

Historian

November/December 2026 ♦ Vol. 70, Issue 6

of the
Tuolumne County
Historical Society
Sonora, California

Museum Hours:

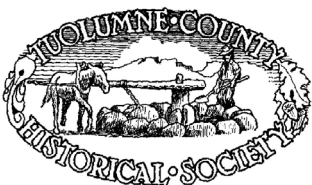
Tues. & Thurs. (10-4)
Wed. (1-4)
Fri. & Sat. (10-3:30)

History Research Center:

Tues. – Fri. (10-4)

Welcome New Members:

Kevin Bolter
Stephanie Rodden



Letter from the President

Fellow Members,



Linda Crocker on the
Museum Porch

This time of year is so wonderful! Autumn sends us beautiful colors and a coolness that makes us smile. This year we can celebrate the anniversary of Sonora being 175 years old. And, what's even more exciting is the 70th anniversary of the Tuolumne County Historical Society! This is quite a benchmark for us with lots of fun ahead!

Have you noticed the Dome? Just look up and you can see the trees in front have been removed. The building looks grand. We are making progress with the repair of the roof. A bid has been approved by SUHSD. The contractor, the architect, and several others have been inspecting the roof with the finish date to be in mid-November.

Also, in November, the porch in the front of the Museum will be restored. There might be some changes to getting into the Museum during this time. We will not be closed but will post a different access.

Our annual Christmas holiday Open House is on December 15, from 2:00-4:00 p.m. We welcome everyone to join us and see all the updated changes.

Lastly, in the spring of 2027, in partnership with ConAmor Building Bridges and Columbia College, we will present a new traveling exhibition created by Exhibit Envoy: *Reclaiming Our Stories, Reflecting on the Land*. This exhibit was developed through a collaboration between California Native communities and California Humanities.



Damaged porch

Linda Crocker

Christmas Open House Celebrate TCHS's 70th Anniversary!

On Tuesday, December 15, the Tuolumne County Museum will open its doors from 2:00–4:00 p.m. for a festive Christmas Open House!

Enjoy cookies and cider in a warm holiday setting, browse books and artwork available for purchase, and celebrate the Tuolumne County Historical Society's 70th anniversary with us. While you're here, be sure to take a moment to explore and enjoy our **new exhibits**.

Come celebrate the holiday season with fellow members, friends, and history lovers! Afterward, take a leisurely stroll down to **Courthouse Square** to admire the beautiful Christmas tree sponsored by the Tuolumne County Historical Society.

✨ We hope you'll join us for an afternoon of holiday cheer, history, and good company! ✨



A Different Perspective

By Rob Gordon

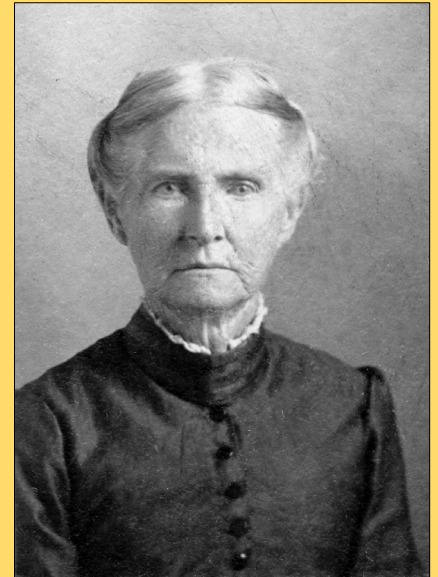
It is not at all unusual to locate a firsthand account of an individual pioneer's experience in the great California Gold Rush. It has been estimated that thousands of Argonauts took the time to record their adventures in the mines via letters, journals, and memoirs. This was, after all, a seminal moment in the lives of many young 19th century men. What is unusual, if not unique, is to discover a recollection written from a female perspective. We are fortunate to have just such work in our collection, one written by Lee Ann Francis (Summers) Whipple-Haslam, entitled *Early Days in California: Scenes and Events of the 50's as I Remember Them*.

Lee Ann was born in Jackson, Gentry, Missouri, on June 5, 1849. Soon after her birth, her father took a trip around the "Horn," eventually connecting in 1850 with his brother in Shaws Flat. Summers apparently had success in finding gold as he returned to Missouri within a year. His objective was to gather up his family and return to Tuolumne County. In May of 1852, the family embarked on the arduous wagon trip across the country to Shaws Flat. Mrs. Whipple-Haslam could not have been much more than three years of age during this trip, and yet she records her journey in remarkable detail. Lee Ann recounts the hardships and dangers, real and imagined, as the family, in company with other similar travelers, journeyed west. She commented on the amount of household items that were left on the trail, the shortage of necessities, as well as the foolhardy behavior of some of the members of other wagon trains. She indicated that most of the Indian tribes were friendly but that when they were nearly to California their group came upon a massacre of a small wagon train. A skeleton of a small child was left as glaring evidence that circumstances on the frontier could quickly turn deadly.

