the Colfax Caboose's Facebook page,  
<https://www.facebook.com/Colfax-Caboose-895423407153497/>.



### The Colfax Area Historical Society

PO Box 185  
Colfax CA 95713

---

**Phone:** (530) 346-8599

**Email:** [museum.colfax@gmail.com](mailto:museum.colfax@gmail.com)

**USPS mail:** Mail for both the Colfax Area Heritage Museum and the Colfax Area Historical Society is received at PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713.

**Museum location:** The Colfax Area Heritage Museum is physically located at 99 Railroad St, Colfax CA 95713

**Web site:** [www.colfaxhistory.org/](http://www.colfaxhistory.org/)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/colfaxmuseum](https://www.facebook.com/colfaxmuseum)

