



# The Placer

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**Ralph Gibson**  
 Museums Administrator  
 101 Maple Street  
 Auburn, CA 95603  
 (530) 889-6500  
[rgibson@placer.ca.gov](mailto:rgibson@placer.ca.gov)

**April McDonald-Loomis**  
 President Placer County  
 Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 5643  
 Auburn, CA 95604  
[April.pchs@gmail.com](mailto:April.pchs@gmail.com)

**Katy Bartosh**  
 Editor and Staff Writer  
 (530) 889-6500  
[kbartosh@placer.ca.gov](mailto:kbartosh@placer.ca.gov)



## Administrator's Notes

by *Ralph Gibson, Museums Administrator*

We all have family stories. The lore of our roots is as fascinating, hilarious, and tragic as any great novel. I link it to fiction because if you listened to your grandpa tell you the story of his parents or grandparents, you can usually tell when a story is being embellished – sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. But beyond embellishment, family stories are from someone's perspective of an event and it may be remarkably different from the perspective of someone else who experienced the exact same event. Memory, too, plays a key role. Case in point is my family tragedy.

The variations of the story I was told, depending on who was telling the story, was that we lost 8-11 family members when a drunk truck driver going the wrong way on a Texas or Arizona highway hit them head-on. There is some truth there, but I was able to decipher what that truth was by accident. While researching something else, I found several articles about the accident, but none mentioned the other driver being drunk. He was driving a pickup truck over 70 mph with his wife and two dogs as passengers. He mistook a "Reduce Speed" sign as a veer left sign and he went left, directly into the path of a station wagon carrying nine of my family members, including my great grandparents. Neither driver touched the brakes. The only survivor was one of the pickup truck driver's dogs. I think the drunk driver aspect of the story was an emotional reaction to the overwhelming tragedy. It can't just be a simple mistake, it must have been something darker, more menacing to take out five adults and four young children. There are a lot of complex things that happen in our brains when we forge a memory and even more happens to that memory overtime. But that doesn't mean these mistakes of memory aren't important. They are, it's what makes us human. This is why we view oral histories with our eyes wide open. We know memory is fallible and we know this is just from one person's perspective. But that perspective, however flawed, is still important.

As I write this, it is exactly sixty years to the date from the accident that took nine members of my family in Jean, Nevada - June 30, 1961. The facts I got from newspaper articles and death records. But the deep feelings I have about this tragedy, I learned from my family.

SATURDAY, JULY 1, 1961 \$1.50 Per Month Ten Pages 10 Cents

## 11 die in desert crash, Entire family wiped out



MERNIE



TOMMY



MARGIE



SHERYAL

Redlands Daily Facts, July 1, 1961

Have you been keeping up with our walking tour guides?

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Do you know the history of the women's jail at the Courthouse?

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The Placer County Museum has a meaningful painting on display.

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Meetings are starting up again!

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## Matthew B. Langstaff's Memories of Foresthill

by Kelsey Monahan, Curator of Archives

Some of my favorite projects to research in the last 15 months have been the self-guided walking tours for Auburn, Dutch Flat, and Foresthill. Through our deed records, photograph collection, and other archival records, I got to dig deeper into each building and how it fit into the town's history. Frequently, I discovered items in our collection that while fascinating to me, never found their way into the tours themselves.

In my most recent project for Foresthill, every time I embarked on researching a new building, one oral history interview continued to pop up: Norman McLeod's interview of Matthew B. Langstaff in 1986. Thanks to the work of Darryl Elliott to digitize the oral history tapes, I was able to hear Langstaff's stories in his own voice.

His interview gave me insight into many buildings in Foresthill that ended up in the self-guided tour—he attended school in the schoolhouse that eventually became the Foresthill Public Utility District building, he owned the old Rea and McAninch Stagecoach Barn, and he later owned the old Garrison store next to the Odd Fellows building.



