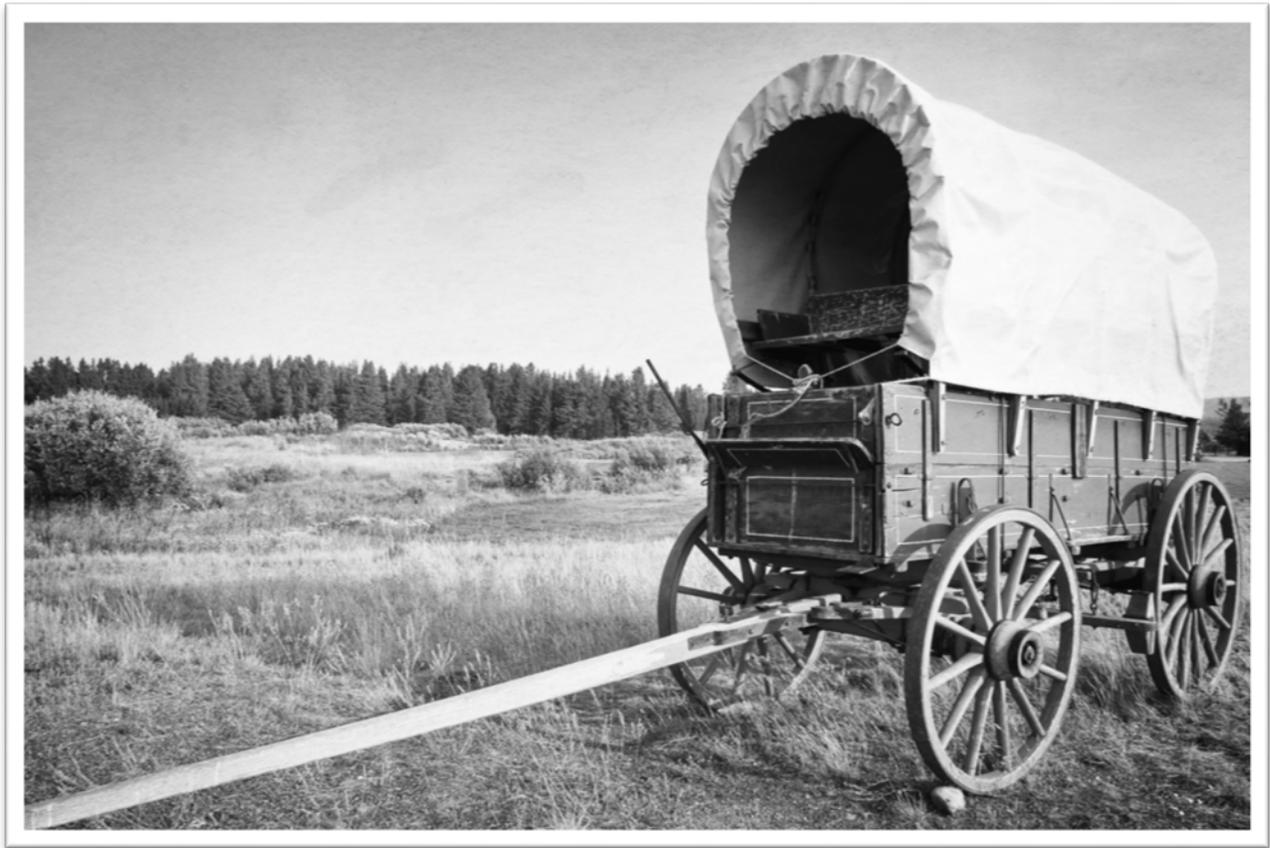

ALPINE REVIEW

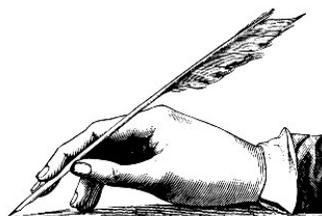
Crossing the Plains to the Sierras

By Jim Boyd



Crossing the Plains to the Sierras *continues on Page 5*

All the etchings are from 1868. Artist unknown.



The Alpine Review is published quarterly by the Historical Society of Alpine County

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Alpine County Museum

The Alpine County Museum is located in the heart of Markleeville, on top of the hill off of Montgomery Street, up the hill at the end of School House Road.

