

SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION

OUR 169TH YEAR

# PIONEER NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022

WINTER EDITION



The Great Naval Duel Between the *USS Kearsarge*  
and the *CSS Alabama* at the Battle of Cherbourg, June 19, 1864

**President's Message**

**The Association Welcomes  
Eighteen New Members!**

**A Clue to the Whereabouts of  
Pioneer Hall's Missing Cannon**

**A Relic from the *USS Kearsarge*  
in the Pioneer Collection**

**A Splendid Holiday Party  
at the MoSAC with Photos**

# Sacramento Pioneer Association Quarterly Newsletter



## Welcome New Members!

Cynthia Van Horne  
Robyn DeLong  
Margaret Hutchinson  
James Culleton  
Andrea Fiske  
David Gibson  
Dana Graham Lidster  
Colleen Jackson Hildeburn  
Carol Goodwin Gwerder  
Eli Richman  
Mary Gail Artz  
Ann & Scott Sadler  
Christopher & Cheryl Holben  
Margo & Richard Brown  
John C. Fat  
Roberta Nichols  
James & Frances Merlone  
Brian Wheeler

### Officers

President.....Bill Gould  
Vice President.....Lori Gualco  
Secretary.....Michael Shepard  
Treasurer.....Thom Gilbert

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#### Term ending March 2023

Mark Rathe Martha Hughes

#### Term ending March 2024

Brian Witherell Jennifer Basye  
Barbara Collopy Peter Noack

#### Term ending March 2025

Katie Brown  
Jeanie MacAulay Molly Wiese

### Administrator

Shelley Ford

### Newsletter Editor

Michael Shepard

**Cover image:** This lithograph print by J. O. Davidson, published by L. Prang & Co. circa 1887, depicts the crew of the *USS Kearsarge* cheering on deck as the ship's guns deliver a fatal blow to the Confederate pirate *Alabama*.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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

[www.sacramentopioneer.org](http://www.sacramentopioneer.org)

[sacramentopioneerassociation@gmail.com](mailto:sacramentopioneerassociation@gmail.com)

## President's Message

Season's Greetings, Pioneers!

With the Holidays upon us we are about to close out the year with our annual Holiday Party. (It will have already taken place when you read this.) I am sure it will be a roaring success! Katie Brown and Barb Collopy do a terrific job of event planning.

The year has been a mixed blessing for the association. We continue to lack a ground floor tenant for Pioneer Hall, and our investments have suffered as a result of the economic downturn. However, on the bright side we have many new members and believe the downtown leasing situation at this juncture is improving. We can look forward to 2023 with a high level of optimism.

Have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Bill

## Half-Off Membership Drive

**Know someone who would  
enjoy membership in the  
Sacramento Pioneer Association?  
Until December 31st, 2022,  
the membership fee  
for new members is only \$125  
(half-off the regular \$250 fee).**

**Tell a friend!**



## A Clue to the Whereabouts of Pioneer Hall's Missing Cannon

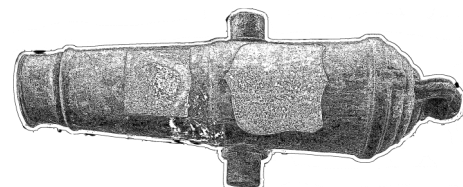
An article that appeared in the March 2021 *Sacramento Pioneer Association Quarterly Newsletter* explored the history of three cannons that belonged to the Sacramento Pioneer Association, and once decorated the front of Pioneer Hall. The first cannon, dubbed the "Knickerbocker Gun" because the Knickerbocker Engine Co. No. 5 gifted the howitzer to the Pioneers, still adorns the façade of Pioneer Hall. The gun called the "Hitching Post," which stood for many years embedded in the ground in front of the Hall for use as a hitching post, now can be found on exhibit in the Sacramento History Museum in Old Sacramento. The third gun, given to the Pioneers by Captain John Nye in 1878 and so called the "Nye Gun," at one time also appeared mounted onto the façade of Pioneer Hall. The Knickerbocker and the Nye both shared the same South American origin, and both had been owned by John Sutter, but the Nye gun disappeared sometime after 1916. Its whereabouts remained unknown.

