

SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION

OUR 168TH YEAR

PIONEER NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2021

AUTUMN EDITION



Message from
President Bill Gould

171st Anniversary of
California Admission

1863 Pioneer
Excursion to the
Alabaster Cave

September 25
Annual Pioneer Picnic
at the Effie Yeaw
Nature Center

Remembering
Past President
Dr. Herbert K. Yee



“Crystal Chapel”
Alabaster Cave, El Dorado County

Sacramento Pioneer Association Quarterly Newsletter



IN MEMORIAM

Herbert K. Yee, D.D.S.
Past President



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President.....Bill Gould
Vice President.....Lori Gualco
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Treasurer.....Thom Gilbert

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Term ending March 2022

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Term ending March 2023

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Shelley Ford

Newsletter Editor

Michael Shepard

Cover image: This widely distributed wood engraving appeared in the December 1860 edition of *Hutchings' California Magazine* as well as other publications. Sacramento Pioneer Association member William Gwynn, proprietor of the Alabaster Cave, offers a description of the "Crystal Chapel" in a letter to a friend, which numerous local newspapers reproduced including the Marysville *Daily National Democrat* on April 22, 1860:

On our first entrance we descended about fifteen feet to the centre of the room, which is about one hundred by thirty feet. At the north end there is a magnificent pulpit in the Episcopal Church style. It is completed by beautiful drapery of alabaster stalactites of all colors, varying from white to pink-red, which overhang the beholder.

Sacramento Pioneer Association Pioneer Newsletter TM

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President's Message

Greetings Pioneers!

It appears that the light at the end of the tunnel is close at hand - at least we all hope so!

The Board of Directors held it's June meeting - Zoom Free - in Pioneer Grove at the City Cemetery. It was delightful to see and greet Board members in person. We had a tour and interesting talk by our cemetery co-chair Rob Taylor. He was joined by our resident historian Michael Shepard who contributed historic tidbits. It was rewarding to spend time in our cemetery and to see at firsthand what a beautiful and well-maintained place it is.

Our other property, Pioneer Hall remains without a first-floor tenant, but there has been interest shown and we are hopeful to see it occupied by the end of the year. Even without a fully leased Pioneer Hall the association is in good shape financially. With a strong financial position, we were able to award two scholarships to outstanding students and we hope to be able to do that every year.

Our social agenda long dormant as a result of the Covid shutdown is about to be revived. Trisha Setzer and her committee have planned an outstanding Picnic at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center on Saturday, September 25th. Good food and drinks in a terrific setting! Be there or be square!! The picnic will also be the start of a membership drive that will offer good deals to the folks who join. You will learn more at the picnic.

As the year winds down we look forward to the publication of a book consisting of articles that have appeared in our newsletter. Hopefully it will be available for holiday gift giving.

Lastly, speaking of the holidays, our annual holiday party will be held at the California Automobile Museum (formerly the Towe Automobile Museum) on Thursday, December 2nd.

As you can see, we have a great deal to look forward to.

Kindest Regards,

Bill

California Admission Day September 9th, 2021

One hundred and seventy-one years ago this September 9th, the United States admitted California to the Union as the 31st State by the authority of the signature of President Millard Fillmore. The United States Senate had approved California's admission the previous month on August 13th, 1850, with a vote of 33 to 16; the House passed the same bill on September 7th with a vote of 150 to 57. Votes in Congress against the California bill all derived from "ultra southern members." California Senators-elect John C. Frémont and William M. Gwin had been waiting in Washington in anticipation and took their oaths of office on September 10th.

While California's representatives in Washington formalized their offices the day after admission, the residents of the Golden State remained unaware of their newly acquired citizenship until October 18th when the steamer *Oregon* made a celebratory entrance into San Francisco Bay adorned with flags, guns firing and displaying a proud banner that read:

"CALIFORNIA IS ADMITTED."



