

SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION
OUR 167TH YEAR

PIONEER NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2020

SUMMER EDITION



Message from
the President

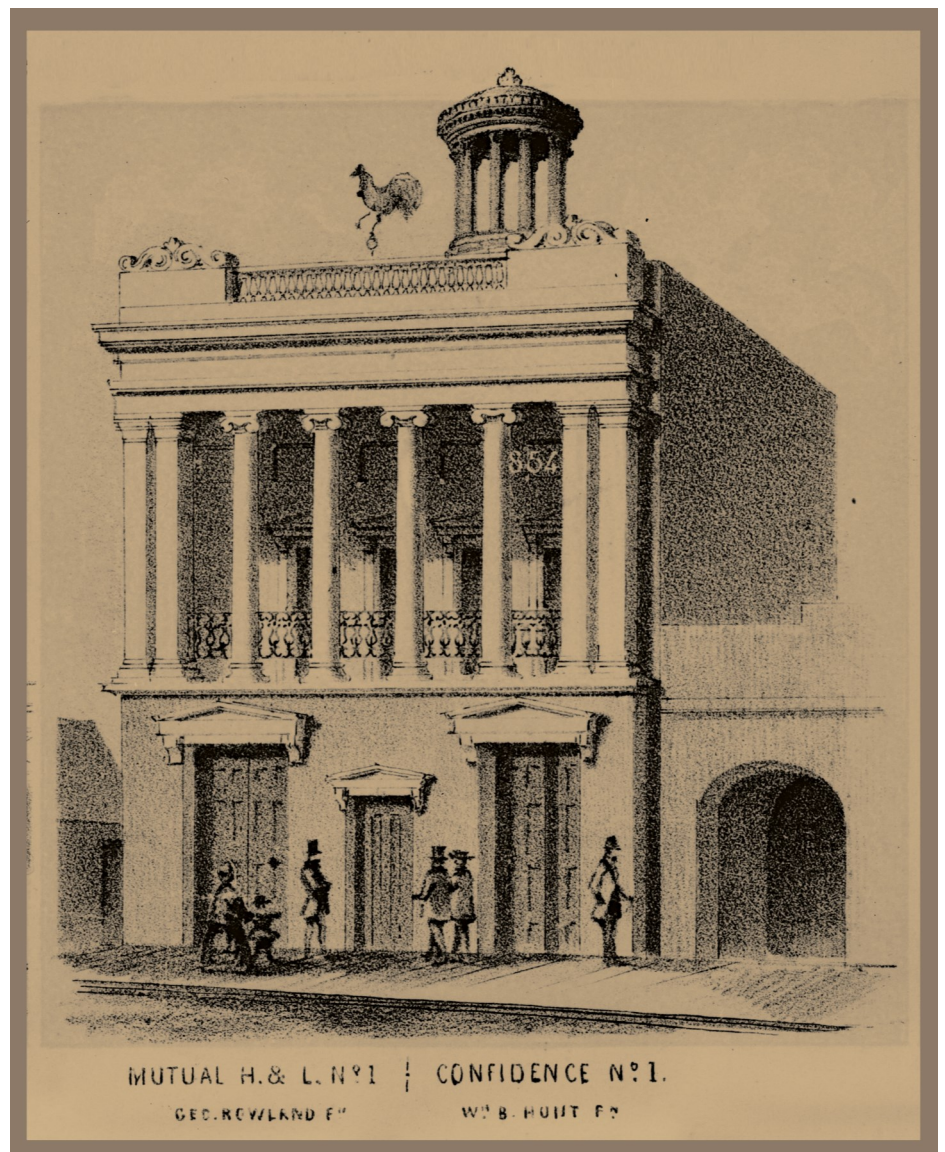
Pioneer Firemen
of Sacramento

Scholarship Awardee
Rohit Jhawar

Pioneer of the Year
Michael Shepard

Sacramento County
History Day

Annual Dinner
Meeting Photos



Pioneer Mutual Hook & Ladder Co. No. 1

Sacramento Pioneer Association Quarterly Newsletter



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Cover image: The Pioneer Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No.1 firehouse and Confidence Engine Co. No. 1 engine house located at 917 Third Street, Sacramento, as it appeared in 1857 according to American artist George Holbrook Baker. The image is one of 36 vignettes that appear on a print titled *A Birds-eye View of Sacramento Capitol of the State of California*. Image courtesy of the California State Library, California History Room, Prints.