The museum features exhibits on Blacksmithing, the Old Webster School, Silver Mountain City, Jail, Basque Oven, early Alpine County's pioneer families, Native Washoe people, mining in the area, farming, and cattle ranching.

The museum is open Memorial Day weekend through October from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.

Museum Curator

Jim Boyd

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello Members,

Now that the snow is gone and the grass is green and growing it is the signal for the summer activities to begin. Around your museum things have been changing again and all for the better. There have been changes to the layout of the displays, lighting, and new displays. When you come to the door you will see an entirely new display featuring the Emigrant Trail. To your right you will notice a new arrangement of the displays. All new lighting gives a new feel and it tells a new story as you move through.

Each room, wall, and display has been modified. Our Curator, your Board of Directors, museum volunteers along with county maintenance staff have made changes and improvements to make your visit not only enjoyable but also a better learning experience.

The changes carry through the entire museum complex. The schoolhouse will have new stairs and deck with handrails added for your safety. The carriage shed will have a new doctor's buggy which was donated over the winter.

Work will begin on modifications to the stamp mill; the stamps will be realigned as the first step in our plan to make the mill operational on a very small scale. But don't worry, it will have the same look and sound that you are all used too.

The split rail fencing around the complex will be repaired. This project and the steps and deck on the schoolhouse are being completed with an all-volunteer group of members of the local Chapter of E Clampus Vitus. We really appreciate their help!

Many of the regular summer and fall Historical Society events are listed on the back page of the Newsletter. As the museum opens for the season we will have our homemade bread and cinnamon roll baking in the Basque oven. It's always fun and can turn into a mini potluck.

The Markleeville History Walk is back by popular demand with costumed actors all in period dress from age 13 thru to well, let's just say seniors. Also take some time to look over the Model A Fords in town for the afternoon.

It is going to be a great summer of events all over town. Come on out and support all the activities and give us comments on how we can make them even better.

Tom

Curator's Corner

This winter we have made some changes in the Washoe Room and we look forward to opening on May 31st. We will have several opportunities for ACHS members to preview the changes before the opening. On May 23rd we will open from 10:00 to 3:00 to allow Historical Society members to view the changes. Please come in, view the changes and meet the Curator. We will have coffee and pastries available.

At 11:00 that day we will meet to discuss the interests of anyone who thinks they might like to volunteer. I have given lots of thought to the needs of the museum, but these have to be matched to the interests and goals of those who might like to volunteer.

One important need is for greeters. This is for people who like to interact with people and share the great cultural history of Alpine County. The only requirement is a passion for the History of Alpine County. We do ask that you commit to a weekly time slot, but that can be as short as an hour or as long as four hours.

But there is also a need for people who like to research and develop the history and story of our photos and objects. I would like to establish a Collections Committee. The people on this committee would be involved in the collections from acceptance of donations based on evaluation of the relevance to the story and history of Alpine County, to researching the history of the item, to photographing the item, to helping with the cataloging and inventorying the current collections. This committee would also be a valuable sounding board for the development and implementation of museum exhibits, and eventually, the development of a Master Interpretive Plan to guide the future use of the museum's collections in presenting the Narrative of Alpine County.

Also, on May 23rd we will have the Basque Oven fired up and will be baking bread. I will give a tour of the museum at that time or you can walk through at your leisure. Sample fresh baked bread and walk through the museum, what could be better?

Of course we will have our Grounds Sprucing Day May 18th and Planting Day to be determined by when Rick's plants are ready. I would be happy to show people around at that time.

Until the opening of the museum on May 25th, I will be at the museum on Mondays 10am to 3pm and Thursdays from 10am to 2pm. Feel free to drop by and visit.

