

Golden Nuggets

March 2009

SCHS Awards Night Dinner

Featuring Jim Dahlberg

Sacramento River Delta Crate Label Art

Tuesday March 24, 2009, 6 PM*

Sierra Sac Valley Med Society Building

5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento

It's that time again! March is the month when the Sacramento County Historical Society recognizes achievements for the prior year in history education, historical preservation, and publications. In addition, SCHS may honor individuals or organizations for lifetime achievements or special contributions to the society. Our congratulations to the recipients of the 2008 Awards of Excellence, shown to the right.

The evening will feature a dinner buffet, including wine, antipasti, and dessert, and—as you can surmise from these small images—a



Crate labels from Jim Dahlberg's collection

very colorful presentation on historic crate label art by Jim Dahlberg of the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society. Jim owns a rare and wondrous collection, and this event is a great opportunity to see it. *If you want to tour the Medical Museum, come at 5:30.

Come join us to support the individuals and groups who have found the time and made the effort to make significant contributions to preserving, protecting and promoting our history. This event embodies the best of what the Sacramento County Historical Society stands for.

2008 Awards of Excellence Recipients

Education Award

Diana Vizzard for her work with the Old Sacramento Schoolhouse Museum, especially for her efforts with the "A Day in School in 1875" essay contest, now in its 26th year.

Preservation Award

The Sacramento Trust for Historic Preservation, for long-term, ongoing support for many significant community historic preservation and history projects.

Publication Award

Canton Footprints: Sacramento's Chinese Legacy by Philip P. Choy with Douglas and Karun Yee, Book Committee Co-Chairs and Researchers, published by the Chinese American Council of Sacramento.

Lifetime Achievement Awards

Mary Otis for her decades-long involvement with the Conference of California Historical Societies, her longtime editing of its California Historian magazine, and her service on the boards of the Sacramento County Historical Society, the Folsom Historical Society, and the Sacramento County History Day organization.

We encourage you to come share this always inspiring evening with fellow lovers of history.

See the form inside for more details, and mail it right away (it must arrive by March 16) to reserve your space. Tickets are only \$15, a real bargain for a great meal and a very special evening. There is ample parking in the lot and adjacent to the building on the street.

Coming in June: SCHS tour of Sacramento's Rock & Roll Museum!

Sacramento's Changing Night Life

By Bill Burg

Despite its reputation as a place without much nightlife, Sacramento has had a long history as a town that stayed open late, played as hard as it worked, and was seldom short of musical entertainment. At some point Sacramento got a reputation for being stodgy and unexciting, but the historical evidence simply doesn't back that up. One of the best descriptions of Sacramento night life in its early days comes from Mark Twain's *Letter from Sacramento* of February 25, 1866:

I arrived in the City of Saloons this morning at 3 o'clock, in company with several other disreputable characters, on board the good steamer Antelope, Captain Poole, commander. I know I am departing from usage in calling Sacramento the City of Saloons instead of the City of the Plains, but I have my justification -- I have not found any plains, here, yet, but I have been in most of the saloons, and there are a good many of them. You can shut your eyes and march into the first door you come to and call for a drink, and the chances are that you will get it. And in a good many instances, after you have assuaged your thirst, you can lay down a twenty and remark that you "copper the ace," and you will find that facilities for coppering the ace are right there in the back room... - *Territorial Enterprise, Feb., 1866*

More recently, Billie Kanelos, whose family opened Sacramento's now legendary Old Ironsides nightclub, restaurant and bar in 1934, described one of her favorite pastimes as a teenager, walking downtown to the Dairy Maid ice cream parlor for banana splits. But this wasn't an activity that she did right after school, but rather at about 11:00 PM after seeing a movie on K Street. The Dairy Maid, like a lot of other Sacramento eateries, was open until midnight or later, and occupied by people of all ages.

It wasn't the only place, either; K Street and J Street had dance halls, theaters, nightclubs and restaurants that were open well into the evening, some all night. Some of the most popular were the Trianon Ballroom above the



Sacramento's Congo Club, c. 1955

SAMCC

Fox Senator Theater on K Street (one of about a dozen downtown movie theaters), and nightclubs like the Mo-Mo, Congo and Zanzibar Club along M Street. Many restaurants were open late or all night, with fare ranging from Italian dinners to Chinese food to waffles.

Sacramento had many breweries, the biggest of which was the Buffalo Brewery on 21st and P, and several wineries, including the California Winery just across R Street from Buffalo Brewery. Hop fields around Sacramento were plentiful to meet the breweries' demands. While much of the beer was exported (Los Angeles was a huge consumer of Buffalo Brewery's beer) an ample amount was for bottled local consumption. One of downtown Sacramento's best known Victorian era buildings, the Ruhstaller Building on 9th and J, was the taproom for Captain Frank Ruhstaller's brewery on 12th and H, the Capital City Brewery. Buffalo Brewery's taproom, the Buffalo Club, stood on 19th and S Street until demolished a few years ago.