Back-cover image: Overview of Sacramento from the 1857 print by George Holbrook Baker titled *A Birds-eye View of Sacramento Capitol of the State of California* superimposed over a silhouette of the California State Flag bear.

Sacramento Pioneer Association Pioneer Newsletter TM

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Sacramento Pioneer Association
1731 Howe Avenue, Box 639
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 447-7411

www.sacramentopioneer.org

President's Message

Welcome New Member –

The Sacramento Pioneer Association welcomes new member Joan Krizman.

Events –

Our Association Annual Meeting took place on March 12th at Del Paso Country Club. The annual election of officers and board members was held along with a raffle in support of the SPA Scholarship program. Members had an opportunity to meet and chat with fellow SPA members and guests while enjoying a very nice meal and wine in a beautiful setting.

Officers elected for the coming year are Bill Schaw, President; Bill Gould, Vice President; Michael Shepard, Secretary; Thom Gilbert, Treasurer. Martha Hughes was added to the Board replacing the departing Debbie Elliot.

The evening's highlight was the presentation of our annual \$5,000 scholarship to this year's recipient, Mr. Rohit Jhawar from Kennedy High School. Mr. Jhawar is extremely accomplished in many ways and plans to ultimately go into orthopedic surgery. He spoke fluently about his history and plans for the future and thanked the Association for our scholarship award.

The SPA held its May board meeting via Zoom on the 18th. Future meetings will likely be conducted in the same way pending the end of the current health crisis.

Future –

Our Annual Meeting was held just before the current social "lock down" took effect and may turn out to be the last SPA member event for the next six months or more. We will hope for the best but be conservative in planning social events until our members can feel comfortable gathering together again to enjoy each other's company.

Thank you for your continuing support of the Association. Enjoy a productive and healthy summer.

Bill Schaw, President

Pioneer Firemen of Sacramento

By Michael Shepard

The cry of "Fire!" could spread fear faster than the flames themselves throughout the dense mass of wooden structures that made up Sacramento City in the first months of 1850. That dire shout pierced the air in the early morning hours of Wednesday, March 13, 1850, when a two story building occupied by Smith, Bensley & Co. on J Street, between 2nd and 3rd Streets, burst into flames.

Sacramento had no fire company to answer the call. Fortunately, citizens rushed to action and subdued the blaze before it could consume other buildings. Damages amounted to an estimated \$5,000. The city had escaped calamity - this time.

Demas Strong, a Sacramento merchant who owned a store on J Street in close proximity to the charred remains of Smith, Bensley & Co., feared the next conflagration. He penned an impassioned letter to the editor of Sacramento's *Placer Times* in which he demanded action:

"MR. EDITOR: I have frequently proposed individuals the propriety of forming a fire company." Strong cited the recent combustion of Messrs. Smith and Bensley's building and noted that "Inexperienced men generally make a fire worse when they touch it, and much work was needlessly and injuriously done by such at the above mentioned fire." He further stated, "With a few men, properly officered, individuals who could be depended on, and who would take a pride in faithful discharge of their duty - much property could at times be saved."

Strong intended for the letter to be printed in the Saturday, March 16, 1850, edition of the *Placer Times*. The editor of that weekly newspaper regretted that the letter "was crowded out of our last issue," so it appeared in print the following Saturday on March 23.

By then, Demas Strong and members of the community had already organized an assembly held at the Sacramento City Hotel on Wednesday evening, March 20, for the consideration of forming a fire company. By the meeting's end, those present passed a resolution for the "immediate organization of a Fire company, to be called the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 of Sacramento city." A number of attendees promptly enrolled themselves as members of California's first official volunteer fire company. The Mutuals elected Demas Strong as their foreman.

Officers of the new fire company appointed a committee to seek subscriptions from the community to defray the cost of necessary equipment including a carriage, hooks, ladders and uniforms. The Mutuals drafted bylaws and began to hold regular meetings. Inspired by the new fire company, Sacramento merchants

Lewis and Bayley independently purchased an engine with 200 feet of hose that could shoot a column of water 70 feet high for use against future fires.