Jim Boyd, Curator

alpinemuseum@yahoo.com

(530) 694-2317

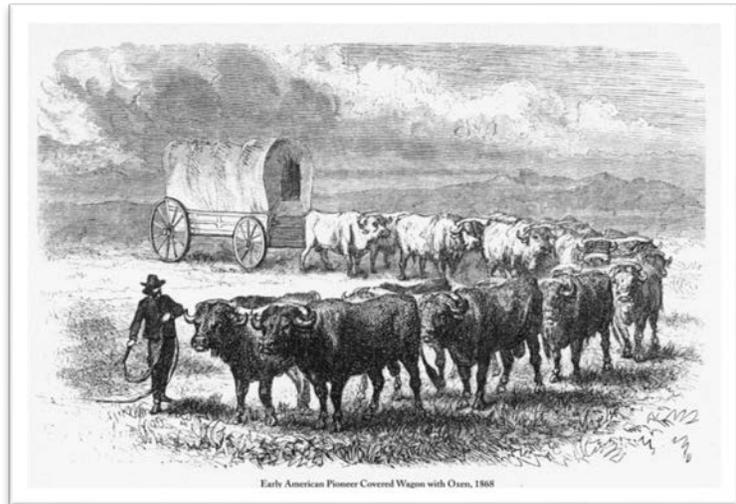
www.alpinecountymuseum.org

Crossing the Plains to the Sierras *continued from page 1*

When the emigrants crossed the Sierras in wagons it was remarkable. That it came at the end of an 1800-mile trip was a miracle. The stories of the emigrants are an endless, fascinating history. To narrow it down to a short article, I will simply speak to the topics I found most interesting: Natural History, technology, and supplies.

Natural History

The Natural History of the journey was significant because it presented obstacles and wonders not seen before. While the trip across Nebraska can be boring on today's interstates, it was definitely not boring for the Emigrants. The first hundred miles had numerous river crossings. Today, you simply cross a bridge at each of those crossings. There were no bridges



then. Each river crossing entailed at least some of the following: raising and sealing the wagon boxes, leveling the banks, swimming a rope across the river to pull the wagons across, avoiding quicksand that could sink a wagon if it stalled for a few seconds, tying rope to the wagon and riding horses up stream with the rope to hold it erect, and swimming fearful oxen, cows, horses and mules across and keeping them from ending up miles below the crossing or perhaps, drowning.

Eventually, you came to the Platte River which you would follow for hundreds of miles. Here the issue was the sandy banks. This was significant because water seeped naturally for hundreds of yards from the river. Once contaminated with Cholera there was no safe water to be had along the river. Tens of thousands of people died along the Platte from this terrible disease.

Chimney rock was a marvel they had not seen before. Due to the flatness of the plains, you could follow it on the horizon for a day or more before you came to it. Of course, the Rocky Mountains sat on the horizon for many weeks before they arrived at them. This was a wonder as the horizon east of the Mississippi was rarely more than 10 miles.



Past Fort Laramie, the landscape changed again. Grassy plains become dry, parched lands until you hit real desert in Nevada. Here water became the issue governing survival. If you could find it, you had to take care to make sure it was drinkable. In the desert it could be alkaline, soda filled, or boiling hot. Flash floods were common, often coming from long distances from where you were. Of course, the rainstorm could also be where you were. On the plains that meant lightning which killed many people and animals, especially oxen with their metal collars. And it also meant mud which made every step a struggle. Eventually, the land simply gave up and became sandy desert.

This was the terrible 40-mile dessert. Here journals talk of little but the dying of the animals. It was a forty-hour trip for most wagons, if the wagons made it. One modern writer likened the number of dead animals to the number of beer cans along a modern road. And that is just the animals. It doesn't include the law libraries, printing presses, retail shop inventories, clothes, ovens and other artifacts left behind in the desert.

But things got better. After the forty-mile dessert, all they had to do was cross the Sierras. The first three attempts to cross with wagons failed and the wagons abandoned and crossing was finished on foot. The first route had 23 river crossings. They finally discovered the Carson River route through Alpine county in 1848. This was considered the easier route.

Technology Changes

It seems kind of funny to talk about technological changes, but over time from the first trip in 1841 to 1869 when the transcontinental railroad was completed, there were many adaptations that were made to the tools and equipment used in the journey.



adaptions that were made to the tools and equipment used in the journey.

