

# Historian

March/April 2024 ♦ Vol. 68, Issue 2

of the  
Tuolumne County  
Historical Society  
Sonora, California

Chuck Holland, Betty Sparagna, and Barbara Balen checking out the Mexican Benevolent Society banner.

## Hours:

Museum:

Tues. & Thurs. (10-4)  
Wed. (1-4)  
Fri. & Sat. (10-3:30)  
Sun. (11-4) - April  
and May only

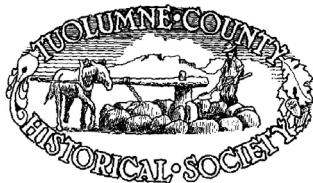
History Research  
Center (HRC):

Tues.-Fri. (9-4)

**April Program will  
be at the Museum—  
Opening Day of  
the Exhibition  
Sun., April 7th  
11am—4pm**

## Welcome New Members:

Evie Heron Olds  
Bob Divine  
Ann Wallace  
Tim Konrad  
Phil Schermeister  
Bonnie McGrath-  
Segerstrom



## Letter from the President

Fellow Members,

During the January meeting the TCHS Board discussed goals for 2024. Two of them were to increase Museum visitors and to grow our membership.

It is our hope that the California Historical Society's traveling exhibit, *Telling Stories of Mexican California: Real Life and Myth Making*, scheduled during April and May, will generate increased Museum traffic. We are currently planning receptions and events to showcase the exhibition. And, while members are encouraged to visit the Museum any-time during our regular hours of operation, we will also be open on Sundays during April and May to provide more

opportunity for the public to visit the temporary exhibit. In addition, we plan to be open during the 2nd Saturday Art Night in downtown Sonora during April and May. We hope that all of our members will consider a visit to the Museum in the coming months.

The other goal for 2024, is to increase our membership. To that end, we have created a new recruitment poster that highlights the many things that a membership helps support. Our quarterly journal, *Chispa*, has been publishing high quality articles about local history for over sixty years. Our newsletter, *Historian*, comes out every other month. We also have a monthly program, usually scheduled for the second Wednesday of each month at the Sonora Public Library on Greenley Road (check <https://www.facebook.com/TCHSociety/events> for a current schedule). We meet in the early evenings when it stays light longer and during the afternoons in the darker winter months.

Membership also helps support the over 200 historical collections the Museum maintains, both as displays and for research purposes (see page 4 for a partial list of collections preserved by TCHS). We have a wide variety of photograph collections from some great photographer, and many of those photos can be viewed on our website at (<https://hub.catalogit.app/1270>). In addition to over 50,000 historical photographs in our collection, the Museum also has a wide variety of historical artifacts—everything from sewing machines to historical clothing, baskets to tools, and from guns to a one-hundred-year-old pony cart. We actually have more historical artifacts stored away than we can display at any one time. One big task our dedicated volunteers face is to regularly change out the exhibits to keep things fresh and interesting.

Members are vitally important to all of our efforts, in terms of the monetary support each membership provides, as well as being an encouraging audience and possible source of volunteer assistance.

Chuck Holland

## Betty Hobbs—In Memoriam



Lysbeth "Betty"  
Hobbs

Betty Hobbs passed away on December 13, 2023, at the age of 92. An assistant librarian at Sonora Union High School for seventeen years, Betty was the Membership Secretary for over fifteen years, retiring at the end of 2007. Taking videos of monthly programs and special events, Betty was also the bulk mail expert, responsible for getting the *Historian* and *Chispa* to all members. Betty was inducted into the Order of the Wheelhorse in 2000. Some of you may remember her delivering the *Union Democrat* up and down Washington Street in Sonora with her husband, Smitty Hobbs. Condolences to Betty's family.

## Sonora's First House-to-House Mail Delivery

By Pat Perry

The first mail delivery in Sonora was on January 17, 1955. At that time the main post office was on Stewart Street, where Barron's Furniture store is now located. Mail was delivered there and sorted for distribution. The original area covered was Barretta Street as far as the Youth Center, just before Mono Way; and to the high school and junction with Stewart Street on Columbia Way. The extremity on the east was Barretta Street and Hope Lane, with the western extreme at the South Gate Addition, behind the fairgrounds. Keep in mind that at this time Sonora was one square mile. By March 1955, service was extended to the Meyers Hill Subdivision.

Prior to 1955, people had to rent a box at the post office or have General Delivery. While some may have found this an inconvenience, many liked meeting and greeting their friends and neighbors at the post office.

The process to change over to a mail delivery system seemed, to some, a difficult process. Sonora City Clerk Mrs. Merle Hagmeyer, sent out 1,000 stamped, self-addressed cards to residents requesting detailed information. The cards had questions requesting the parcel numbers of the property, the direction the house faced, and toward which street, along with information showing the nearest intersecting streets.

The cards also required an estimate of the number of feet from the parcel boundary to the location of the house. Once Mrs. Hagmeyer received the information, she assigned it a number, plotting it on a city numbering map, and then a card with the assigned number was returned to the householder.

Upon receiving the new number, the resident was required to post the street number on their property and install a mailbox easily accessible to the carrier. It was the policy of the United States Postal Department that mail delivery could not begin until eighty-five per cent of properties had numbers and boxes installed.

The transition to this new system presented challenges, as indicated in the August 18, 1953, *Stockton Record*: "Inasmuch as the postmaster at Sonora and the inspector report that only 48 per cent of the houses are numbered, the order authorizing city delivery service in Sonora is cancelled. When the inspector informs this bureau that 85 per cent of the houses in the territory have been numbered and all mail boxes have been provided new orders will be issued."

