

**SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION**

OUR 169TH YEAR

# PIONEER NEWSLETTER

**JUNE 2022**

**SUMMER EDITION**



**State Agricultural Pavilion at Sixth and M Streets**

**Message from  
President Bill Gould**

**Sacramento Pioneer N. A. H. Ball  
And the Washington Monument**

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# Sacramento Pioneer Association Quarterly Newsletter



## Officers

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Vice President.....Lori Gualco  
Secretary.....Michael Shepard  
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### Term ending March 2023

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### Term ending March 2024

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## Newsletter Editor

Michael Shepard

**Cover image:** The *Sacramento City Directory* for the year 1860 included within its pages a print of the newly constructed State Agricultural Pavilion on the corner of 6th and M Streets, and declared the impressive Romanesque-style structure “one of the finest buildings in California.” The write-up in the *Directory* added “the Main Hall of the Pavilion is the largest clear chamber or public room in the United States.” The roof especially impressed visitors as “one of the most prominent features of the entire structure. It had been framed of Puget Sound lumber, in one span of one hundred feet without any support.” Sacramento Pioneer O. C. Wheeler served as secretary of the Agricultural Society. The Sutter Rifles utilized one of the Pavilion rooms as its armory.

## Sacramento Pioneer Association Pioneer Newsletter TM

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## President's Message

Greetings Pioneers!

Where has the year gone! Here we are - as I write - in mid-May and the year is almost half over.

When I penned my last report, we were looking forward to our Annual Meeting. It has come and gone, and was a great success. We can now look forward to other gatherings, and you will hear more about them soon, as Katie Brown and Barb Collopy are working on some outstanding events.

When you receive this newsletter you may also receive the long awaited Anthology of Pioneer newsletter articles, and also our updated membership roster.

The Anthology will be great summer reading, our resident historian Michael Shepard's work is outstanding.

On May 16th, the Board held a brief meeting at Pioneer Hall to unveil the historic photo of the original association membership. Thanks go to Wendel Flint and George Artz for this special gift that now enhances the lobby of Pioneer Hall.

We continue to seek a tenant for the first floor of the Hall, and are optimistic that the downtown area is recovering. Financially we have felt the impact of volatile markets, however, we have not suffered greatly, and will be in good shape when we have a tenant for our empty space at Pioneer Hall.