The interview has so many great stories that it seems impossible to choose just one. Some of my favorite parts of his interview had to do with his experiences of running the mail between Colfax and the Foresthill Divide: “You’ve seen the old rural boxes where the box would be hanging out and the mailbag. They’d hang it on a post then, you never even slow down. When you’re good at it, you just reach out and whip that sack off there and set it on the seat and you’d have a strap that you’d strap it as you go along. Sometimes you’d bring a big lizard in with it. The first earwigs I ever saw came into the cab and I had to stop and climb out of there. I had a lizard and a bunch of earwigs.”

The progress Darryl has made digitizing the oral history tapes has made me so excited to see what other voices of Placer County we will get to hear. If you’d like to hear the Matthew B. Langstaff oral history recording, or get a copy of the transcript, please email me at [kmonahan@placer.ca.gov](mailto:kmonahan@placer.ca.gov).

Matthew B. Langstaff at 10 months old, 1916. PCM Collection.

Be on the lookout for the Foresthill Self-Guided Tour on our blog!

## Women's Crimes in Placer County's Past

*by Christina Richter, Administrative Clerk, Archives & Collections*

From 1905 to 1941, Auburn's women's jail consisted of a small cubbyhole underneath the Historic Courthouse steps. Today, the cell is part of the Placer County Museum and is curated to represent the space's original purpose.

The space is small, only large enough for two cots, a washbasin, and open toilet. With no windows, the only light comes through a heavy iron screen over the door, making the air stale and still. A 1937 article in *The Placer Herald* decried these conditions. The women's jail was called a menace to health, with bad plumbing and a distressing odor. The report was disputed by Sheriff Elmer Gum, but it was widely acknowledged that the conditions at the jail were poor.

A jail register from 1895 to 1923 provides details on the women who were incarcerated in Auburn. Crimes included consorting with a Chinaman, abusing a horse, child desertion, and writing fraudulent checks. In 1905 Mamie Gardner and Rose Sherwood were arrested for attempting to rob a Chinese man of \$15.00. Mamie was sentenced and became the first woman housed in the women's jail cell. These early records provide insight into Placer County's social environment. Offenses included "disturbing the peace" with ten charges, "vagrancy" with seventeen charges, and an incredible thirty-six women being charged with "insanity". Being "insane" accounted for a little over 30% of the known crimes that put women in jail at that time.

One of the most infamous prisoners held in the women's jail was Alma Bell, a young lady who shot and killed Joe Armes. Alma freely admitted to her crime, claiming that Joe had been her lover and had promised to marry her before "throwing her over." Alma was reported as saying "I killed him because I believed I was right in doing so."

At that time, a man could be found guilty of a "breach of promise." For this reason, the public generally sided with Alma with reports of "He got what he deserved" and "Show by your verdict that the man who seduces a woman under promise of marriage must keep that promise under penalty of death." Yet the prosecution found no credible evidence of the engagement.

At a time when Women's Suffrage made regular headlines, Alma Bell was acquitted, "not guilty by reason of insanity."

When you visit the women's jail and peek into the cold, dark walls of the past, think of the women who were housed in that place. Especially remember that some of the crimes women were accused of, and acquitted of, were truly a reflection of the times.

## Lady Justice

by Katy Bartosh, Curator of Education

On June 18th, 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom issued an apology on behalf of California to the Native American Peoples of the state for the “violence, discrimination and exploitation sanctioned by state government through its history.”

This two-page executive order recognized and apologized for the state sanctioned abuse and genocide of native peoples during the Gold Rush and beyond. Tribes were removed from their traditional lands, children were separated from their families, and Native Americans could be forced into servitude. Stated plainly by California’s first Governor Peter Burnett, “That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct must be expected.”



A meeting between tribal leaders from around the State with Governor Gavin Newsom in Sacramento, June 18, 2019.

This executive order forms the background of our newest painting (on-loan) at the Placer County Museum. Commissioned last year by Placer County Superior Judge Garen Horst, the piece was created by Derek Smalling, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. His painting features Lady Justice in vivid color.