In the early morning of April 4, 1850, the cry of “fire!” jolted the citizens of Sacramento from their beds once again when the general merchandise store of Hoope & L’Amoreaux on J Street, near Front Street, erupted in flames. A dry north wind spread the fire to K Street and more buildings succumbed to the blaze. Approximately eight structures burned to the ground worth an estimated value of \$65,000. An article in the *Placer Times* the following day acknowledged that, “A large amount of property was saved here by the skill of Demas Strong, Esq., aided by the efficient fire department of Sacramento.” The article concluded, “Our citizens are much indebted to the engine and to the Hook and Ladder company, for the preservation of a large part of our city.” Following the conflagration, Mayor Hardin Bigelow invited the firemen to the City Hotel for a collation held in their honor paid for by a number of Sacramento’s businessmen.

On May 16, 1851, Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 held a meeting at the Court House on Fourth Street, near J Street. Demas Strong, foreman of the Mutuals and the man who had singly done more to organize Sacramento’s first fire company, stepped down from his post to be replaced by an equally dedicated man named Hiram Arents.

Mr. Arents arrived in California from New York on July 4, 1849; an arrival date that later qualified his membership in the Sacramento Pioneer Association. In the preceding years back in the Empire State, Arents served as foreman of New York City’s Protection Engine Co. No. 5. He then accepted an appointment as assistant engineer of the New York City Fire Department in 1847. He failed to win the election to become NYC’s chief engineer in November of 1848. The election results may have been the catalyst for Hiram to seek his fortune in California. He and his brother, William, boarded the brig *John Enders*, which sailed on January 19, 1849.

Under Arent’s experienced stewardship, the city’s capacity to fight fires evolved. In January of 1851, Mayor Hardin Bigelow and the Common Council of Sacramento established a city fire department. The council unanimously elected Hiram Arents chief engineer. He remained foreman of the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 through March and then assumed his more expansive role. As his last act as foreman, during a meeting on March 22, 1851, Arents accepted forty pledges who wished to become new members of the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1. The list of pledges appeared in a *Sacramento Daily Union* follow-up article, which included eight names that would later be found in

the roster of the Sacramento Pioneer Association: D. O. Mills, J. S. Fowler, Samuel J. May, William McWilliams, Robert Brown, John G. Cleal, Eugene F. Gillespie and James Queen.

Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 held a meeting on March 25, 1851, at the Orleans Hotel to reorganize the company and for the election of officers. Shortly thereafter, Confidence Engine Co. No. 1, Protection Engine Co. No. 2 and Sacramento Engine Co. No. 3 formed under the auspices of Chief Engineer Arents. More companies would follow in the years to come.

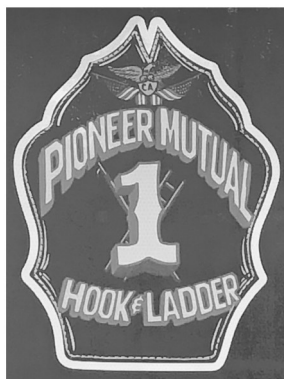
In addition to the main duty of fighting Sacramento’s fires, the volunteer firemen also represented their companies in full uniform during special civic events, such as annual Fourth of July parades. The Mutuals marched on September 5, 1850, in the solemn funeral obsequies of the late President Zachary Taylor. All existing Sacramento fire companies participated in the August 12, 1852, public ceremonies in honor of the memory of the late Senator Henry Clay. A

celebration particularly important to the fire companies occurred on April 6, 1854, with the official dedication of the Sacramento City Waterworks.

Benefit events, such as the traditional firemen’s ball, defrayed the operation costs of the fire companies. Harriet Carpenter, a popular actress in Sacramento and San Francisco theaters, donated the proceeds from a May 22, 1851, performance at the Pacific Theatre to the Mutuals. In addition, she crafted by her own hands a flag for the hook and ladder company which she presented to them after the show. Likewise, on May 12, 1855, the “favorite American Tragedienne” Miss Estelle Potter and her troupe performed *Armand* and *Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady* for the benefit of the Mutuals.

The Mutuals elected Joseph H. Nevett as their president and N. A. H. Ball as their secretary in March of 1852. In less than two years’ time, Nevett would also serve as vice president of the newly formed Sacramento Pioneer Association and Ball would be the association’s corresponding secretary. In August of 1852, the Mutuals elected Dr. Volney Spalding as their foreman and Samuel Colville as secretary. Dr. Spalding would serve as a director during the Pioneer Association’s first years and Colville would be its recording secretary.