The Alabaster Cave

By Michael Shepard

Two workmen employed by William Gwynn, a Sacramento Pioneer Association member and proprietor of an El Dorado County lime kiln, discovered something fantastic as they excavated an outcropping of limestone near Wild Goose Flat on the north fork of the American River on April 18, 1860. With a forceful blow from a pickax, one of the workers broke through solid rock to expose a dark void "through which came a current of air with a moaning sound, that awakened their curiosity, and upon examination, to their astonishment and delight they found they had discovered a cave of considerable size," according to an account printed in the April 28, 1860, Nevada County newspaper *The Hydraulic Press*.

William Gwynn explored the depths of the cavern, and it left him profoundly in awe. He promptly penned a letter to a friend in Sacramento, in which he describes "the most beautiful cave you ever beheld." Narrow passages connected three distinct and separate grottoes. A myriad of stalactites and stalagmites sparkled and glistened throughout in the lantern light. The most impressive chamber, roughly one hundred by thirty feet, possessed a massive stone formation that Gwynn described as "the most magnificent pulpit, in the Episcopal church style," complete with calcified drapery of varying colors. This chamber he dubbed the "Crystal Chapel."

William Gwynn named the cavern Alabaster Cave after his kiln and limestone deposit, which heretofore had been known as Alabaster Marble Quarry. Visitors came from far and wide to experience the subterranean spectacle. Descriptions soon appeared in newspapers throughout northern California. Numerous articles expressed wonder and amazement at nature's artistry. Gwynn's workmen carved a larger entrance to the cave some thirty feet from the original aperture. They installed a wooden plank gangway and railings to prevent visitors from injuring themselves on the uneven ground, or from seeking souvenirs. Already, many fine specimens of stalactites and stalagmites had found their way to private collections.

During the first two months alone, nine hundred seventy guests had signed the cave's registry. Even His Royal Highness Prince Kamehameha of the Sandwich Islands, and entourage, visited Alabaster Cave during his visit to California in autumn of 1860. The Reverend O. C. Wheeler, a notable member of the Sacramento Pioneer Association, explored the cave as secretary of the State Agricultural Society

along with a visiting committee of that society's members. Young couples exchanged vows in the Crystal Chapel. A songstress serenaded the cavern with a rendition of *The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls*.

In June of 1862, Mr. D. A. Wilson capitalized on the cave's popularity by opening the Alabaster Hotel "where good rooms, and good beds, and excellent food can be had," complete with dancing hall. William Gwynn appeared to be pleased with the newly constructed tourist accommodations. He and Mr. Wilson advertised the cave and hotel together in the Sacramento *Daily Union*.

ALABASTER CAVE!

THE GREATEST NATURAL CURIOSITY yet discovered in the State, is

NOW OPEN

And prepared to receive visitors. This wonderful and magnificent piece of Nature's handiwork is situated in Salmon Falls township, El Dorado county, ten (10) miles from Folsom, where at all times visitors can obtain ANY KIND OF CONVEYANCE desirable at reasonable prices. The road is now in good order, free from dust, and surrounded with NATURAL SCENERY second to none in the State. In connection with the Cave is a good HOTEL, where the wants of the inner man will be carefully attended to; also a new and commodious DANCING HALL, that will at all times be at the service of visitors FREE OF CHARGE.

WM. GWYNN, Proprietor.
D. A. WILSON, Agent.

je9-1m1p

Sacramento *Daily Union*, June 9, 1862

Three months later, in September of 1862, the Sacramento Valley Railroad opened its terminal at Auburn Station, roughly located where the current Auburn Folsom Road intersects with Whiskey Bar Road in Loomis. Alabaster Cave lay only two and a half miles from Auburn Station, but on the other side of the American River, so Gwynn erected a suspension bridge across the river between Rattlesnake Bar and Wild Goose Flat. The bridge proved to be a boon for tourism from Sacramento.

Alabaster Cave! Alabaster Cave!

THE OWNER OF THIS CAVE informs the public that he has completed the **WIRE SUSPENSION BRIDGE** over the American river at Rattlesnake Bar, making the communication direct to the Cave. The curious can see the Wonders of Nature from Fire to Water. To appreciate, go and see.

je25tf WM. GWYNN, Owner.

Marysville *Daily Appeal*, June 25, 1863

When the Sacramento Pioneer Association met at Confidence Engine Hall on September 5, 1863, to

plan the thirteenth anniversary celebration of California statehood, the Pioneers decided upon an excursion to fellow Pioneer William Gwynn's Alabaster Cave.

