

**SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION**

OUR 170TH YEAR

# PIONEER NEWSLETTER

**SEPTEMBER 2023**

**AUTUMN EDITION**



## **President's Message**

**2023 Burnett Awards  
Thursday, October 5**

**An Enduring  
Partnership with the  
Sacramento History  
Museum**

**2023 Annual Picnic at  
East Portal Park  
Bocce Ball Courts  
Saturday, September 23**

**Dangberg Home Ranch  
In Minden, Nevada,  
Overnight Trip  
Saturday, October 7**



**The Pioneer Cannon in Action**

# Sacramento Pioneer Association Quarterly Newsletter



## *In Memoriam*

Judy Palmer  
Mimi Miller  
Jim Streng

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**Cover image:** Mead Kibbey fires the *Pioneer Gun* in front of Pioneer Hall on April 19, 1967, to commemorate the opening of the Sacramento City and County Museum located on the second floor of Pioneer Hall.

**Photo:** Sacramento Pioneer Association Collection

## NEW MAILING ADDRESS

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# President's Message

Greetings Pioneers!

As I write this column, it has been a long hot summer and the Pioneers have been on hiatus during the summer months.

We were lucky to have Delta Pick Mello and the Sacramento History Museum give a reception on August 17, 2023, in recognition of SPA's long-time support of the History Museum, including the recent sponsorship of the May Hollister Woolsey exhibit unveiled in May 2023. We were treated to a talk by Ms. Mello's assistant and informative remarks by our resident historian, Michael Shepard. Michael tied in the long association between the History Museum and the Pioneers. In particular, Michael spoke about the cannon in the exhibition that apparently served as a hitching post in front of Pioneer Hall. The cannon was fired in 1967 and 1988. There is a photograph of the cannon in the published SPA Quarterly Newsletter Anthology, 2013-2021 on page 183. According to Michael's very amusing anecdote, when past President Mead Kibbey attempted to fire the cannon in 1967, revelers had poured champagne down it and it would not light! It was a lovely evening, and we were free to wander in the museum enjoying the terrific design and fascinating exhibits. I suggest you make a trip to the museum if you have not seen the May Hollister Woolsey exhibit which also accommodates blind visitors.

We have many events to look forward to in the next several months and into 2024:

- September 23, 2023 - The Annual Picnic is taking place at East Portal Park & Bocce Ball Courts in East Sacramento; 12 pm to 4 pm.
- October 7, 2023 - Trip to Minden, Nevada – Picnic lunch at the Dangberg Home Ranch-Historic Park- 11 am to 2 pm and then cocktails at the home of Trisha and Mark Setzer, Dinner at JT Basque Bar & Dining and if you want an overnight stay, rooms are available at the Carson Valley Inn & Casino.
- December 7, 2023 - Annual Holiday Party – Julia Morgan House
- March 7, 2024 - Annual Meeting and Dinner

I look forward to seeing all of you at the above events and urge you to participate in these activities- it is a good way to see old friends and meet new friends.

Kind Regards,  
Lori

## Celebrating Sacramento's Legacy: 2023 Burnett Awards

*Honoring the Sacramento Pioneer Association  
Thursday, October 5, 2023*

As autumn approaches, we eagerly anticipate the 5th Annual Burnett Awards, an event hosted by the Sacramento History Alliance. This gathering serves as a time to celebrate the vibrant history and lasting contributions of iconic Sacramento businesses and community partners. This year, the Sacramento Pioneer Association takes center stage along with the Firehouse Restaurant, North Sacramento Land Company, La Esperanza Market, and Pucci's Pharmacy.

The Sacramento History Alliance, a nonprofit partner organization, stands as a guardian of Sacramento's diverse history. Through its stewardship of the Sacramento History Museum, the Old Sacramento Visitors Center, and the Underground Tours, the Alliance has made it its mission to make our city's history accessible to all. Engaging exhibits and immersive programs weave together stories of the past, fostering a deeper understanding of our roots.