Recent research uncovered a brief note made by the late Jim Henley included in a document titled *Interim Report of the Archives Committee of the Sacramento Pioneer Association*, c2010, that reads:

### Sutter's Fort

Again, this is mainly anecdotal, but artifacts "loaned" by the Pioneers in the past included a cannon loaned for the Days of '49 in 1922 that was apparently traded with the Hudson Bay Company for items that the Fort needed.

Perhaps there is truth to Henley's anecdotal story, and perhaps the Nye Gun lies somewhere in the archive of Hudson's Bay Company Museum collection in Manitoba.



# A Relic from the *USS Kearsarge* in the Pioneer Collection

By Michael Shepard

Thunderous guns roared across the open sea just eight miles out from the port city of Cherbourg, France, as the iron-clad *USS Kearsarge* engaged the Confederate pirate *Alabama* in ship-to-ship battle. For over an hour, the two men-o'-war circled one another as each fired and received broadside volleys of explosive shells. Spectators on shore in Cherbourg witnessed the dueling vessels and churchgoers in England claimed to have heard the cannonade at morning services in coastal Sussex that Sunday morning on June 19, 1864. At last, the skill and accuracy of the *Kearsarge* gunners sent the *CSS Alabama* down into the watery deep.

Sacramentans followed the American war against brother and countrymen via a deluge of correspondences from eastern presses reprinted in the *Sacramento Daily Union* and the *Sacramento Bee* as well as other California periodicals. Maritime news held a particular interest for many residents of the Golden State because of the vital lifeline that shipping provided between California and the Union. Any threat to this lifeline immediately became newsworthy.

The *Sacramento Daily Union* reported on April 30, 1861, that "Much apprehension seems to be felt that the steamers with California treasure will fall prizes to Southern Confederacy privateers." Regular readers learned of the most notorious Confederate commerce raider, Rafael Semmes, who captained the pirate frigate *Sumter* and later the *Alabama*. The *Sumter* ran the Union's naval blockade of Southern ports on June 30, 1861, and proceeded to plunder merchant ships throughout the West Indies. The *Sumter* continued its wanton piracy across the Atlantic to the coast of southern Spain. When the Union ship *Florida* blockaded the *Sumter* at the port of Cádiz while the Confederate vessel underwent repairs, the pirate captain Semmes abandoned his ship to take command of the commerce raider *Alabama* newly built in the shipyards of Birkenhead across the Mersey from Liverpool, England.

Confederate foreign operatives found sympathetic ears for their cause among English businessmen and government officials as long as the war in America disrupted the overseas cotton trade and British textile manufacturing enterprises. The North, too, had agents in England who conveyed intelligence regarding British support for the South, including building and arming of Confederate

privateers, to Secretary Seward's Department of State. Some of this information found its way into newspapers. In fact, on November 7, 1862, the *Sacramento Daily Union* printed an article from Boston with the headline *The Pirate Semmes and his Crew – English Aid and Comfort* that reported "The *Alabama* left Birkenhead, England, on a trial trip, but never went back, and is now under the direction of the English, who are to furnish her supplies at the different islands while she is to continue to prey on our commerce." An article from New York printed in that day's same *Sacramento Daily Union* informed readers "Secretary Seward sent communication to the New York Chamber of Commerce which states that the Government has already called the attention of our Minister to England to the depredations of the Pirate Semmes."

For three years, Rafael Semmes plundered Union merchant ships on the high seas until that fateful encounter with the *USS Kearsarge* off the coast of Cherbourg on June 19, 1864. News of the US victory reached Atlantic cities on July 5 and the Pacific coast just two days later thanks to the US Transcontinental Telegraph Line completed in October 1861. The *Sacramento Daily Union* printed the following exciting news on July 7, 1864:

## THE ALABAMA ABATED

The American marine will breathe freer and deeper. Captain Rafael Semmes, the most successful corsair since Captain Kidd, has come to grief. The *Alabama*, which has so long lighted the sea with our blazing ships and troubled the pillow of Secretary [of the Navy] Welles, is an abated nuisance. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, Semmes was so indiscreet as to forsake his usual policy of attacking peaceful traders and to venture on a pitched battle with the steam sloop *Kearsarge*, Captain John A. Winslow, off the French harbor of Cherbourg, and after seven rounds, the *Alabama* found a watery grave. Semmes and some of his crew were saved from death or captivity by the kindly attention of an English yacht. This was in harmony with the history of the pirate craft. The *Alabama* was an English vessel, built, equipped and manned by Englishmen for the destruction of American shipping.