The Sacramento *Daily Union* printed the following announcement in its September 7 edition:

The Sacramento Pioneers will celebrate the thirteenth anniversary of the admittance of California into the Union by a picnic excursion to the Alabaster Cave, Wednesday, September 9th. They have made arrangements for a special train of cars, and will leave the foot of K street, at nine o'clock A. M., for Auburn Station, where a sufficient number of stages will be ready to convey the Pioneers and their friends to the celebrated cave. The exercises will consist of visiting; collation of fish chowder and refreshments furnished by the ladies; music by the Philharmonic Society; oration by a distinguished gentleman of this city; music and dancing in the Cave House. They will return at sundown. We are pleased to announce that the excursion will not be confined to the members of the Pioneer Association alone, but other citizens will have the privilege of participating in the exercises of the day on equal terms with members.

The Pioneer Association sold tickets for the excursion priced at \$5 per gentleman and no cost for escorted ladies. Pleased with the turnout, the Pioneers reported the sale of ninety-six tickets. Assuming each gentleman would accompany one to two ladies, the association estimated in excess of two hundred participants. The committee of arrangements secured an appropriate number of cars with the railroad as well as wagon transportation from Auburn Station to Alabaster Cave.

The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men... At the last minute, a throng of Pioneers "bought tickets and brought along their wives and daughters, their baskets and their stores, solid and liquid," the *Daily Union* reported the following day. "The natural consequence was a universal jam, nobody being ready for so large a party." Three hundred and forty excursionists and their well-filled baskets squeezed into four passenger cars and one baggage car.

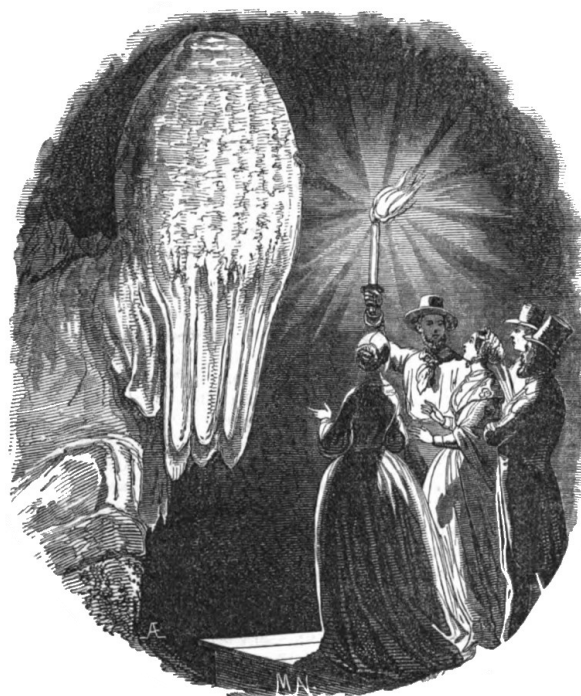
The train left Sacramento just after nine o'clock, made good time and arrived at Auburn Station at eleven. The multitude of excursionist overwhelmed the awaiting wagons. "Several lumber wagons and one six-mule Washoe schooner were impressed, and these, with one or two teams in the livery stable, exhausted the possibilities of wheels, unless, indeed, the Pioneers had seen fit, which they didn't, to imitate the London chap in the nursery song who was 'forced to bring his wife home in a wheelbarrow.'" A score or two of men organized a foot brigade and marched the two and a half miles to

the cave.

Despite the logistical complications, the excursionists appeared to have a grand time. The Alabaster cave served as the chief attraction of the day's activities, but additional entertainment included a picnic lunch, musicians in the hotel dance hall, hikes over golden hills, or simple relaxation under the shade of an oak tree. The day culminated with a large kettle of chowder cooked under a pine tree. The trek back to Auburn Station then ensued. The *Daily Union* reported a jovial return to Sacramento aboard the train filled with conversation, laughter and song.

