

# Golden Nuggets

December 2007

December Social

**Saturday, December 15**

**Optional No-Host Lunch, 11:30 AM**

**Elk Grove Brewery & Restaurant**

9085 Elk Grove Boulevard, Elk Grove

**“An Old Fashioned Christmas,” 1:30 PM**

**Elk Grove Hotel & Stage Stop Museum**

9941 East Stockton Blvd., Elk Grove



Note the special date of our December meeting, timed to fit better into the usual holiday bustle.

Take a break from your Christmas shopping—or maybe get in the mood to start that shopping—with an SCHS group visit to Elk Grove for an Old Fashioned Christmas. It’s the Elk Grove Historical Society’s holiday open house. Docents in each room allow people to just flow through. We’ll plan to get there about 1:30, which should allow ample time to linger over lunch.

This year the crew of local decorators and volunteers will festoon the Elk Grove House, aka the Elk Grove Hotel and Stage Stop Museum, in a 1940s theme. The cost is \$5 per adult. Children under 12 are free with an adult. For adults, the pub is just east of Route 99 on Elk Grove Blvd, and the museum is adjacent to Elk Grove Regional Park, only two miles from the pub. More directions: 916-685-8115. Please join us for this special holiday treat! And yes, they do have a gift shop at the museum.

**Time to Say Good Bye**



Former Sacramento mayors give tribute to City Historian James Henley. From left: Jim Henley, former Mayors Ann Rudin and Burnett Miller, Mayor Heather Fargo; at the podium, former Mayor James Yee. Photo: Tom Meyers

City Historian Jim Henley was feted at a retirement party held at the Memorial Auditorium on October 29. Attendance included local political notables of the past and present, with official resolutions of service coming from the city, the county, the state, and the U.S. Congress. Burnett Miller served as emcee, adding several humorous anecdotes about young Jim Henley literally trailing his mentor, former City Historian Aubrey Neasham, whose professional ‘shoes’ Henley later so ably filled.

A video showing highlights from Henley’s 41-year career and exhibits featuring other special moments formed a backdrop to the festivities. The video and exhibits were created by SAMCC staff in honor of their departing chief. Over 150 people, including a number of SCHS members, attended. The event also helped raise funds to endow the James E. Henley internship at SAMCC.



Archivist Pat Johnson presents SAMCC staff tribute.

Photo: Karen McDonald

## Dam That's Ironic

By Dan Winkleman



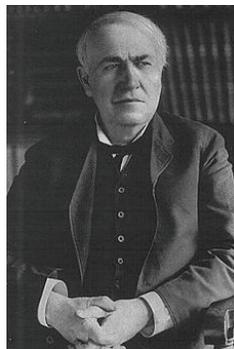
Horatio G. Livermore

Blasting out past the Natoma Crossing Bridge in my canoe, just below the old Powerhouse, I suddenly heard some rustling at the water's edge. It was the same beaver I've been making regular sightings of in this area. He is always trying to reach up and pull down tree branches so he can eat the leaves. I don't see any dam-building activity from him. There is no need for a dam for lodging or food, and no small running stream to be dammed. How ironic that this master dam builder has all that he needs without the hassle of building a dam.

Humans, on the other hand, have been building dams here since 1850. That's when the Livermore family decided to build one that was about two miles upstream from the current Folsom Powerhouse. Their intent was to divert water into a canal system to float logs to a saw mill. They accomplished this goal by trading land to the state for a new Folsom Prison in exchange for prison labor to help build the dam. The lumber business didn't quite work out, but in the early 1890s the Livermores decided to adapt the dam for hydro-electricity. They formed the Folsom Water and Power Company and solicited bids from eastern corporations to build the powerhouse.

Thomas Edison, of Edison General Electric, had invested the company assets in direct current (DC) equipment. The problem with DC is that you can't run it through a transformer and raise the voltage for long distance transmission.