The Burnett Awards pay homage to R. Burnett Miller, a man whose imprint on Sacramento is indelible. A former mayor, councilmember, and philanthropist, and long-time member of the Sacramento Pioneer Association, Miller's contributions span generations. His role as one of the founders of the Sacramento History Museum and his dedication to preserving history laid the foundation for this celebrated event. This year's award ceremony holds a deeper significance because of the recent loss of Mimi Miller, Burnett's widow, a regular presence at Pioneer Association events, and a dynamic member of the community.

Pioneers are invited to attend the 2023 Burnett Awards Ceremony, which will take place on Thursday, October 5th, from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at the Sacramento History Museum, located at 101 I Street in Old Sacramento. The evening promises heartfelt tributes, light appetizers, and refreshments, including beer and wine. Complimentary parking will be available for your convenience. Tickets can be purchased or included as part of a sponsorship. Further details can be found on the event's website : [www.burnettawards.org](http://www.burnettawards.org).



## An Enduring Partnership with the Sacramento History Museum

By Michael Shepard

The construction of Interstate 5 ushered in a transformative era for the city of Sacramento that set a course for modernization, growth, and economic progress. The massive project spearheaded a forward-looking vision intended to enhance commerce and revenue for downtown Sacramento. Amid the excitement of these changes, there emerged a group of residents, V. Aubrey Neasham among them, who recognized the potential destruction of Sacramento's oldest and most historic district on the riverfront due to the freeway project. Neasham, a devoted advocate for preservation of the past, had years of experience working with California State Parks and in 1960 founded Western Heritage Inc., a historic consulting firm that played a significant role in safeguarding the city's heritage during I-5 construction.

V. Aubrey Neasham and his consulting firm worked closely with the Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission, an agency appointed by the city council to advise on historic landmarks, study local sites for potential landmark status, and place historic markers, as well as to manage and collect artifacts for a Sacramento history museum. In 1965, Neasham prepared a nineteen-page, softcover booklet titled *Old Sacramento: A Reference Point in Time*, published by the Commission, which offered a descriptive glimpse, with illustrations and maps, of Sacramento's newly protected riverfront district soon to become Old Sacramento State Historic Park. Neasham's advocacy earned him the affectionate moniker "Father of Old Sacramento."

In the midst of this evolving landscape, an almost forgotten historical society underwent a critical transformation of its own. The Sacramento Pioneer Association, founded in 1854 by California forty-niners, had originally pursued a threefold purpose: to nurture the social virtues of its members, to gather and safeguard information related to the early settlement and conquest of the region, and to uphold the memory of those visionary individuals whose sagacity, enterprise and love of independence led them to settle in the untamed wilderness laying the foundation for a new state. The organization rebranded itself the Sacramento Society of California Pioneers in 1873 and merged with the Sacramento Society of Sons and Daughters of California Pioneers in 1909. By the 1960s, however, the organization's membership had dwindled significantly, with only four remaining members: Lincoln B. Edwards, Grant Black, Florence Markofer, and George Artz, all of whom were descendants of original founding members.

The impending departure of these final four members signaled the potential disappearance of the Sacramento Pioneers' legacy. During this critical period, a passionate historic preservationist named Mead Kibbey, who resided next door to George Artz, engaged in conversations with him about the Sacramento Pioneers. The Pioneers possessed valuable assets, including a two-acre burial ground in the City Cemetery, a nineteenth century meeting hall on Seventh Street referred to as Pioneer Hall, and an archive rich in historical documents, all in need of preservation.

To safeguard the legacy of the Sacramento Pioneers, Mead successfully persuaded the four remaining members of the Sacramento Society of California Pioneers to restructure the organization, opening its doors to new members regardless of their ancestral ties to the original Pioneer membership. Mead enlisted the services of Tom Hammer and Burnett Miller as officers of a new subsidiary organization named the Sacramento Pioneer Foundation. This endeavor was further supported by the formation of a board of directors, which included the esteemed historic preservationist and "Father of Old Sacramento" V. Aubrey Neasham. Simultaneously, the remaining original four members established the Pioneer Memorial Trust, a means to transfer assets such as Pioneer Grove, Pioneer Hall, and the archives to the Sacramento Pioneer Foundation.