In the beginning horses were seen as the natural mode of locomotion. But the use of horses to pull the wagons was soon discarded. They simply were not adapted to pulling wagons for 2000 miles. They seemed to do well for a few hundred miles, but failed to have the endurance to continue. Mules were used and did ok, but

they cost three times as much as oxen. In the end oxen were the overwhelming choice and held up very well, at least until they came to the forty-mile desert. And the trouble they had at that point was really not their fault: Malnourishment, lack of water, and exhaustion did them wrong.

The wagon boxes also changed. Early on, large wagon boxes were adapted to the journey. They were shortened to a compact 4 by 10 box with most wagons using 6 to 8 different woods, each having its own purpose. Front wheels were shortened to reduce turning radius. A system was devised that allowed the boxes to be raised almost 18 inches to better ford rivers and creeks, a variety of sealants were carried to seal the wagons for river crossings, including tallow, grease and lard. Natural petroleum bogs allowed the first use of asphalt as a sealant. Lacking that, oxen could be killed and the hides used to seal the wagon boxes. Tables were attached to the back that could be lowered and used as a work station (there were no frozen biscuits). Butter churns were hung off the wagons to take advantage of the movement of the wagons, tuning milk to yellow goodness during the day.

One of the more creative changes was the miniaturization of the spinning wheel. Someone shrank the wheel to three feet from 6 feet and put the parts in a box that was quite compact. (We have one at the museum).

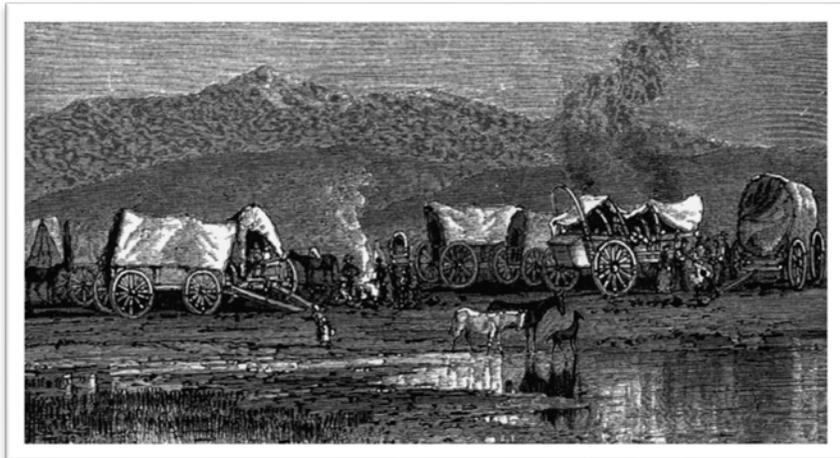
The most remarkable of the many changes was the development of several kinds of odometers used to measure the distance that the wagon would travel each day. Using the circumference of the wheel, a count of the rotations was made using elaborate cogs and

wheels. Travelers were able to count the miles traveled to a remarkably accurate degree. Almost every journal entry written on the trip contained a statement of the miles traveled each day, most to the nearest tenth of a mile.

What the wagons held

One summary stated a family of four would need 600 lbs. of flour, 120 lbs. of biscuits, 400 lbs. of bacon, 60 lbs. of coffee, 4 lbs. of tea, 100 lbs. of sugar, and 200 lbs. of lard. These would just be the basic staples. Other food stuffs could include sacks of corn, rice and beans (rare due to cooking time and water needed), plus dried peaches and apples. Bacon was often hauled in large barrels packed in bran so the hot sun would not melt the fat. Each man took a rifle or shotgun and some added a pistol. A good hunting knife was essential. Farm implements such as a plow, shovel, scythe, rake, hoe; plus, carpentry tools - saw, broad axe, mallet, plane. Seeds for corn, wheat and other crops.

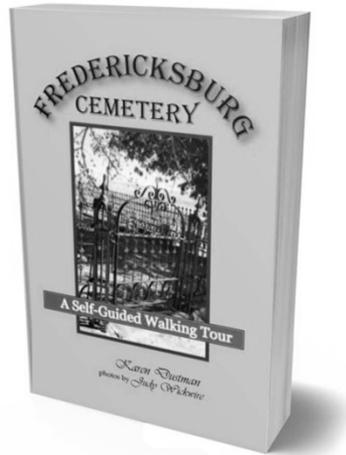
Of course, there was much more: Medical supplies, sewing supplies, clothing, shoes, bedding, books, musical instruments, trade beads, writing materials, pots and pans, stoves, money,



and a coffee grinder. It should not come as a surprise that many families had two wagons. It was not unusual for a family to have eight or ten oxen, several horses, a milk cow or two, a dog or two (one of the irritants mentioned in the journals was barking dogs). One family took a bird cage with canaries while another took a buggy for the family's daughters.

