The San Joaquin Historian

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition
1954-2004
This Issue...
While local historical societies tend to be very durable and maintain long traditions of service to their members and communities, they are often operated by volunteer boards and sometimes assisted by overworked staff. They do research, produce publications, collect material culture and produce educational programs and exhibits that represent the history and development of their communities. This situation often prevents, or at least, does not encourage, the documentation or preservation of their own organizational history. Our San Joaquin County Historical Society is just such an organization. "Too busy chasing the cows to fix the barn door". Well, we are going to take one little step toward rectifying our shortfall by providing a brief history of our organization on the occasion of its 50th Anniversary. So, hang on to your hat, this will be a fast and maybe exciting ride. We will drive through boxes of minute books, miles of budgets and canyons of photographs and slides to try to bring you the most important milestones and memorabilia. We hope also to pay proper homage to all of the volunteers, board members and staff who have contributed toward the success and survival of this organization. We cannot name everyone or this would become a book. Each current contributor knows who they are and we will try to recognize some of the leaders of our past as we tell this story.

On the Cover...
Left to Right
The first meeting place of the Lodi District Historical Society in 1954-The home of Thomas and Naomi Carey, 317 East Elm Street, Lodi, 2004

The current offices at the San Joaquin County Historical Society & Museum, 2004

The first Society Logo, 1984
San Joaquin County Historical Society-
50 Years and Still Looking Forward

By
Michael W. Bennett

The Early Days
Recollection- Naomi Carey Aug 23, 2004

"In 1953, while my weekly column- An Interview With the Past- in The Lodi Times, was running, I was urging Lodians to record their family histories and Lodi’s history before all the people who had that knowledge had died. Many interested people gathered in my living room at 317 East Elm Street, to create the Lodi Historical Society and to become charter members. Then we thought that we should include a larger area and called it the Northern San Joaquin Historical Society."

Our Society began as the Lodi District Historical Society in 1954.

(Excerpt)

"Northern San Joaquin County Historical Society Lodi, California, Minute Book No. 1 March 30, 1954
(Second name made official later)
The first meeting of the proposed Lodi Historical Society was held in the home of Mrs. Thomas J. Carey, 317 E. Elm, Lodi.
Present were:
Mrs. Ora (VanVlear) Woodson,
Mr. Leland Woodson,
Mr. Joseph Newfield, Sr.
Mr. Henry A Glaves, Jr.
Mr. Del Rinfret
Mr. William F. Brewer
Mrs. Naomi (McCallum) Carey

Discussion was held about a possible location of a Museum. It is possible that the Thompson Room of the Public Library will contain the manuscripts and books donated to the Society. If additional locked cases are obtained, more displays could be set up in the library.

The most likely location for the Museum seems to be the library. Mr. Micke is planning additional buildings at Micke’s Grove and it might be that he would display some of his valuable collections. The only public display at present (aside from the library), is the case maintained by the Native Daughters of the Golden West in the Hotel Lodi. The future plans for the City of Lodi call for a new or enlarged library. A room might be established in that building for museum purposes. If a new building is put up, the present library might be maintained as a museum. The location is excellent for availability, etc.- Until a definite plan is agreed upon, word-of-mouth advertising to locate interested citizens will be used. Acting Secretary, Naomi Carey"

Included in the minutes is a list of 114 citizens of the North County and several Stocktonians "likely to be interested". Recognizable in the list are the names of most of the streets and roads in the North County.

By the next meeting on July 28, 1954, the memberships totaled 29. In addition to the official minutes, Naomi McCallum Carey also reported on the activities of the Society in the Lodi Times in a column titled "An Interview with the Past" (sic).

Also, by the July meeting, the fledgling Historical Society had its first landmark project underway. —"as to the progress made so far in erecting a monument on the Woods School site. This was begun by Mrs. Edward Haas (Mable Thompson) of San Francisco and is to be a memorial to the students and teachers of San Joaquin Valley College which was on that property. A number has been designated for this plaque in the State Parks system- 520" A
search was in progress to gather information on all of the graduates and teachers of the San Joaquin Valley College in Woodbridge at the Woods School site.

Advisors to the new Historical Society included such luminaries as Mr. Leon Whitsell of the College of the Pacific and Richard Coke Wood, PhD of Stockton College.