For decades, the Alabaster Cave remained a site to be seen in El Dorado County. Eventually, however, William Gwynn sold his cave and quarry to pursue other business interests. The H. T. Holmes Lime Company acquired the land, probably in 1880, and in 1886, reopened the Alabaster Cave to the public. The company installed as many as fifty gas burners to illuminate the chambers, and constructed bridges and stairways to modernize the cavern. The H. T. Holmes Lime Company even prepared to build a new hotel constructed of limestone near the cave; but by 1888, the lime company sold the Alabaster Cave to Mr. J. H. Russell who marketed the attraction as a "marvel of beauty" and a "great freak of nature." He charged 50 cents admission.

By the turn of the century, the Alabaster Cave had become a relic. A century later, the wondrous cavern slumbers hidden beneath the El Dorado foothills, sealed off from the world on private land, its splendors unseen and almost completely forgotten.



"The Pulpit"
Alabaster Cave, El Dorado County

Remembering Dr. Herbert K. Yee Through Archived Letters

By Michael Shepard

Herbert K. Yee, D.D.S., the Sacramento Pioneer Association's 64th president, passed away on June 26, 2021, at the age of 96. Volumes could be written about Dr. Yee's accomplished professional life in Sacramento, his community leadership and his philanthropy (much, in fact, has been written), not to mention his impressive California pioneer pedigree that dates back to great-grandfather Yee Fung Cheung's arrival in Fiddletown in 1851.

Dr. Yee's extensive involvement in the Sacramento community as well as his ancestral ties to the region led then-president of the Pioneers Bob Livingston to sponsor his friend and Land Park neighbor for membership in the organization. The Association archive preserves Livingston's March 14, 1983, letter of recommendation addressed to Secretary Tom Hammer, which formally introduces Dr. Yee. It reads:

Previously the name of Dr. Herbert K. Yee was presented to the Board and now his qualifications for membership are offered on a more formal basis.

His great-grandfather came to California in 1850 to care for the Chinese miners in the Mother Lode. This pioneer was the first herb doctor in America and his herb store in Fiddletown is still standing.

Dr. Herbert K. Yee is a graduate of Stanford University and University of the Pacific School of Dentistry. In addition to actively practicing dentistry, he is serving as chairman of the board of Sacramento Valley Bank. He is a member of the Board of Regents of University of the Pacific and the board of Regents of the International College of Dentists. He is past president of the California State Board of Dental Examiners. In 1974 he was named National Dentist of the Year by the American Association of Dental Examiners. He is past president of the Capitol Lions Club and past district governor of the Lions Club. He is a past president of the Yee Family Association in Sacramento and at present he is president of the national association.

Dr. Yee and his wife, Inez, have four sons – three are dentists and one is an M.D. – and seven grandchildren.

With the long family ties to this area and his many accomplishments, I strongly recommend approval of Dr. Herbert K. Yee for membership in the Sacramento Pioneer Association.

The board approved Dr. Yee's application. Ten years later, Dr. Yee served as the Association's vice president.

Four Presidents of the United States accepted honorary membership in the Sacramento Pioneer Association. They include Grant, McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft. Association Vice President Yee proposed that the Pioneers extend honorary memberships to President and Mrs. Reagan. Director Jerome R. Lewis, tasked with the correspondence, wrote the following in a letter dated June 18, 1993:

Dear President Reagan,

At the last meeting of the Board of Directors of the Sacramento Pioneer Association, Board Member and Vice President Dr. Herbert K. Yee offered to defray the cost of an honorary membership in our society for the benefit of you and Mrs. Reagan. His gesture met with the unanimous approval of our board. I enclose a copy of a letter which is sent to new applicants and which explains some of the functions of our organization. Also enclosed is a current roster of our organization.

Dr. Yee is a prominent civic leader, benefactor, and businessman, who resides in Sacramento. He has profound respect and admiration for you, and perhaps you will recall that he served under you when you were Governor and he served on the California State Board of Dental Examiners from 1967 to 1974. He was also one of your personal representatives on the California Post-Secondary Education Commission from 1974 to 1976, and a member of the Reagan-Bush Electoral College in 1984.