Regards, Bill

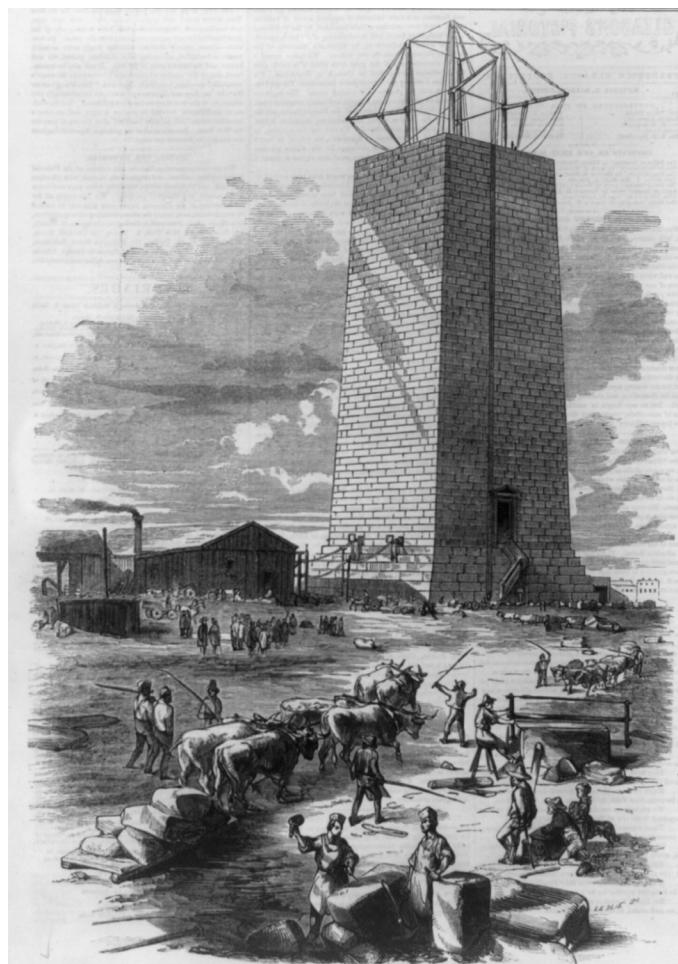


## Sacramento Pioneer N. A. H. Ball and the Washington Monument

When the Sacramento Pioneer Association formed on January 24, 1854, N. A. H. Ball served as the organization's first Corresponding Secretary. A year-and-a-half earlier, Ball served as an agent of the Washington Monument Association appointment by Thomas O. Larkin (who had served as the only US consul to Alta California during Mexican rule). The article below announces the progress of the national project.

**Daily Alta California  
October 28, 1852**

**WASHINGTON MONUMENT.** – We have received from Mr. N. A. H. Ball, subagent in this State for the collection of contributions to the Washington National Monument, a poster to be placarded near every ballot-box on the day of the election. The Managers at Washington City report that up to July 1<sup>st</sup> of the present year the sum of \$175,000 has been collected, and \$168,000 expended. It will require \$377,000 to complete the work. The monument is now 117 feet high, and will have to be raised to the height of 500 feet. It is calculated that if every voter in the United States contributes ONE DIME on the day of the election, that a sufficient amount will be collected to complete the great national work.



**View of Washington Monument (1853)**  
Courtesy: Library of Congress



# Joseph H. Virgo's Star-Crossed Destiny

By Michael Shepard

Rarely had the citizens of Sacramento city expressed such an outpouring of sympathy and support for one of their own than when Joseph H. Virgo unexpectedly died. Death took the thirty-four-year-old early on Friday morning, December 7, 1860. From Saturday to Sunday, Virgo's body lay in state, guarded by members of the Sutter Rifles, at the State Agricultural Pavillion on Sixth and M Streets, where the militia maintained its armory. The *Sacramento Daily Union* estimated two thousand attendees at Joseph Virgo's funeral on Sunday afternoon at 1pm when the service commenced under the auspices of Reverend O. C. Wheeler, a Sacramento Pioneer and secretary of the State Agricultural Society.

Upon conclusion of the Reverend's eulogy, a procession formed to escort the deceased to his final resting place at the Sacramento city cemetery. The Union Brass Band played Chopin's *Funeral March* as it led mourners from the Agricultural Hall, down Sixth Street to K Street, up K Street to Ninth Street, and up Ninth Street to its terminus at the burial ground. The firing squad followed the band, and behind them came the hearse with eight pallbearers comprised of two representatives each from the Sutter Rifles, the Sacramento Pioneer Association, Exempt Firemen and the City Guard. Next marched regular members of the Sutter Rifles, the City Guard, the Sacramento Hussars, the Sacramento Pioneer Association, and the Exempt Firemen. The Reverend O. C. Wheeler's carriage continued the procession with carriages of mourners and carriages of citizens in tow. In addition, residents lined the streets to watch the solemn procession pass by. At the cemetery, the Reverend offered another prayer, and the firing squad fired a final salute over Joseph H. Virgo's grave.

In life, the Lansingburgh, New York, native had attracted a commendable number of friends and admirers in his adopted city of Sacramento. Joseph H. Virgo honed his business acumen and social skills as a thriving saloon keeper. His sense of civic duty remained beyond reproach as a volunteer militia member as well as a volunteer fireman. Virgo actively participated in local politics, and even ran for elected office. His mode and date of arrival in California remains elusive; but Virgo's membership in the Sacramento Pioneer Association confirms his arrival prior to January 1, 1850. Several of Joseph's fellow Sacramento Pioneers served with him as business associates, brothers in arms, firemen, and elected officials.