In the weeks that followed, California newspapers printed exposés, eyewitness accounts and official reports of the battle of Cherbourg until the *Kearsarge* had certainly become a household name among Sacramentans. Excitement over the exploits of the *Kearsarge* diminished, however, as



other news of the war, the assassination of President Lincoln, and then the war's end dominated newspaper headlines.

In March 1870, the *Kearsarge's* now famous captain, John Ancrum Winslow, earned a promotion to the rank of rear admiral, and received orders to serve as Commander of the Pacific Fleet stationed at Mare Island, Vallejo, California. Perhaps by coincidence, or by design, the *Kearsarge* steamed to Mare Island in October 1870 for a major overhaul in the dockyards there. Renovation of the renowned ship took nearly three years. The California State Library has in its California History Room collection a photograph taken c.1872 of the *Kearsarge* anchored between Mare Island and Vallejo.

Some enterprising individual, or individuals as the case may be, recognized the historic significance of the venerable man-o-war and salvaged pieces of the ship's original white oak to be used for crafting memorabilia. As early as 1872, walking sticks began to appear in the hands of notable Vallejo gentleman. The *Weekly Butte Record* reported on March 23, 1872, "The timbers of the *Kearsarge* furnish splendid material for canes – as the people of Vallejo can testify." Gavels made from the timber of the old *Kearsarge* also began to appear as special gifts to various organizations.

Sacramento Society of California Pioneers member Benjamin A. Saunders, a resident of Vallejo, presented one such gavel, "made from a piece of the *Kearsarge*," to the Pioneer Society during a meeting held on Saturday evening, November 30, 1872, according to the *Sacramento Daily Union*. The Pioneers accepted the gift with gracious remarks and thanks tendered to the donor. The Pioneers then handed the gavel over to member William Cummings, a Sacramento watchmaker and jeweler, who mounted the gavel "with silver and gold." Mr. Cummings returned the enhanced mallet to the Pioneer Society on March 1, 1873.

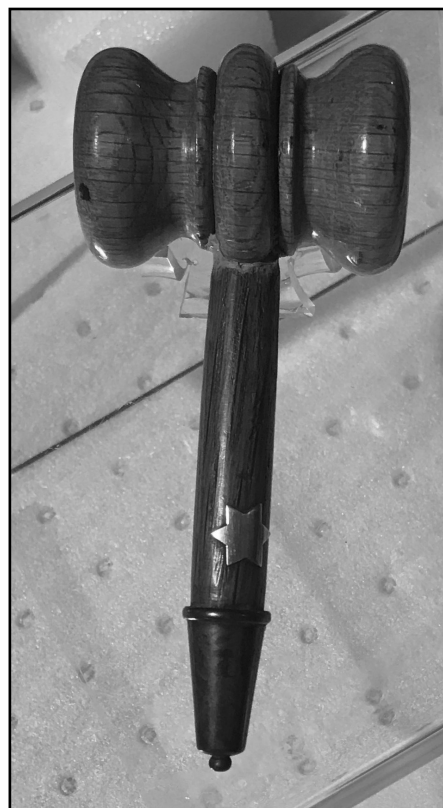
\* \* \*

In recent years, when the Sacramento Pioneer Association worked diligently to retrieve various historic objects lent out by the Association, Archives Committee Chair Jim Henley corresponded with Committee co-Chair Dr. Bob LaPerriere. In an email dated July 18, 2009, Henley wrote, "Bob – There are many pieces of the *Kearsarge* floating around in many curio collections. I believe there is mention in the Pioneer records that the Pioneer President's gavel is made from such a relic. I also believe there is a piece of wood about 8 inches long in the Pioneer's collection at SAMCC [Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection

Center] that has an old tag on it that identifies it as from the *Kearsarge*."