Prohibition, the nationwide ban on alcohol in the United States from 1920 to 1933, slowed down the official production of alcohol, closing many breweries and wineries, but even then, Sacramento was notorious as a "wet" town, with many speakeasies downtown and in the outlying farm communities. At one point, officers of nearby military bases forbade their soldiers entry into Sacramento, due to the city's reputation as an easy place to get a drink. After Prohibition ended, the Old Ironsides tavern received Sacramento's first post-Prohibition liquor license. It should be noted that by the time Old Ironsides opened its doors, there

were already other bars operating that had not yet bothered with the formality of obtaining a liquor license.



Old Ironsides in the 1940s theoldironsides.com

Longtime residents may recall the K Street cruise—Sacramento’s original car enthusiasts parade. In the 1950s and 1960s Sacramento was changing—largely due to explosive expansion and redevelopment pressure. However there was still plenty to do.

Redevelopment had a profound effect on downtown Sacramento’s nightlife and its population. The Capitol Mall project destroyed most of the residential neighborhood along M Street, including the aforementioned Mo-Mo, Congo and Zanzibar clubs. The Interstate 5 project demolished whole downtown blocks.

One objective of this redevelopment was to reduce the population of the central city from its 1950s level of about 32 residential units per acre to a more suburb-like 8 residential units per acre. To accomplish this, 75% of downtown’s population had to be moved. Many of the remaining 25% could not afford the limited number of garden apartments that replaced earlier multi-story apartment buildings, rooming houses, and other residential buildings, resulting in an almost complete shift in the neighborhood’s population.

By the end of the redevelopment era, Sacramento’s downtown was almost depopulated, except for the several thousand residents of the old waterfront residential hotels. These hotels were then closed, and either demolished or converted into non-residential struc-

tures as part of Old Sacramento. Redevelopment-era case workers worked only with families. Single individuals, including the hotel dwellers, were ineligible for relocation assistance or alternate housing. So they moved from their old homes into other hotels along K Street, some of which are still used as residential hotels.

One unintended effect of this depopulation was the elimination of most of the customers that came downtown, either on foot or by streetcar, to eat, drink and be entertained. Remaining businesses suffered because their customers now lived much farther away. Sacramento’s middle class had moved to the suburbs, and car-centric places like shopping centers, suburban movie theaters and drive-ins, and new indoor malls were more convenient than driving downtown to shop on K Street. Parking was limited, the streetcars were gone, and walking was no longer practical. Before long, downtown Sacramento had changed dramatically. Without customers with money to spend, the handful of remaining businesses had little reason to stay open late, or to stay open at all. New businesses focused their attention on the remaining market, mostly office workers who left at night. It was this era that gave Sacramento its reputation as a place that rolled up its sidewalks at 5:00 PM.

Editor’s Note: Bill Burg’s article was adapted from the December 2008 issue of www.sacramentoexpress.com.



Fox Senator Theater, 912 K St., Sacramento, c. 1953, with the Trianon Ballroom location on the second floor. Sacramento Room, Sacramento Public Library

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Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
MARCH 8 Sunday	2 to 4:30 PM	A Voice of My Own: Story Voices Four local women tell stories in word and song about the challenges faced by women in history. A fundraiser for the Folsom museum.	Folsom Community Center 52 Natoma Street, Folsom 916-985-2707 www.folsomhistorymuseum.org
Ongoing thru August 16	10 AM to 5 PM Daily, except holidays	The Call of Trains Exhibit of railroad photos by award-winning photographer Jim Shaughnessy. Special presentation and book signing Sunday, March 8.	California State Railroad Museum 2nd & I St., Old Sacramento 916-445-6645
28-29 Sat.- Sun.	10 AM to 5 PM	Women's History Day Celebration See a Living History program celebrating the role of women of an earlier time.	Sacramento History Museum 101 I Street, Old Sacramento 916-264-7057
APRIL 4 Saturday	10 AM	Symbolism in the City Cemetery Learn about the meaning of common symbols found on headstones during this guided tour. Free parking opposite 10th & Broadway main entry gate.	Historic Old City Cemetery 10th & Broadway, Sacramento 916-448-0811 www.oldcitycemetery.com/SymbolismTour.htm
28 Tuesday	7 PM	M Street and Sacramento's West End Bill Burg returns with a slide program overview of the types of development along the Capitol Avenue/M Street area between the 1850s and the 1950s.	Sierra Sac Valley Medical Society Building 5380 Elvas Ave, Sacramento Directions: www.ssvms.org/directions.asp SCHS Message Phone: 916-443- 6265