All of the members of the Sacramento Pioneer Association would be most highly honored if you would allow us to include your names upon our roster of members. Please be assured that there are no social, financial, or other responsibilities which would be required or asked of you.

President Reagan's director of Planning and Scheduling, Ms. Joanne Drake, politely declined the invitation on behalf of President and Mrs. Reagan in a reply dated June 14, 1993. Ms. Drake concluded her response with the following sentiment: "President and Mrs. Reagan have asked me to convey to you and the members of the Sacramento Pioneer Association their best personal wishes and their sincere appreciation for your thoughtfulness."

During Dr. Yee's tenure as president of the Association, from March 1995 to March 1996, he oversaw numerous events and excursions including

a May 1995 trip to Yosemite. Highlights of Dr. Yee's presidency surely included an October 14, 1995, trip to San Francisco's De Young Museum in Golden Gate Park to view the Mongolian State Museum exhibit, and a tour of Chinatown.

Dr. Yee recounted the memorable adventure within his October 1995 *President's Letter* to the membership:

On a beautiful Saturday, October 14, 1995, sixty pioneers enjoyed a fun-filled day in the City by the Bay. We were overwhelmed by the response, so we had to travel by two buses. We started with coffee and apple strudel from LaBou and arrived at the Asian Art Exhibit in the De Young Museum in Golden Gate Park... truly a rare opportunity to see the treasured objects of art from the Mongolian State Museum for the first time.

The Luncheon was at the elegant five-star Empress of China restaurant. The delicious luncheon of shrimp ball appetizers, winter melon soup, Manchurian beef with vegetables, Cantonese chicken with mushrooms and Peking spareribs with pineapple and fried rice at the garden court of the rooftop restaurant set us in the right mood for our walking tour of Chinatown. We were privileged to visit the Chinese Six Companies (city hall) and were greeted by their president and officers. We were followed throughout by a reporter from the oldest Chinese newspaper, *China Times*. We met at the ornate chamber of the Chinatown City Hall, and we had a group picture taken at the entrance. This will be in the Chinese newspaper in a few days. We walked across the street to the new Dr. Sun Yat Sen (1866-1925) Memorial Hall to see his life, struggle, revolution, and success. He is considered the "Founding Father" of the Republic of Taiwan.

After a short walk, we were at the headquarters of the Yee Family Association on Waverly Street. The boardroom had beautiful Chinese tables and chairs. This is where I served as grand president of 30,000 Yee family members. We were greeted by all the leaders of the Yee family and treated to a delightful cake and coffee or tea. This is the first time that the western world had a true glimpse of Chinese governance, culture and life in a city within a city, almost like going to China.

Dr. Yee graciously shared his overflowing generosity with the Sacramento Pioneer Association. We remember Dr. Yee fondly and with appreciation.



Effie Yeaw Nature Center Picnic Excursion!!!

SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION ANNUAL PICNIC

WHEN: Saturday September 25, 2021

3:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

WHERE: Effie Yeaw Nature Center

2850 San Lorenzo Way

Carmichael CA 95608

Hosted Beer & Wine Bar

MENU: Tri Tip, Chicken, Pulled Pork, Beans,
Cole Slaw & Dinner Rolls. Catered by Texas
West BBQ.

Members \$55, Non-Members \$65
Child (under 16) \$30

**Invitations with payment vouchers
have been mailed**

All Members are encouraged to bring
guests/potential new members.

Any guest who signs up at the event will
receive 50% off the \$250 membership
registration fee.

Applications will be available at the picnic.

New member registration fee of \$125 must be
received at the event, or no later than
October 31, 2021.

**Please R.S.V.P. by
Wednesday, September 15, 2021.**

For more information,
call (916) 447-7411 or email
sacramentopioneerassociation@gmail.com

NO pets allowed.





Sacramento Pioneer Association
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Calendar of Events

2021

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Thursday, September 9 | California Admission Day (No event) |
| Saturday, September 25 | SPA Annual Picnic at
Effie Yeaw Nature Center |
| Thursday, December 2 | SPA Holiday Gala at the
California Automobile Museum |

2022

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Thursday, March 10 | SPA Annual Meeting at Del Paso
Country Club |
|---------------------------|--|