The City still not making sufficient progress, in April 1954 the City Council requested the assistance of the Sonora Lions Club and the Sonora Rotary Club to do a house-to-house canvass to ensure that all residences had proper mailboxes in place.

By October 1954, Sonora Postmaster Edwin O. King reported that the failure of the public to purchase the newly assigned property numbers and to put up mailboxes had delayed the start of the project for nearly two years. However, the City was finally in compliance with the eighty-five per cent requirement and had asked the United States Postal Department for authorization to proceed. Success at last!



**Tuolumne County Museum SPV10276**

*US Post Office on Stewart Street, next to Drabkin Brothers furniture store, circa mid-1950s.*



## Museum Corner

### In Preparation for Mexican California Exhibit

April 7 - June 2, 2024

The traveling exhibition *Telling Stories of Mexican California: Real Life and Myth Making*, sponsored by the California Historical Society focuses on the Spanish Mexican descendants from different backgrounds, who tell their stories from their own experiences. The exhibit broadly outlines California's history leading up to statehood as a backdrop to the factual and fictional stories that emerged after the United States takeover.

While getting ready for the upcoming display, the Exhibits Committee started looking around the Museum Collection for appropriate articles to enhance the visitor's experience. A rare cultural artifact representing Latino history in Tuolumne County and California is a banner from the Mexican Benevolent Society that was formed in Sonora on September 26, 1869, forty-eight years after Mexico's independence from the Spanish Empire. At a time in history when there were no governmental



Allan Bryant points to a detail on the hand-sewn banner from the Mexican Benevolent Society.

provisions for public assistance, the organization was created to give assistance to widows, orphans, and those in need. The banner hangs in the Latino exhibit of the Museum.

Organizers of the modern Cinco de Mayo event in Columbia SHP, Mercedes Tune and Barbara Balen were on hand to help volunteers photograph the banner. Chuck Holland noted about the upcoming traveling exhibit, "Not only did we get the dates we requested, all of the costs associated with this exhibition will be funded by the Henry Mayo Newhall Foundation." He stated in the application, "The greatest benefit to our community and organization would be realized if we could host the exhibition during April 7—June 2. That way it would be on display in our Museum during the local Cinco de Mayo activities." He got his wish!

*Mercedes Tune is one of the organizers of the Cinco de Mayo in Columbia—the birthplace of spontaneous celebrations over Mexico's unexpected victory in the Battle of Puebla.*

The banner hangs in the Latino exhibit of the Museum.

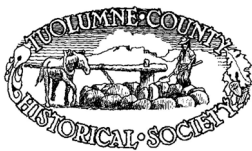


Barbara Balen

## Protecting a Legacy Water System from Wildfire

The history of our remarkable ditch and canal system will be the topic of the **Wednesday, March 13**, program at the **Sonora Library at 3:00 p.m.** Barbara Balen will discuss its determination of eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places and how its management has changed over time. An example of how it has changed is the recent USDA Forest Service Community Wildfire Defense Grant, a crucial step in fortifying our community against the escalating threat of wildfires. This plan aims at reducing wildfire risk by using the ditch system as critical green infrastructure and managing its resources for community benefit, including developing fire water drafting points along the ditch system—thus reducing the need to use treated water for fire suppression.

Barbara is a 4th term elected director of the Tuolumne Utilities District. She is a retired USFS cultural resources manager who worked extensively in the Complex Fire of 1987. She uses her professional experience to help guide TUD's responsibilities towards managing its resources for public benefit.



**TUOLUMNE COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

158 Bradford Street  
SONORA, CA 95370-4920

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

Non-Profit Organization  
U S POSTAGE PAID  
Permit #15  
Sonora, California

*The Mission of the Tuolumne County  
Historical Society shall be to discover, collect,  
preserve, and disseminate knowledge about  
the history of Tuolumne County and  
the State of California.*

**Membership is valid January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024. Have you paid your membership yet?**

The *Historian* is published several times a year by the Tuolumne County Historical Society, 158 Bradford St., Sonora, CA 95370-4920 for the benefit of the membership. There is no charge for the *Historian*. (In compliance with Public Law 103-123, 39 U.S.C. 3656 subsection [j].)

**Tuolumne County Museum & History Research Center**

158 Bradford Street, Sonora, CA 95370

Museum: 209-532-1317—History Research Center: 209-532-4227

<http://tchistory.org>, [info@tchistory.org](mailto:info@tchistory.org)

**Collections Preserved  
by TCHS:**

Fred Leighton Photography  
Thad Waterbury Photography  
Henry Ruoff Photography  
Ernest Durham Photography  
Russ Simpson West Side Collection

Carlo De Ferrari-Hartvig Family Firearm Collection

Craig Bates Basket Collection

Barbara Eastman Collection

Aronos Club Archives

Tuolumne County School Yearbooks

Pocket travel miner's  
gold scale



Pony cart in front gallery



Baer's sign

**TCHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Chuck Holland—President

Open—1st & 2nd Vice President

Cheri Holmes—Treasurer

Betty Sparagna—Recording Secretary

Kathy Boone—Membership Secretary

**DIRECTORS**

Linda Crocker

Linda Emerson

Sandy Fisher

Mike Ghiorso

Lisa Mayo

Janet Montano

**MUSEUM BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Allan Bryant, Chair

Tina Gordon

Winnie LoVine

Mike Macon

Eleanor Provost

Betty Sparagna

HRC Coordinator—Brad Fisher

**Change in address or contact  
information?**

Contact Kathy Boone—

[cookie48@mlode.com](mailto:cookie48@mlode.com) or 209-984-3359