With the restructured Sacramento Pioneer Foundation at the helm, a mission to restore the nearly century-old Pioneer Hall on Seventh Street commenced in earnest. The preservation effort gained significant momentum thanks to the backing of local officials. The City Council granted \$3,250, and the County Supervisors contributed \$1,000 towards the restoration of Pioneer Hall and contracted a lease for the building's second floor by the Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission and Sacramento's first publicly funded museum.

The Sacramento City and County Museum (the first incarnation of today's Sacramento History Museum) materialized as a joint effort between the city and county, housed on the second floor of Pioneer Hall along with museum director Jim Henley and the Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission. In collaboration with the Sacramento Pioneer Foundation, the Commission opened the museum doors to the public in the spring of 1967. Its sixteen exhibits offered a chronological journey through Sacramento's history, from the pre-gold rush era to contemporary times. *History News*, published by the University of California's American Association for State and Local History, announced the museum's inauguration with the following

article:

First conceived in the 1880s, the dream of a museum to tell the story of Sacramento, California, was at last realized on April 19, 1967. On that day, the Sacramento City and County Museum, at 1009 Seventh Street in California's state capital, was opened to the public. The opening ceremonies marked two important occasions in addition to the inauguration of the museum, the ninety-nine-year-old Pioneer Hall, which houses the museum, was dedicated as a City of Sacramento Historic Landmark.

Pioneers, city officials and the public gathered in front of the newly recognized historic landmark, Pioneer Hall, to commemorate the museum's opening day. Festivities included the firing of an old cannon that had been in the possession of the Pioneer Society since 1873, adding an element of historical authenticity to the event. Pioneer Foundation President Mead Kibbey believed the cannon originated from Sutter's Fort as he suggested in an interview for the book *The Restoration of Pioneer Hall* published in 1999 by the Sacramento Pioneer Association. After all, the Pioneers possessed two other guns that came from the old fort. Research, however, later revealed that the journey of the artillery piece began in Massachusetts when the Salem Mechanics Trading and Mining Association brought it to California aboard the ship *Crescent* in 1850. The ship sailed from San Francisco to Sacramento where it remained as a storeship moored on the riverbank between L and M Streets. The cannon ended up being forgotten in the hold of the *Crescent* for over two decades. Its existence came to light when the Pioneers acquired the gun in 1873. The cannon now resides on display in the Sacramento History Museum at the foot of I Street in Old Sacramento.

The dedication of the Sacramento City and County Museum in Pioneer Hall marked the beginning of a decades-long relationship between the Pioneer Association, the Landmarks Commission and the Museum. The organizations collaborated on various projects that aimed to celebrate and share the city's history. Notably, in 1969, the Sacramento Pioneer Foundation, in cooperation with the Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission, published *The City of the Plain: Sacramento in the Nineteenth Century*, authored by V. Aubrey Neasham and Museum Director Jim Henley, who also joined the membership of the Pioneers.

Over the years, expansion and opportunity

brought about beneficial changes to these history-focused institutions. The Sacramento Pioneer Foundation added to its membership and, in 1970, reclaimed the organization's original name, Sacramento Pioneer Association. The Historic Landmarks Commission disbanded in 1972, after which the city and county developed the Sacramento Museum and History Commission as a new advisory group. The City and County Museum vacated the 1,000 square feet on the second floor of Pioneer Hall for more spacious accommodations at the Mayflower building on K Street, and later moved to its current location in Old Sacramento.

An old steamer trunk, packed with contents that belonged to a twelve-year-old girl named May Hollister Woolsey, remains one of the most intriguing artifacts currently on display in the Sacramento History Museum. A typical girl living in Sacramento in the 1870s, Miss Woolsey enjoyed school, played with dolls, maintained a diary, sketched portraits, and eagerly anticipated attending a schoolmate's birthday party while looking forward to wearing a new dress for the occasion. However, tragedy struck when May fell seriously ill, likely from a bacterial or viral infection, possibly transmitted through a mosquito bite, causing encephalitis. Regrettably, May passed away on September 21, 1879, at her home on E Street.