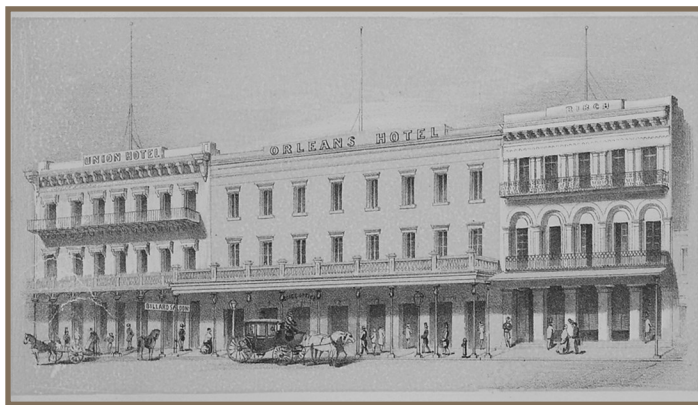
Shortly after his arrival in California, Virgo established himself as a saloon keeper in Sacramento. As early as December of 1850, an advertisement in the *Sacramento Transcript* dated December 21, 1850, places him at the El Dorado Saloon on J Street. An article the following month in the *Sacramento Daily Union* suggests a partnership in the El Dorado Saloon between Virgo and J. P. Dyer, future mayor of Sacramento and future director

of the Sacramento Pioneer Association.

The Challenge Saloon opened on J Street, between the El Dorado and American Theater, under the management of Virgo & Co. in August of 1852. Less than a month in operation, Virgo changed the name of the Challenge to the Fashion because another saloon named the Challenge already existed in the vicinity of 3<sup>rd</sup> and J Streets. The great fire of November 2, 1852, burned the Fashion to ash along with much of Sacramento city. Virgo quickly rebuilt, and the Fashion reopened on November 19, 1852, to accommodate the recovering community with much needed social diversion.

In the spring of 1854, Virgo and Dyer opened another saloon on the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and J Streets called the Sazerac, named after the popular cocktail of the day concocted in New Orleans made exclusively with Sazerac brandy.

In 1857, proprietor of the Orleans Hotel, fellow Sacramento Pioneer, and former Sacramento Mayor James R. Hardenbergh leased the bar of the Orleans Hotel to Joseph Virgo, at which time, Joseph's reputation preceded him. In the March 6, 1857, edition of the *Sacramento Daily Union*, the newspaper editor acknowledged: "By reference to our advertising columns, it will be seen that the bar of the "Orleans" has been leased by J. H. VIRGO. To those who are acquainted with the new lessee – and their name is "legion," – it is unnecessary to say a word. To strangers, we will only say give him a call ONCE, - the SECOND visit will follow as a matter of course."



Orleans Hotel on 2nd Street, Between J and K Streets

A Sacramento militia organized in June of 1852 under the name of Governor's Guard for the purpose of celebrating the upcoming day of national independence. Virgo served as the company's 4<sup>th</sup> Orderly Sergeant. The Guard turned out for the celebration in full uniform, which included black frock coats, black belt, white pantaloons, and blue caps.

By the summer of 1855, Sergeant Joseph H. Virgo appears on the roster of the Sutter Rifles' officers; nearly every one of them a Sacramento Pioneer including General John A. Sutter. While the Sutter Rifles trained thoroughly for martial action, its actual duties involved participating in parades and hosting joint civic and military balls.

Sacramento's first fire company, Mutual Hook &

Ladder Co. No. 1, added Virgo to its ranks in 1855. The company elected him 2<sup>nd</sup> assistant foreman the following year. By 1858, the Mutuals elected Virgo one of its delegates to the Sacramento Fire Department; Virgo's old business partner J. P. Dyer served as the hook & ladder company's president at the time.

Like many of his fellow Sacramento Pioneers, Virgo took an active interest in politics. The Sacramento Whigs, at their municipal convention in March of 1855, elected Virgo as a delegate for upcoming primary elections. Virgo switched party affiliation the following year, and the American party nominated him as its candidate for Sacramento constable at a "meeting of the people" held in front of the Orleans Hotel on September 17, 1856. He won the November 4 election.