Meanwhile entrepreneur George Westinghouse, Jr., and his inventor buddy, Nicolas Tesla, were pushing the idea that alternating current (AC) was best because it can be used with a transformer. The argument became quite ugly with Edison claiming AC was dangerous and was be-



Thomas A. Edison



Nicolas Tesla

ing used for electrocutions in prison. In stepped J.P. Morgan, who had just financed the rival Thompson-Houston Electric Company. Thompson-Houston bought up most of Edison General Electric's stock and merged into one AC company to be known as General Electric. They won the bid to build the powerhouse for the Folsom Water and Power Company.

The new General Electric Company removed the DC armatures from the generators they had in stock, installed Tesla-design AC armatures, and shipped the generators to Folsom. In July 1895, the world's first long-distance power grid sent current 22 miles to downtown Sacramento. And this triumphant use of AC was done by the reconfigured company that had once so vehemently opposed it. Now there's irony!

So where is the original dam now? When the new Folsom Dam was erected in 1952, the builders dynamited a gently sloping channel from the new dam to Rainbow Bridge. The slope helped water flow away and down the channel from the turbine blades of the generators. They blasted right through the dam the Livermores built. What's left of the old dam is now on prison property.

My evening paddle has brought me to the granite-walled canyon that the Folsom Dam workers deepened with their explosives. I really appreciate the gentle slope they created for me. Of course it wasn't done with recreational boaters in mind, but that's just a bit more irony.

SCHS Board member Dan Winkleman is a docent at the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park. An avid canoeer, he regularly paddles the quiet waters around Lake Natoma.

## Holiday Music!

Sacramento Area Musicians  
Perform Daily  
Nov. 30 through Dec. 19

State Capitol Rotunda  
Information: 916-324-0333

## DINING ON THE ROAD

By Mary A. Helmich

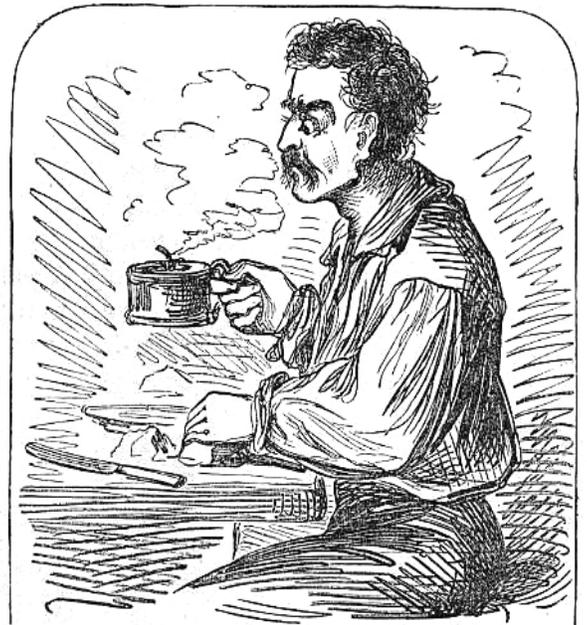
When driving or flying this holiday season, reflect upon the hardy souls who once relied on 19<sup>th</sup> century stage companies for their food while traveling. Stagecoach lines used two types of stops—swing stations, situated from 12 to 30 miles apart, and intermittent home stations about every 50 miles. Ten minutes usually were allowed to exchange teams and give passengers a stretch. At home stations, travelers had a little more time for a quick meal.

A mile or two from a scheduled stop, conductors blew a small brass bugle or trumpet. When close to the station, another long blast was sounded. The first call alerted the station keeper to begin food preparations for the passengers and to ready a fresh team for the stage. The final blast meant the stage had arrived. The meals were always an adventure.

Often there were not enough plates or tin cups available to serve everyone. In West Texas in 1858, the first through passenger on the Butterfield Overland Mail Line, Waterman Ormsby, breakfasted on jerked beef cooked over buffalo chips, raw onions, slightly wormy crackers, and a bit of bacon. Sometimes passengers partook of chicory coffee sweetened with molasses or brown sugar, hot biscuits, fried pork floating in grease, and corn bread. Ormsby noted "...the fare, though rough, is better than could be expected so far from civilized districts." On his journey, he also ate bread and fried steaks of bacon, venison, antelope, and tough mule. Milk, butter, and vegetables were served toward the two ends of the overland trip.