The worst conflagration in Sacramento’s history ignited on the night of November 2, 1852, from within the dress and fancy goods shop of Madame Lanos on J Street, between 5th and 6th Streets, “in the heart of one of the most combustible blocks in the city,” according to a *Sacramento Daily Union* article. The flames destroyed the firehouses and much of the equipment of Engine Companies No. 1 and No. 3 as well as Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1. After the fire, most of the city lay in charred



ruins with an estimated \$10,000,000 in damages. The *Union* reported that "A large number of our gallant firemen were severely burned and otherwise injured while attempting to subdue the flame;" the Mutuels' N. A. H. Ball among them.

Sacramento's Mutual Hook and Ladder Company and Mr. Ball both recovered. He remained foreman through 1853. The Mutuels acquired a new truck in July of 1854. An article in the *Sacramento Daily Union* dated July 29, 1854, describes the carriage as "a beautiful specimen of California manufacture, although adorned partly by the skill of Eastern mechanics and artizans [*sic*]." Silver-plated metal work embellished the ultramarine blue and vermillion striped carriage.

Having lost their hall in the great conflagration of 1852, the Mutuels held their meetings at various locations such as the City Collector's Office and the Recorder's Court Room. On December 9, 1854, the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 dedicated its new hall on the east side of Third Street, between I and J Streets. A *Sacramento Daily Union* article that appeared two days after the event describes the ornate décor of the firehouse down to the smallest detail including a president's chair "of the richest materials of various colors beautifully blended, and adorned with elegant tassels," lounges and chairs "covered with the richest damask," a large gilt mirror and two gilt chandeliers, as well as an elegant Turkish carpet.

During a speech delivered by Hook & Ladder President J. H. Nevett at the hall's dedication ceremony, he emphatically stated that, "The organization of this company, on the 5th day of February, 1850, was an event interesting not only in the history of this city, but is a part of the history of the State; it was the first meeting of citizens of this State to form a fire company; it was a nucleus around which gathered that noble band of brothers, the Firemen of California..."

Incongruously, a previously mentioned *Placer Times* newspaper article dated March 23, 1850, places the hook and ladder company's founding on March 20, 1850, during a meeting at the City Hotel at which time a resolution passed for the "immediate organization of a Fire company, to be called the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 of Sacramento city." The February 5, 1850, date nevertheless became proverbially set in stone as later newspaper articles repeated Nevett's inaccuracy. That mistaken date can be found in Sacramento city directories and history books, including *An Illustrated History of Sacramento County, California*, published in 1890 by official Sacramento Pioneer Association historian Winfield J. Davis. Regardless of the perpetuated month-and-a-half error, Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 remains California's first fire company as San Francisco's Empire Engine Co. No. 1 didn't organize until June 4, 1850.

Worse hazards than misremembered dates imperiled

Sacramento's firemen. Because of the high risk of life and limb taken on by these unpaid volunteers, ten esteemed doctors from Sacramento's medical community organized the Board of Physicians and Surgeons of the Sacramento Fire Department on December 5, 1854. Among the ten, Dr. John F. Morse, Dr. Gregory J. Phelan, Dr. Harvey W. Harkness and Dr. Volney Spalding also held membership in the Sacramento Pioneer Association.

By January of 1855, Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 boasted fifty-two members. On January 8 of that year, The *Sacramento Daily Union* printed the name of each one. Among the fifty-two named, twenty-four held membership in, or would become members of, the Sacramento Pioneer Association.

From July 18, 1855, to June 30, 1858, the Sacramento Pioneer Association met regularly in the second floor of the Lehman building across from the *Union* office on J Street, between Front and Second Streets. When renovations conducted by the owner of the building caused the Pioneers to seek a new home, it comes as no surprise they looked to Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1, especially considering the Pioneer Association board at that time consisted of President John F. Morse, Vice-President J. H. Nevett, Corresponding Secretary N. A. H. Ball, and Directors Gregory Phelan and J. H. Culver - each one affiliated with the Mutuels.

The Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1 disbanded on October 30, 1859. Since 1854, the Engine House of Confidence Engine Co. No. 1 adjoined the Mutuels' hall on Third Street, and so the engine company appropriated the building as its own company headquarters. The Sacramento Pioneer Association continued to meet regularly at the hall until it closed for renovation in October of 1866. The Pioneers convened at the County Court Rooms until January of 1869 when they dedicated Pioneer Hall on 7th Street, between J and K Streets.