Following the sensational murder of San Francisco journalist James King of William on May 20, 1856, the subsequent formation of a Committee of Vigilance in that city, and the trial and public hanging of the accused, Governor J. Neely Johnson (a member of the Sacramento Pioneer Association) called on the militia of the State to prepare to march on San Francisco to force the disbanding of the Committee. The order proved extremely controversial. Most members of the Sutter Rifles, including Constable Virgo, responded dutifully to the call of the Governor. The Sacramento City Guards, however, voluntarily disbanded rather than march against citizens San Francisco. The Sutter Rifles promptly moved to secure the arms and accoutrements that the City Guards left behind. Apparently, the Governor never issued marching orders.

Vigilantism versus Law and Order remained a divisive subject for some time in California. On August 7, 1857, an incident in Sacramento's Union Hotel barroom involving none other than Samuel Brannan and Ned McGowan (a notorious political party boss charged and acquitted just two months earlier as an accessory to the murder of James King) nearly devolved into violence. Brannan, a Vigilance man who appeared to be drunk, exchanged words with McGowan who favored Law and Order. McGowan accused Brannan of making a speech in the Plaza at San Francisco in support of the Vigilance Committee, and he called Brannan a "damned strangler." Brannan marched upstairs and returned with a revolver evident beneath his coat. McGowan seized the "English self-cocking pistol" and handed it to Constable Virgo who apparently had been present during the heated discussion between the two. Both Brannan and McGowan were arrested. The Sacramento Daily Union dated August 8, 1857, reported that "The cases were dismissed by the Court. It did not appear in the view of the Court that Brannan had drawn his pistol, or that McGowan had done anything which could be deemed as a disturbance of the peace."

Ten years of public service in Sacramento had earned Joseph H. Virgo an enviable reputation. One can only imagine the personality that accompanied the man. In any case, Virgo possessed dear friends who held him in the highest regard. When, in December of 1860, Virgo became ill, his friends confined him to his room in Sacramento's Magnolia Hotel and took turns watching

over him day and night.

The porter of the Magnolia recalled that Virgo's "mind was flighty on yesterday morning and again last evening...talking to himself and at times raving." Virgo's friend, a Mr. Kercheval, did his best to calm his anxious ward who paced "the room praying, and raving at intervals until about five o'clock A. M." At that early hour on the morning of December 7, 1860, something dreadful occurred. Joseph H. Virgo somehow obtained a penknife, plunged it into his neck and began to cut his own throat. Kercheval attempted to stop the self-directed attack, and he called desperately for help; but Virgo soon lay dead. He had severed his own trachea and the right jugular vein as well.

That very day, the coroner held an inquest. "The jury, after hearing the evidence, found by their verdict, that the deceased, Joseph H. Virgo, came to his death from knife wounds in the neck, inflicted with a pocket-knife held in his own hand, while he was suffering from temporary insanity or mental derangement."

The Sutter Rifles held a meeting at their armory in the State Agricultural Pavilion during which they unanimously adopted a series of resolutions regarding their late brother in arms, Joseph H. Virgo. They recognized "the loss of one who was a gallant soldier, a genial and cherished companion, either on duty or in the private walks of life – to a friend true and generous, to mankind whole souled and open handed, and a high-minded and worthy citizen." They resolved to "wear the usual badge of mourning for the period of thirty days." They resolved that "the thanks of the Company be tendered to the City Guard, Sacramento Hussars, Pioneer Association, and Exempt Firemen, for their generous response to our invitation to participate in the last sad rites to our deceased member." Finally, they resolved to send a copy of the resolutions to the deceased's family.