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and his brother Orion traveled the central overland route by stage in the early 1860s. Twain described one of their miserable dining experiences in his book, *Roughing It*:

The station-keeper up-ended a disk of last week's bread, of the shape and size of an old-time cheese, and carved some slabs from it which were as good as Nicolson pavement, and tenderer.



DRINKING SLUMGULLION.

He sliced off a piece of bacon for each man, but only the experienced old hands made out to eat it, for it was condemned army bacon which the United States would not feed to its soldiers in the forts, and the stage company had bought it cheap for the sustenance of their passengers and employés. We may have found this condemned army bacon further out on the plains than the section I am locating it in, but we found it—there is no gainsaying that.

Then he poured for us a beverage which he called "Slumgullion," and it is hard to think he was not inspired when he named it. It really pretended to be tea, but there was too much dish-rag, and sand, and old bacon-rind in it to deceive the intelligent traveler. He had no sugar and no milk—not even a spoon to stir the ingredients with.

We could not eat the bread or the meat, nor drink the "slumgullion."

Nineteenth century food service at stage stops may have been fast, but certainly not reliable. How reassuring it is when dining out today to see the County Health Board "A" placard in restaurant windows.

Mary A. Helmich is the immediate past president of the Sacramento County Historical Society.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 160065  
Sacramento, California 95816-0065  
www.sachistoricalociety.org

Non-Profit Org  
US Postage  
Permit No. 674  
Sacramento, CA

**2007 Board of Directors**

President: Susan Ballew  
Vice President: BranDee Bruce  
Membership: Jenan Saunders  
Secretary:  
Treasurer: Alan O'Connor  
History Consortium: Dr. Bob LaPerrière

**Members-at-Large**

John Allen, Shelly Atkinson, Rick Bettis,  
Lisa M. Calloway-Wire, Becky Carruthers,  
Illa Collin, Clare Ellis, Bill Gaylord,  
Mory Holmes, Dan Winkelman

*Journal* Editor: James E. Henley

**GOLDEN NUGGETS**

Pat Turse, Editorial & Layout  
Email: newsletter@sachistoricalociety.org  
Contributions Deadline: 20th of month

**Please deliver by December 4, 2007**

## Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
December First Sat. Every month Year-	1 PM to 4 PM	<b>Rae House Museum.</b> This 1868 Galt landmark was restored in the early 1990s and again in 2002 with the help of the Galt Area Historical Society. Ranch life exhibits.	204 Oak Avenue Galt, CA <a href="http://www.galthistory.org/history/raehist.htm">www.galthistory.org/history/raehist.htm</a>
5,12,19 Wed. eves 9 &16 Sundays	6 PM to 9 PM  1:30 to 6 PM	<b>Victorian Christmas.</b> Victorian singers, strolling minstrels, brass bands, street hawkers, and chestnuts roasting on an open fire highlight this annual Christmas fair.	Downtown Nevada City Free parking at Nevada County Gov't Center on Hwy. 49. \$2 roundtrip shuttle to downtown. Info: 800-655-6569. <a href="http://itychamber.com">itychamber.com</a>
Wed. to Sunday, thru 6 Jan	1:30 to 5 PM	<b>From the Heart.</b> Plein-Air Painters of America (PAPA) annual exhibit & sale of paintings done directly from the beauty that surrounds us. Juried members select their best works.	The Haggin Museum 1201 N. Pershing Ave Stockton, CA 95203-1699 209-940-6300 <a href="http://www.hagginmuseum.org">www.hagginmuseum.org</a>
January 22 Tues	7:00 PM	<b>SCHS Collectors' Night.</b> Your chance to show off your collectibles. Select your best goodies to fit on a 5-foot table, and share! Call to reserve a space, 916-798-3871.	SAMCC 551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd. Sacramento, CA