

COLFAX COBBLESTONES

May 2018

Issue 30.2

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May 19, 2018, Meeting and Program

Building the Railroad at Cape Horn, 1865-present

The history of building the railroad at Cape Horn will be presented by **Jack Duncan** at our next quarterly meeting on May 19. Jack Duncan will explain how the excavation was done; how tracks were added, moved, and reinforced as rail traffic increased and engine weight increased from 70 tons to 250.

He will also discuss the widespread stories about Chinese laborers being lowered over cliffs in bosun chairs and wicker baskets—stories that he has extensively researched and concluded are not true.

Jack Duncan is the author of *A Study of Cape Horn Construction on the Central Pacific Railroad 1865-1866* (2005) and *To Donner Pass from the Pacific: A Map History Covering 150 Years of California's Lincoln Highway, Victory Highway, US-40, I-80, Henness Pass, Pacific Turnpike and Dutch Flat Donner Lake Toll Roads from 1852 to 2002* (2004).

Saturday, May 19, 2018, 7 p.m.

Colfax Passenger Depot
99 Railroad Street, Colfax

In his book *Images of America: Placer County*, Arthur Sommers wrote this about Jack Duncan's research into the story of Chinese laborers being lowered over cliffs:

Many histories of the Central Pacific Railroad include the story of Chinese laborers being lowered over the side of the cliffs in wicker baskets or bosun chairs attached to ropes. Jack E. Duncan published a

study of these claims in his 2005 book, *A Study of Cape Horn Construction on the Central Pacific Railroad 1865-1866*.

Duncan graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, as a mechanical engineer, and his work experiences included photograph analysis, surveying, and the study of foreign construction techniques. Applying these skills to his study of the construction of the tracks laid around Cape Horn, Duncan concluded that the story of Chinese workers being lowered in baskets at Cape Horn was not true. (Arthur Sommers, *Images of America: Placer County*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010 page 68.)



An early eastbound work train on Curve 149 entering Cape Horn. Photo courtesy of Jack Duncan, from *A Study of Cape Horn*.

Jan Westmore, in her book, *Images of America: Colfax*, also referred to Jack Duncan's research and stated:

His [Duncan's] research over three years concluded that the slopes were insufficiently steep to warrant baskets. He did not claim that workers were not working in precarious situations on the mountainside, but decided that ropes were probably used without bosuns. (Jan Westmore, *Images*

of America: Colfax. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2013, page 22.)

There is no charge to attend. The meeting is open to all CAHS members and to the public. Visitors and guests are welcome. Come early to enjoy refreshments and visit with everyone before the meeting starts. As always, we will be in the Meeting Room of the Colfax Passenger Depot, 99 Railroad Street, Colfax, California.

Pat Jones' Histories of Local Towns (part 3 of 3)

This is the third—and final—group of short histories of local towns and cities written by Pat Jones. 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. The November 2017 issue of the *Colfax Cobbblestones* contained her histories of Alta through Colfax. The March 2018 issue contained her histories of Damascus through Iowa Hill. This issue contains her histories of Lincoln through Virginiatown.

Pat Jones 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.

Lincoln

Lincoln was named in honor of Colonel Charles Lincoln Wilson, a large landowner and builder of the California Central Railroad. The first settlement was made in 1859 and it soon became very prosperous, as it was on the route of the freight wagons hauling supplies to the mines. Importance was added by the discovery of excellent coal beds and later, clay deposits which resulted in the founding of the pottery works of the Gladding McBean Co.

Loomis

The original site was a mile south of the present town. It was first called Smithville, Pine Grove, and Pino. But Pino was confused with Reno, so after 1864, when the town moved to the new railhead of the Central Pacific, it was renamed for James Loomis, the first station agent. He was also the postmaster for 17-and-a-half years. It is said that

mail was placed in a cigar box and everyone allowed to pick out his own.

James Loomis was succeeded by a second agent, James J. Morrison and it was he who bought land, subdivided, and sold lots. The town began to grow and before long the usual places of business were thriving. There was even a race track south of town. As the orchards around town began to flourish, packing houses sprang up. Some mining was done in the area on Yankee Hill.

Michigan Bluff

Michigan Bluff was founded in 1850 as Michigan City. It rested high upon the bluff of the canyon of the Middle Fork of the American River, about 30 miles northeast of Auburn. In July of 1857 the town was almost entirely destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt on the original site, however, the miners soon had the town so undermined that it became unsafe. In 1859 the residents moved higher up the hill and renamed the town Michigan Bluff. Its chief claim to fame was that Leland Stanford operated a store there from 1853-55. The building supposedly survives.

Newcastle

Newcastle was first known as Castle, located a few miles from the present town. When the railroad was built, the town moved to its new location and the name was changed. It was noted as a fruit shipping center. Its Chinatown, with balconied upper stories shaded by an avenue of giant cottonwoods was torn down for the freeway.

Penryn

Penryn got its start when a Welshman named Griffith Griffith [his first and last names were the same] established the Penryn Granite Works in 1864 and the town a year later, naming both for his birthplace in Wales.

His decision to locate his quarry was influenced by the arrival of the Central Pacific. He needed transportation for the heavy rock, as he had contracts for Alcatraz and Fort Point. Granite from Griffith's quarries was also used in the state capital, Stanford University, and the San Francisco Mint.

The site is now a county park, with hiking trails and picnic facilities. The quaint quarry office is now a museum.

Towle

Towle, located between Dutch Flat and Alta, was neither a mining camp nor a railroad town. It was a company town for the Towle Brothers' lumber business. Founders Allen and George Towle came to California from Vermont in the 1850s. Three mills were built at Towle in 1865. When a new mill was added ten 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 gun powder [by making charcoal from it]. 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. The bitterness lingered for years.