Lady Justice for the Presidential Task Force

As described by Smalling, “She adorns herself with a silver gorget of her rank and her shawl denotes the daytime sun and the nighttime moon of her vigilance. She staves off attack with the Inter-locking Arms Shield that represents to the Southeastern Tribal Nations the fundamental concept of Community. And, She wields a Pen Lance for that is how we must now affect change in both our Tribal Nations but in our broader community of the United States. She is an active agent of protection, securing her families, clans, Country, and Tribal Nations.”

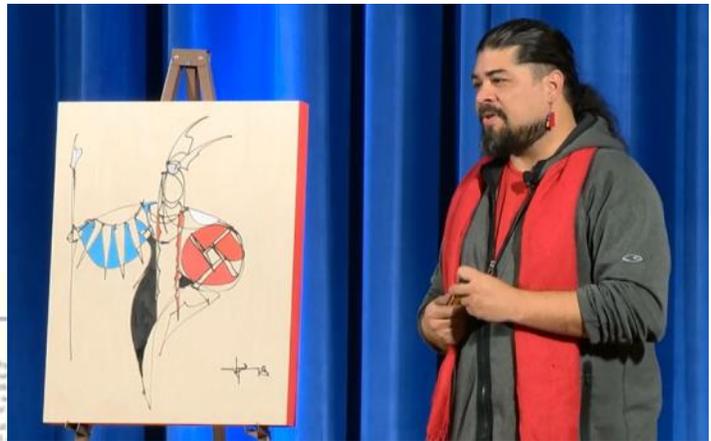
Smalling’s Lady Justice was chosen to represent The Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives. This task force was created in 2019 to help identify the insufficiencies and jurisdictional issues between state, local, and Tribal law enforcement.

Lady Justice is both a reminder and a call to action, for the murder and missing Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people of this country.



Reflecting on justice, Judge Horst relates to trial jurors the symbolism of the three Lady Justice statues presiding over the three entrances to the Historic Courthouse in Auburn. They symbolize hallmarks of the American justice system, like equality under the law, due process, and accountability. To Judge Horst, this painting of Lady Justice, from a Native American point of view, provokes us to think about justice from another perspective, akin to the contemporary restorative and reparative justice movement.

“How extraordinary that in this empire, which is the United States of America, our histories are threading in a more honest and complete fashion never encountered in human history, and in so short amount of time.” D. Smalling



Lady Justice over top and emerging from Executive Order N-15-19.

This image was created with Smalling’s one-line, continuous drawing technique, in which the pen never leaves the paper until the image is completed. The sections are then painted in vivid color.

## News from Placer County Historical Society

by April McDonald-Loomis, President

April.pchs@gmail.com (530) 823-2128

Good news! The dinner meetings are back! We don't usually meet in August but are making up for lost time! Mark your calendars for August 5, Thursday at 6:00 pm. The details will be announced later: menu, price, RSVP date. Watch your email or check our website. We will also hold our long over-due election of directors and officers. See the slate of candidates below.

We will have a selection of our newest books available for purchase at the meeting, we can take cash or checks, no cards. The booklets are \$5.00, the larger books are \$21.00. **We will not have change!** The following titles will be available for purchase: Auburn Dry Diggins and water, Auburn Images, Auburn's Landmarks and Monuments, Infamous Crimes and Criminals, Notable and Interesting Women Vol. 1 & 2, Sam Hollady's 1849 Journey and the History of Placer Co. 1882 & 1924.

We will go back to our regular schedule for the rest of the year, meeting in October and December. In December we will be presenting the winner of the Placer County History Award. The Board is contemplating moving the general meetings to noon instead of 6:00 pm for October and December with a luncheon not a dinner. If you have any opinion on this please contact me at [April.pchs@gmail.com](mailto:April.pchs@gmail.com) We would really like some feedback on this.

The corrected plaque for Firehouse No. # 1 arrived and was handed over to the City. Hopefully it will be up by the time this newsletter is out. Always nice to get our history right.