Aided by Jim Henley's information, Dr. Bob LaPerriere tracked down the "piece" of the *Kearsarge* on loan from the Sacramento Pioneer Association to California State Parks and stored at the State Museum Resource Center, which he delivered to the Center for Sacramento History on April 5, 2010, to be added to the Pioneer Collection.

The Center for Sacramento History possesses the *Kearsarge* Pioneer President's gavel, as well, archived within the Sacramento Pioneer Association Collection and stored in the climate-controlled facility on Sequoia Pacific Blvd., just off Richards Blvd., in Sacramento. William Cummings's metal work remains evident from a silver cap on the butt of the handle and a gold, six-point pioneer star embedded in the handle. With a little imagination, the gavel still evokes the proud victory of a US mighty war ship over the Confederacy's most notorious pirate at the Battle of Cherbourg.



The Sacramento Pioneer Association President's gavel made of wood from the *USS Kearsarge* and given to the Pioneer Society by member Benjamin A. Saunders in 1872. Archived in the Pioneer Collection at the Center for Sacramento History.

Photo by Michael Shepard

## **Chinese American Council of Sacramento Invites Pioneers on a Tour of Yosemite**

Karun Yee, historical chair of the Chinese American Council of Sacramento (CACS) and past director of the Sacramento Pioneer Association, invites Pioneers to participate in a four-day, three-night, excursion to spectacular Yosemite National Park organized by the Chinese American Council of Sacramento from May 15 to May 18, 2023.

The package includes round-trip bus transportation from Sacramento to Yosemite, lodging at the historic Wawona Hotel, informative lectures by expert park rangers, a tour of the Yosemite Valley Floor in an open-air tram, and perhaps a hike through the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, or a ride on the Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad according to your pleasure.

Of particular interest, Park Ranger Yenyen Chan will share her extensive knowledge of Chinese contributions to the Yosemite Valley including the original Chinese Laundry Building built for the Wawona Hotel and recently dedicated by the National Park Service as an historic monument.

CACS Historical Chair Karun Yee organized this amazing trip as an opportunity for fellow appreciators of history to experience a beloved national park in a new light, learn new history and make new friends. Inspiring stories of dedication and hard work that helped forge a beautiful national park will provide new insight into the human experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> century High Sierra.

"I hope you can join us on this incredible journey."

Respectfully,  
Karun Yee  
CACS Foundation Historical Chair

Please call Karun for more information,  
including price, and for a registration form.

**The Sacramento Pioneer Association  
is not affiliated with this trip.**



## **A Festive Start to the Holiday Season**

One hundred twenty-four Pioneers celebrated the start of the holiday season with a festive collation at the new SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity on Jibboom Street near the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers. Event Committee Chairs Katie Brown and Barb Collopy treated Pioneers to a fantastic venue, a catered buffet by Mama Kims (both delicious and plentiful), and a delightful jazz trio that played all the holiday favorites. Additional thanks to Jeanie MacAulay and Martha Hughes for procuring all the libations for the bar. A special thanks to Johann Otto for his assistance in securing the MoSAC as this year's venue. Most importantly, thank you to all the Pioneers who attended this celebration. Your presence helped to make it a night to remember!

## **SAVE THE DATE!**

### **SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION 2023 Annual Dinner Meeting**

**Thursday, March 9, 2023  
5:30 p.m.**

**Del Paso Country Club**  
3333 Marconi Ave., Sacramento, CA 95821

**Ticket Price and Menu including  
*Choice of Entrée & Dessert*  
To be announced**

**No host cash bar**

**Complimentary Wine**

**Election of Officers & Directors**

**Scholarships Awarded**



**Formal Invitations will be mailed in February**



# Sacramento Pioneer Association Holiday Party at SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity



Paul Richardson and Mark Rathe



Jim & Theresa Krtil and Karun Yee



Holiday tunes with a smooth jazz groove



A full house of festive Pioneers





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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## Calendar of Events

**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