By the 1930s few residents remained. The Allen Towle home, built in 1870, was torn down in 1959 to make room for the freeway.

George Washington Towle and his wife, Frances, celebrated their tenth or tin anniversary in their home in Towle Glen in 1883. A magnificent top hat,

a bonnet, a fan and other tin items worn on that occasion are now in the Placer County Museum.

Nothing of interest to tourists remains at the site.

Yankee Jims

Yankee Jims was named for an Australian horse thief named [Jim] Robinson.

At a spot about one half mile east of present Forest-hill, Jim Robinson established a claim, calling it Yankee Jims Dry Diggings.

It is not known if Jim actually mined or merely used the mine as a front for his principal profession. He built a spacious corral, where he kept his booty, selling the purloined horses in Sacramento.

Respectable settlers arriving in the fall of 1850 were the three Gilbert brothers and Thomas Farthing, all Missourians. Soon they were joined by a group of Illinoistown merchants.

Following a fire that leveled the town in 1852, Yankee Jims was quickly rebuilt as word of successful mining operations spread. At least 12 hotels or boarding houses sprang up. Three lawyers hung out their shingles. The usual array of general stores and other businesses lined the streets and the post office was established in September of 1852.

Hydraulic mining was introduced to Placer County there in 1853 by Col. William McClure, who brought the method from Nevada County. The colonel also planted the first orchards in the area.

Among the town's prominent alumna are said to be the Folger brothers, founders of the coffee company. They apparently operated a store there.

Virginiatown

Virginiatown, located about eight and a half miles west of Auburn, was settled in 1851. Water was scarce, so in 1853 some miners built what was probably the first railroad in California. It was less than a mile in length and carried dirt from the mines to Auburn Ravine to be washed. Here Philip Armour operated a butcher shop which led to the formation of the meat packing company which bears his name. **[Editor's note:** California Historical Landmark 400, in Virginiatown, states: "Founded June 1851 - commonly called 'Virginia.' Over two thousand miners

worked rich deposits. Captain John Bristow built California's first railroad, 1852, carrying pay dirt to Auburn Ravine, a distance of one mile. Site of Philip

Museum and Archives

The Colfax Area Historical Society (CAHS) and the Colfax Area Heritage Museum (CAHM) preserve the local history of Colfax, California, the surrounding area, and the railroads, by collecting stories, photographs, and artifacts about the people and buildings in this part of the Sierra foothills.

The CAHS and CAHM have an Archives Room that is currently open to the public by appointment. The Archives Room is being redesigned to better accommodate research and access to the collections. The following are some of the items in the collections located in the Museum and the Archives.

Physical Items

- Collection of Chinese ceramics and baskets
- Period clothing from 1800 to 1940
- WWII memorabilia: Uniforms, helmet, shells, and an album with pictures of Camp Placer

News and Books

- Historical books and other literature

Docents and Volunteers Needed at the Museum and Chamber of Commerce

Are you interested in volunteering one day a week in either the Colfax Area Heritage Museum or the Chamber of Commerce?

Docents at the Museum answer local history questions and greet visitors and travelers. If interested, please call the museum at (530) 346-8599 or visit the museum and talk to the docents or Museum Director.

CAHS Officers

President: Jay MacIntyre

Vice President: Swend Miller

Treasurer: Barbara Kelly

Recording Secretary: Joann Geist

Membership Chair: Chris Miller

Corresponding Secretary: Lynda Couchman

Archives Director: Swend Miller

Armour's and George Aldrich's butcher shop, said to have led to founding of famous Chicago Armour meat packing company.”]

- Cemetery records from 1851 to 1984
- Back copies of the *Colfax Record* newspaper

Maps, Photos, Sketches

- Maps and pictures from 1870–1999 of the Colfax area and of many of the railroads
- Pictures of bridges and books on the North Fork of the American River

Grace Hubley Jones Photographic Collection

- 10,000 glass plate negatives from the early 1900's

To schedule an appointment or find out when the Archives Room is open, please call the Colfax Area Heritage Museum before your visit, at (530) 346-8599.

The Colfax Area Heritage Museum is open daily, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. It is located at 99 Railroad Street, Colfax, CA 95713 (in the Colfax Passenger Depot).

The Chamber of Commerce also needs volunteers to answer questions about the Colfax Area and 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 are both located in the Colfax Passenger Depot, 99 Railroad St., Colfax, California. Their hours are 10 a.m.-3 p.m. daily.

Museum Director: Rachel Christian

Member-At-Large: Bonnie Wilson

Member-At-Large: Walt Wilson

Member-At-Large: Gayle McClain

Cobblestones Editors: Dirk Gifford, Mel Couchman

Webmaster: Dirk Gifford

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.

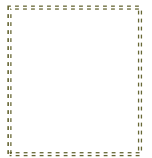
American Legion Colfax Post 192 P.O. Box 311 Colfax, CA 95713	Colfax Dental Center 120 Whitcomb Avenue Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6244	Colfax Garden Club P.O. Box 1801 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6215
Grace Hubley Foundation 24820 Ben Taylor Colfax, CA 95713 www.gracehubleyfoundation.org	Kurtis H. Fox, M.D., Inc. 101 Grass Valley St. Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2281	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

When you join the CAHS, you will receive the *Colfax Cobblestones* newsletter four times a year by mail. Each issue includes articles and photos about local history and news of upcoming meetings.

Memberships are for one year, from July-June. If you join between October 1 and March 31, your membership will be pro-rated as described on the form.

<p>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.</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"/> \$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 begins July 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$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 begins July 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Business or Non-Profit Organization (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>
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The Colfax Area Historical Society

PO Box 185

Colfax CA 95713

Phone: (530) 346-8599

Email: 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