A century later, in 1979, during a renovation of the old Woolsey house, the owner discovered the steamer trunk filled with six hundred artifacts that had belonged to May. These cherished items had been hidden away by May's grieving mother. The Sacramento Pioneer Association acquired the trunk and its contents in 1981 and donated them to the Center for Sacramento History. In 2022, the Sacramento Pioneer Association reaffirmed its commitment to sharing May Hollister Woolsey's remarkable story by sponsoring the reimagining of the exhibit, ensuring that her legacy lives on. The exhibit showcases May's life and possessions, allowing visitors to engage with history in a tangible and meaningful way. A special "tactile graphic and audio component" enhances accessibility, demonstrating the museum's commitment to inclusivity.

The reimagined May Hollister Woolsey exhibit serves as a testament to the enduring partnership between the Sacramento Pioneer Association and the Sacramento History Museum. As both organizations continue to safeguard the heritage of the city, their combined efforts ensure that Sacramento's story will remain accessible for the benefit of generations to come.



## **Firing the Old Pioneer Cannon at the Dedication of the Sacramento City and County Museum**

The Sacramento City and County Museum opened its door to the Public at Pioneer Hall on April 19, 1967, with a grand dedication ceremony. The Sacramento Pioneer Foundation rolled out the old cannon that had been in the organization's possession since 1873, and strategically positioned the gun on Merchant Street facing west toward Fourth Street (in the 1960s, Merchant Street ran all the way through to Fourth Street..)



Foundation President Mead Kibbey, under the watchful eye of a registered pyrotechnic engineer, poured a measured amount of powder into the mouth of the cannon, followed by wadding and a tennis ball, and then tamped down the contents to seal the charge. Mr. Kibbey ignited the fuse.



A fizz and a puff of smoke emanated from the cannon's fuse hole, but the powerful report anticipated by the gathered crowd failed to impress.

The night before the ceremony, a champagne party added a touch of merriment to the occasion. Some of that merriment found its way into the cannon barrel, which dampened Mead's carefully measured powder, resulting in the old gun's less-than-dramatic performance. One of the Pioneers dubbed the 19th century artillery piece "Old Poop Out," marking a humorous footnote in the storied history of the cannon, which remains on display in the Sacramento History Museum in Old Sacramento.



# Sacramento Pioneer Association Annual Picnic

East Portal Park Bocce Courts  
1120 Rodeo Way, Sacramento

Saturday, September 23  
Noon to 4 pm

Member price \$40, Guest price \$45

Please *RSVP* by September 19



SACRAMENTO PIONEER ASSOCIATION  
Invites you to join us for a

Picnic lunch at the Dangberg Home Ranch  
Historic Park in Minden, Nevada

Saturday, October 7th, 2023  
11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Afterward, check into your hotel room  
and relax before cocktails  
at the home of Trisha & Mark Setzer.

Top the day off with a trip to  
JT Basque Bar & Dining for dinner.

- \$70 per member & \$80 per non-member Price includes park entrance fee, picnic lunch, cocktails at the Setzer's, and dinner at JT's.
- Stay a night or two. Travel and hotel on your own (approximately 2 1/2 hour drive from Sacramento)
- Book your stay at the Carson Valley Inn & Casino. For reservations, please call (775) 783-6629.
- H. F. Dangberg, a young German immigrant, came to the Carson Valley in 1856, worked hard and prospered. He and his descendants built a ranching empire that came to include 48,000 acres. In 1905, the family founded the town of Minden, named after H. F.'s hometown of Minden, Germany. One of our own Pioneer members had an uncle who married into the Dangberg family.





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## Calendar of Events 2023

Saturday, September 23	Annual Picnic at East Portal Park
Thursday, October 5	Annual Burnett Awards at the Sacramento History Museum
Saturday, October 7	Overnight trip to the Dangberg Ranch, Minden, Nevada
Thursday, December 7	Holiday Party at the Julia Morgan House

**September 2023**