Two months later, the Sutter Rifles received a correspondence from New York, which the *Sacramento Daily Union* printed on February 28, 1861:

E. E. Eyre., Esq, Captain of the Sutter Rifles – Dear Sir: I am in receipt of a copy of the resolutions and proceedings of your Company at a meeting held at Sacramento, December 9<sup>th</sup>, on the occasion of the death of my brother Joseph H. Virgo. Allow me to return yourself and Company, also to the City Guard, Sacramento Hussars, Pioneer Association and Exempt Firemen, the sincere and heartfelt thanks of the aged mother of the deceased and myself for the sympathy manifested to us and the respect shown to the remains of my departed brother. It is a consolation to us to know that my brother had warm and sincere friends to perform the last sad offices to his remains, and to stand round his grave in sorrow.

I am, with much respect, yours very truly,  
WILLIAM VIRGO.  
New York, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1861.



# Pioneer(s) of the Year(s)

## 2021 Pioneer of the Year Bill Schaw

Introduced by Michael Shepard

In January of 1855, just one year after the Sacramento Pioneer Association first organized, the Pioneers began to hold lectures to inform and entertain Association members and the public. The lectures continued regularly throughout the 1850s and 1860s. The last lecture appears to have been held in December of 1869.

In more recent years, many of you will remember, the Pioneers invited guest speakers to deliver orations during each annual dinner meeting. However, organizers of the dinner meeting learned that you folks preferred socializing with your fellow Pioneers rather than listening to some scholar blather on. Point noted, so I'll be brief.

In November of 2016, the Sacramento Pioneer Association revisited the lecture as an event unto itself featuring inaugural speaker Mark Wahlberg of Antiques Roadshow fame. Additional lectures followed, one or two a year, and included local film maker Bill George, and Chair of the Center of the American West Patty Limerick, held in venues such as the Crocker Art Museum theater and the California State Railroad Museum theater.

Then in March of 2020, society went on Covid lockdown. By December of 2020, the Pioneer lectures went online via Zoom. Speakers included historian Steve Beck, Marsha Eymann of the Center for Sacramento History, historian William Burg, and most recently Archivist for the Sacramento City Library's Sacramento Room James Scott.

One Pioneer among us has done more to revitalize the speaker program, to seek out and bring to us compelling pre-pandemic lecturers, and during Covid, he masterfully set up and hosted Zoom lectures for our organization, a skill that he developed as president presiding over Zoom board meetings during the lockdown.

This Pioneer's deep involvement with our Association's speaker series is just one of the many reasons that it is with honor and pleasure that I introduce to you the 2021 Pioneer of the Year – Bill Schaw.

## 2022 Pioneer of the Year Rob Taylor

Introduced by Thom Gilbert

The SPA maintains two historic properties, Pioneer Hall on Seventh Street, and Pioneer Gove that is part of the Sacramento City Cemetery. The properties have been well maintained by the dedication of several key volunteers. The 2022 recipient, Rob Taylor, has dedicated countless hours toward the efforts of maintaining Pioneer Grove. Rob has served on the SPA Board of Directors, and for many years in the leadership of the Cemetery Maintenance Committee. Rob is currently the Committee Chair. He is our expert regarding the history of Pioneer Grove as well as Sacramento City cemetery regulations. He is currently working on re-doing the strategic plan and digitizing it along with the plat maps. Rob describes the Cemetery Maintenance Committee on the SPA website as follows:

"Over the last 150 years weather, pollution and vandals have taken their toll on the stone walkways, brick walls and headstones within the cemetery. The Maintenance Committee has restored much of the stonework to its original appearance and design. The Committee is totally self-funded through donations from Association members and a perpetual trust fund. It does not receive any financial assistance from city taxes or government funding."

Pioneer Grove remains one of the Association's most significant assets along with Pioneer Hall (and, of course, its members). Rob's service on the Maintenance Committee is of utmost importance to the SPA.



# 2022 Annual Dinner Meeting

After two years of postponed in-person Pioneer Association annual dinner meetings (replaced by serviceable, but less pleasurable, Zoom video conference calls), a sizeable gathering of Sacramento Pioneers coalesced on the evening of Thursday, March 10, 2022, at Del Paso Country Club to conduct the Association's annual business of elections, and more importantly to bring old and new friends together for the much anticipated seasonal event.