Books available from our local authors

The two books pictured below, amongst others, are available the Alpine County Museum including walking and driving tours in the area, oral histories, and much more.



Fredericksburg Cemetery Karen Dustman

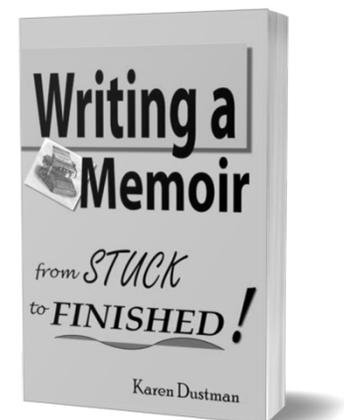
Take a stroll through the historic Frederickburg Cemetery with this book in hand and "meet" some of settlers from Alpine County's early days: a Civil War veteran; California first woman sheriff; a silver miner from Monitor; even a tiny Welshwoman who used to tell fortunes -- and predicted her own death. A great way to learn more about local history and the people who shaped it.

Second edition, \$19.95

Writing a Memoir from Stuck to Finished! Karen Dustman

Been thinking about writing a family history or memoir, but not sure where to start? This step-by-step guide is for you! Loaded with suggestions, samples and tips to simplify the process, this book is designed to help you tell *your* great life story.

\$9.95



Miscellaneous Musings

Are you a modern world Historical Society Member who would like to receive this **Newsletter by email**, rather than on paper? If so (or if you want both) just forward your name and email address to us at alpinemuseum@yahoo.com.

The museum is looking for Volunteers to help with exhibits, filing, and acting as docents for the coming year.

See the long list of things you could help with in the Curators Corner. If you have time, please contact the museum to help.

Check out our **Website** and be sure to add us to your favorites. Come visit us at www.alpinecountymuseum.org Announcements and additional information about our events will also be posted so be sure to bookmark us.



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The Historical Society of Alpine County



Sketch by Dede Lyon

Old WEBSTER SCHOOL

HISTORIC JAIL

BASQUE OVEN

MUSEUM BUILDING

The Historical Society of Alpine County invites you to become a part of our member family. Whether you are joining for the first time, or are renewing your membership: Please fill out this form and mail it today!

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Email: alpinemuseum@yahoo.com Website: alpinecountymuseum.org

Membership dues are tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ALPINE COUNTY

2019 EVENT DATES

- **May 16th** Historical Society Quarterly Meeting and Potluck at Turtle Rock Park. Doors open 5:30 PM, Potluck 6 PM, Program follows
- **May 18th.** 9 AM Grounds Sprucing Day (formerly Weeding Day) at the museum Everyone Welcome
- Volunteer training meeting, contact Jim at the museum
- Planting Day at the museum, To Be Announced, when Rick says the plants are ready.
- **May 23rd,** 10 AM Museum opening for the 2019 Summer Season
- **May 25th** Bread and Cinnamon Roll baking begins around 10:30 at the Basque oven (usually turns in to a mini potluck), Everyone Welcome
- **June 15th,** 10 AM "Impact of the Carson River Route on Alpine County" presented by Frank Tortorich at the museum. Everyone Welcome
- **June 22nd,** Markleeville History Walk, 2 PM meet at Barrett Fountain; stroll back in time and hear the story of the town from individuals who believe they were really here. Also take some time to look at the Model A Fords in town for the afternoon.
- **August 17th** Quarterly Meeting and Pizza Bake and Potluck at the Museum more information to follow
- Saturday, **Sept. 21st** Silver Mountain City tour 9 AM call Karen Dustman to reserve a spot 694-2122
-

The Historical Society of Alpine County
P.O. Box 517 Markleeville, CA 96120
Address Service Requested