President – April McDonald-Loomis

1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President – Mike Holmes

Secretary – Karen Bleuel

Treasurer – Al Stoll

Director – Jean Allender- 2021

Director – Delana Ruud - 2021

Director – John Knox - 2021

Director – Ed Weiss - 2020

Director – Carmel-Barry Schweyer -2020

Director – Sherri Schackner – 2020

## Placer County Historical Organizations

### Colfax Area Historical Society

Jay McIntyre, President, (530) 346-8599

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

### Donner Summit Historical Society

Bill Oudegeest, (209) 606-6859

[donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

### Foresthill Divide Historical Society

Troy Simester, (530) 367-3535

[foresthillhistory.org](http://foresthillhistory.org)

### Fruitvale School Hall Community Association

Mark Fowler

### Gold Country Medical History Museum

Lynn Carpenter, (530) 885-1252

### Golden Drift Historical Society

Sarah Fugate, (530) 389-2121

### Historical Advisory Board

Glenn Vineyard, (916) 747-1961

### Joss House Museum and Chinese History Center

Larry Finney, (530) 305-9380

### Lincoln Area Archives Museum

Elizabeth Jansen, (916) 645-3800

[laamca.org](http://laamca.org)

### Loomis Basin Historical Society

Karen Clifford, (916) 663-3871

[ppgn.com/loomishistorical.html](http://ppgn.com/loomishistorical.html)

### Maidu Museum & Historic Site

Kaitlin Kincade, (916) 774-5934

[roseville.ca.us/indianmuseum](http://roseville.ca.us/indianmuseum)

### The Museum of Sierra Ski History and 1960 Winter Olympics

David C. Antonucci, (775) 722-3502

[tahoemuseum.org](http://tahoemuseum.org)

### Native Sons of the Golden West Parlor #59

Dave Allen, (530) 878-2878

[dsallen59@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dsallen59@sbcglobal.net)

### Newcastle Portuguese Hall Association

Mario Farinha, (530) 269-2412

### North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Phil Sexton, (530) 583-1762

[northtahoemuseums.org](http://northtahoemuseums.org)

### Placer County Genealogical Society

Toni Rosasco, (530) 888-8036

[pcgenes.com](http://pcgenes.com)

### Placer County Historical Society

April McDonald-Loomis

(530) 823-2128

[placercountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://placercountyhistoricalsociety.org)

### Placer County Museums Docent Guild

Craig Norris

### Rocklin Historical Society

Hank Lohse, (916) 624-3464

[rocklinhistory.org](http://rocklinhistory.org)

### Roseville Fire Museum

Jim Giblin, (916) 538-1809

[rosevillefiremuseum@gmail.org](mailto:rosevillefiremuseum@gmail.org)

### Roseville Historical Society

Denise Fiddymont, (916) 773-3003

[rosevillehistorical.org](http://rosevillehistorical.org)

### Calendar:

*Please confirm all meeting times and locations which each organization*

**Foresthill Divide Historical Society Meeting:** Monday, July 19th at 6:00pm

**Golden Drift Historical Society Meeting:** Monday, August 2nd at 7:00pm

**Historical Advisory Board Meeting:** Wednesday, August 18th at 5:30pm

**Historical Organizations Committee Meeting:** Tuesday, August 10th at 10:00am

**Loomis Basin Historical Society Meeting:** Wednesday, July 21st at 6:00pm; Wednesday, August 18th at 6:00pm

**Placer County Historical Society Meeting:** Thursday, July 1st at 2:00pm, **Dinner Meeting:** August 5th, 6:00pm

**Placer Genealogical Society Meeting:** Thursday, July 22nd at 7:00pm; Thursday, August 26th at 7:00pm

**Rocklin Historical Society Meeting:** Monday, July 12th at 6:00pm; Monday, August 9th at 6:00pm

**Roseville Historical Society Meeting:** Tuesday, July 13th at 4:00pm; Tuesday, August 10th at 4:00pm



PLACER COUNTY MUSEUMS  
101 Maple Street  
Auburn, CA 95603