In late fall, the family was ensconced in a dirt floor cabin with solid walls and fabric roof in Shaws Flat. This was to be their home until around 1854, when the family became the first non-indigenous people to live in the area that came to be called Summersville, then Carters, and finally Tuolumne. Lee Ann spends little time recounting her personal activities, devoting more time to expressing her contempt for the unsavory nature of gamblers and drunkards and to vivid descriptions of violence, which could quickly erupt during the gold rush. Sadly, such violence eventually resulted in the death of her father in 1856, at La Grange. She angrily recalls this event as "cold blooded murder," a contention not supported by the details revealed in period newspapers.

As noted, there are contradictory and questionable statements within Lee Ann's treatise. She claims to have met the infamous outlaw Joaquin Murrieta, remarking that he was "painted blacker than he deserved." Since the generally accepted year of Murrieta's death is 1853, Lee Ann could scarcely have been more than five years old at the time of her alleged encounter. Precocious or not, she would hardly have been capable of evaluating Murrieta's character. Then there were her remarks regarding the Chinese, in one section defending them as being a great help to society but later declaring them a menace that should be forbidden entrance into the country. That perception and the presence of more than a few bigoted remarks about various ethnics make her small book a difficult read at times. A different time, yes, but still difficult to read.

Lee Ann went on to marry three different men, abandoning one husband and being abandoned by another. She gave birth to two sons. Her last photograph, taken perhaps five years prior to her death in 1928, reveals a stony countenance reflecting a difficult life. Lee Ann's account challenges the present-day reader to keep in mind the hardships of the frontier days when judging those who lived through those arduous times.



**Tuolumne County Museum,
P28554**

Lee Ann Francis (Summers)
Whipple-Haslam

Museum Corner



Glen White

Stories in the Stars

Wed., November 11, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.
Tuolumne County Library, Greenley Rd., Sonora

Join us on a journey through the night sky and uncover the wisdom hidden within stories that have connected people to the stars for countless generations.

As natural pattern seekers, our ancestors gazed at the stars and saw patterns that represented heroes, villains, animals, and mythological creatures. They built stories around these star patterns that helped them understand and navigate their world. We'll explore some of the stories that go with these star patterns and discuss how these seemingly fanciful stories are particularly useful in conveying critically valuable information. Far more than

simple tales, these stories served as powerful tools for teaching, remembering, and passing knowledge from one generation to the next.

Glen White has earned a reputation as an inspiring, respectful, and effective educator, known for his extensive knowledge of local geology, practical examples, and engaging teaching methods. Over twenty-six years of teaching **Earth Sciences at Columbia College**, he has positively impacted thousands of students. Drawing on twenty-five years of experience as a consulting geologist and his work with the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, Glen has inspired both students and K-12 teachers throughout the region through his support of geoscience and STEM education.

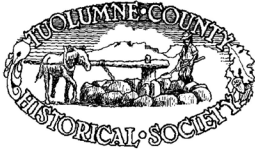
El Portal Abierto

ConAmor Building Bridges is proud to announce the upcoming launch of *El Portal Abierto (The Open Portal)*, a new community radio series exploring the layered and often-untold history of Tuolumne County. The series is produced in partnership with KAAD-LP community radio and the Tuolumne County Historical Society.

Each episode follows a single thread, one moment, one place, or one name, through history, blending historical narration, music, and short dramatized audio-theater scenes that bring real historical moments to life. The series will uncover stories that shaped our county and region but rarely made it into the official record.

The show will soft-launch this fall, ahead of its full live on-air debut next year. Have a story to tell? We'd love to hear it. A memory passed down across generations? Reach out, join the conversation, and help us shape future episodes of *El Portal Abierto*. Contact info@b-conamor.org. For information about KAAD-LP - <https://kaad-lp.org/>.





**TUOLUMNE COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

158 Bradford Street
SONORA, CA 95370-4920

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*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.*

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

**Change in address or contact
information?**

Contact Linda Emerson—memberships@tchistory.org

Milestones of the Society



Milton "Punny"
Dambacher shown
in front of the old
jail in 1925.

Seventy years ago, in November 1956, applications for membership in the newly-created Tuolumne County Historical Society were sent to fifty persons who attended a recent organizational session, and these persons were asked to obtain an additional member for the Society. The drive for membership continued until the first meeting of the new group in January 1957. During this meeting, new officers were elected. Leading the membership drive was Archie Stevenot, Ernest Hodge, Joe Azevedo, and Madeline Poe.

In July-September 1961, the first issue of *The Quarterly* was published by the Society, renamed *Chispa* in the April-June 1969 issue.

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