Per usual, Del Paso Country Club served a delicious dinner, which included a selection of entrees featuring fillet of Scottish salmon, filet Mignon, or stuffed eggplant.

Prior to calling the meeting to order, President Bill Gould acknowledged outgoing Directors Jim Phillips and Trisha Setzer. He thanked them for their service.

In accordance with the Association's bylaws, President Gould appointed this year's nominating committee, which included Chairman Steve Huffman, Katie Brown, Jim Craig, Martha Hughes and Mark Rathe. President Gould gave the floor to Nominating Committee Chairman Steve Huffman to conduct elections. The membership unanimously approved the election of the following nominees:

President with term ending March 2023: Bill Gould

Vice President with term ending March 2023: Lori Gualco

Secretary with term ending March 2023: Michael Shepard

Treasurer with term ending March 2023: Thom Gilbert

Directors with terms ending March 2025: Katie Brown, Jeanie MacAulay, Molly Wiese

President Gould welcomed new Directors Jeanie MacAulay and Molly Wiese, and adjourned the formal meeting. Festivities resumed.

## Scholarship Winners

Vice President Lori Gualco, chair of the scholarship committee, reached out to counselors in the Sacramento City Unified School District to encourage university-bound seniors to apply for the annually awarded Sacramento Pioneer Association scholarship. Candidates must embody scholastic excellence and express in writing how California or Sacramento history has influenced her/his career plans, and why is it important for students to know the cultural or natural history of the Sacramento region.

This year, the scholarship committee selected three deserving graduating students to receive awards, whom the board unanimously approved. Pioneers awarded Alirayane Harsha the Joan Kibbey Taylor Scholarship for \$5,000; Ryan Tang and Francisco Ciraulo each received a Sacramento Pioneer Association Scholarship for \$5,000. All three students attended the annual dinner meeting, each with a member his family.

We wish Alirayane, Ryan and Francisco success in their scholastic endeavors.



Ryan Tang

Lori Gualco

Alirayane Harsha

Francisco Ciraulo

Bill Gould



## Half-Off Membership Drive

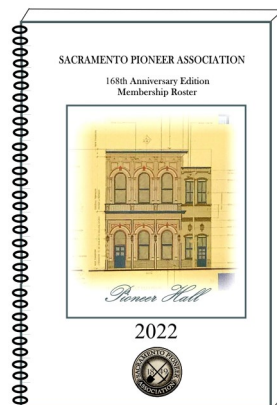
Know someone who would enjoy membership in the Sacramento Pioneer Association?

From July 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2022, the membership fee for new members is only \$125 (half-off the regular \$250 fee).  
Tell a friend!



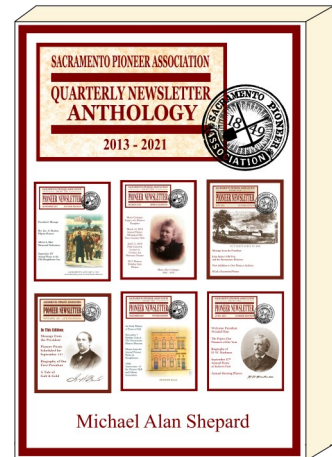
## 2022 Roster

The updated 2022 Sacramento Pioneer Association Roster is hot off the press. It's your way to keep in touch with fellow Pioneers. One free copy to each member courtesy of the Association.



## Quarterly Newsletter Anthology

Thirty-two historical vignettes originally featured in the Association's quarterly newsletter comprise this new Anthology. Each member will receive a free copy.



## Calendar of Events

### 2022

**Saturday, September 24**  
(date subject to change)

SPA Annual Picnic, tentatively at  
San Joaquin County Historical Museum

**Thursday, December 1**  
(date subject to change)

SPA Annual Holiday Party, tentatively at  
SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity

### 2023

**Tuesday, January 24**  
(event in the works)

175th anniversary of James Marshall's  
discovery of gold at Coloma

**Thursday, March 9**  
(date subject to change)

SPA Annual Dinner Meeting at  
Del Paso Country Club