Among those intrepid forty-niners who rushed to California inspired by dreams of fortunes in gold for the taking, some chose to forego the gold fields and instead settled in the newly founded city of Sacramento, to grow commerce and industry and to foster civilization in the distant and undeveloped Pacific fringe of the United States. This breed of citizen became the seed of the Sacramento Pioneer Association - builders and preservers of civilization who bore a strong sense of civic duty. In like manner, such men formed Sacramento's first fire company; their mission to preserve and protect the impressive yet precarious civilization so recently germinated in the California wilderness. A substantial number of Mutual Hook and Ladder firemen joined the Sacramento Pioneer Association. The purpose of the two organizations spawned from the same noble desire.





Rohit Jhawar **2020 Scholarship Award**

Scholarship awardee Rohit Jhawar, a graduating senior at Sacramento's Kennedy High School, confidently accepted the microphone to address attending Pioneers at the March 12 annual dinner meeting. Well versed in the art of rhetoric, the appreciative recipient informed the crowd that he serves as president of his high school debate team, which ranked as one of the country's top twenty debate teams last year. Rohit also has the honor of representing the United States on the National Debate Team. He intends to earn an MD as an orthopedic surgeon as well as PhD to conduct medical research. Rohit enjoys reading works of political philosophy and has a passion for cooking. His father and younger brother accompanied him to the dinner. The young scholar plans to attend UC Berkeley in the fall. We wish Rohit well in all of his future endeavors.

Michael Shepard **2020 Pioneer of the Year** by Thea Rygg

Vice President Bill Gould introduced the 2020 Pioneer of the Year, Michael Shepard, at the annual dinner meeting. Mr. Shepard, a past-president and editor of the Association's quarterly newsletter since 2013, expressed his gratitude to the membership for the award. He acknowledged his late grandfather, past-President Bob Livingston, who received the Pioneer award in 2007 and who would have been thrilled to know that his grandson received the award. Shepard thanked Kay Wood, in attendance, for sponsoring his membership to the Association seven years ago. Members also elected Michael to the office of secretary at the dinner meeting. He looks forward to his continued work with the Sacramento Pioneer Association and is honored to serve in a position once held by esteemed Pioneers such as Samuel Colville and Tom Hammer. In compliance with Governor Newsom's stay-at-home-order, Michael has been keeping busy producing the June newsletter and tending to his three pet goats.

Supporting Sacramento's Young Historians: Sacramento County History Day at Inderkum High School, March 7, 2020 by Karun Yee

Rain Again! That's how the 7:30 am meeting for judges started at the annual Sacramento County History Day this year.

The purpose of the event is to motivate students to discover and enjoy the study of history researching, building historical content and forming a thesis based on this year's theme: *Breaking Barriers in History*.

The project categories include posters, exhibits, documentaries, websites, performances and historical papers. Students are from 4th-12th grades. Judging is based on quality, clarity of presentation and adherence to the theme.

The Sacramento Pioneer Association's representative, Karun Yee (special judge 12 years), reviewed all projects encompassing our California area related focus. We awarded Daniel Dang, David Nguyen and Amell Santa Maria for their work entitled *The Iron Express*. Their senior division exhibit clearly told the story of how the US government had to overcome obstacles like coming out of the Civil War, finances and organization, finding workers, land surveying and venturing into unknown territory. The Transcontinental railway project was a Herculean feat no one could imagine was possible.

Our second award was presented to Faizan Islam, Abdullah Mahmood and Sanjit Nijjar for their senior exhibit *Ride to the West*, which also focused on the Transcontinental Railroad. This team used recorded interviews to tell their story. Because we were only allowed two special awards per organization, it was very difficult to choose. Honorable mentions are *Building the Golden Gate* and *Building the Golden Gate Bridge*, both in elementary poster division.

Congratulations to all students in their search for enlightenment. Dr. Bob LaPerriere presented the monetary awards in afternoon ceremonies. This event is a great opportunity for Sacramento Pioneer Association members to introduce our organization to community, counselors, teachers and students. Come join the judging team next year!

**Sacramento Pioneer Association
Annual Dinner Meeting at Del Paso Country Club
Thursday, March 12, 2020**



**Scholarship award recipient Rohit Jhawar
and President Bill Schaw**



Michael Shepard and Bill Schaw



Mark Rathe, Fitz Miller, Laurie Glines, Alexis Allen, David Allen

Photos by Shelley Ford



Sacramento Pioneer Association
1731 Howe Ave, #639
Sacramento, CA 95825-2209

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