"Mr. & Mrs. Wood operate a pioneer museum at Murphys on weekends and told us interesting things about the area."

He stressed the fact that all California history is local history.

California has three mothers which have shaped the history of the state. Mother Spain has provided the missions and their history; Mother Lode brought the migrations of the Gold Rush period and Mother Nature has given us the legacy of Yosemite, Big Trees, Redwood Empire, etc."

A speakers bureau was assembled to talk to service clubs or organizations about the Society. They included many who stayed actively involved until their ultimate demise; a few are Estelle E. Todd, Roswell Barbour, Mrs. Philip Johnson (our first Director) Howard H. Babcock, Amy Boynton, Gladys Forsberg and Mrs. Thomas Carey.

The landmark was placed in

**Charter Night Dinner Is Set**

The newly organized Lodi District Historical Society will hold its "charter night" dinner and install officers at 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 27, at the El Chorro.

Dr. J. Randolph Hutchins, recently appointed director of the California Historical Foundation at the College of Pacific, a specialist on California and Spanish-American history, will be the principal speaker.

Dr. Hutchins' topic will be based on the importance of local history.

Willard Robinson, city councilman, chosen as president of the society, heads the list of officers to be installed.

The announced purpose of the Lodi District Historical Society is the collection, preservation and dissemination of local history.

Reservations for the charter night dinner must be made by Monday noon with Mrs. Frances Dragon, Lodi 8-0572.

Lodi News/Sentinel Friday Oct. 22, 1954
Installing officer.

While the charter was being signed by those present, the members told of their origins and only one person was found to have been born in Lodi. About 3 were born in the District, one in Sweden, one in Mexico, two in Kansas, one in Illinois, the remainder in California.

The first President, Mr. Willard Robinson, was installed with a specially carved gavel and he introduced the officials who were installed by Dr. Hunt. The Charter members were:

Dr. Hunt introduced the officers who were installed by the President. The Charter members were:

1. Mrs. Louise (Jahant) Bennett
2. Miss Marian Akerley
3. Mrs. Anne K. Granlees
4. Mrs. Naomi (McCallum) Carey
5. Mrs. Emma (Pearson) Gregg
6. Mrs. Dorothy (Sargent) Van Thiel
7. Mrs. Marion (Gray) Williams
8. Mrs. Dorothy (Watson) Tappan
9. Mrs. Winifred (Beckman) Jones
10. Mrs. Evelyn (Morse) Skinner
11. Mrs. Enid (Woodson) Sullivan
12. Miss Katherine Sullivan (dau.)
13. Mrs. Dorothy (Watson) Tappan
14. Mrs. Celia (Crocker) Thompson
15. Mrs. Charlotte (Jones) Van Gelder
16. Mrs. Dorothy (Sargent) Van Thiel
17. Franklin Haskell Watson, Jr.
18. Mrs. Ruth (Gomperts) Watson
19. Mrs. Marian (Gray) Williams
20. Mrs. Miriam (Madison) Woodside
21. Mrs. L. Ora (Van Vlear) Woodson
22. Mrs. Elma (Huffman) Blais

By the sixth meeting November 24, 1954, the new historical society had committees assigned to each project. The financing of the Woodbridge College marker was underway.

"Mrs. Johnson reported on possible County aid to the society and a future museum if this Society adopts a name containing a County designation or reference. On the basis of this and other discussion about interesting other sections of the District in the Society, Mrs. Dragoo made the following motion:

That the name of the Lodi District Historical Society should be changed to the Northern San Joaquin County Historical Society.

There was concern that residents outside the Lodi area would not feel the connection.
society was interested in them and that they could not join. Provisions were being made to collect and preserve the early collections, minutes and reports of the new society. Interviews were to be conducted with older residents and a membership in the American

The Treasurer reported $144.75 in the bank which includes $37.00 in the (Woodbridge) College fund.

Ed. Note) Obviously a number of people became interested in the Historical Society and a museum and a plan for a museum at Micke Grove Park was developed and executed in 1966. The new Lodi Library building was not completed until 1978.

We must leave the early days or we may never reach 2004 in the space allotted. However, the record of early activities is instructive in that the vision of 1954 was executed in large part and the Society & Museum of today is the result of that vision. What remains to be learned is how the great task was accomplished.

While hundreds have led and served the Society and many thousands have lent their support, those who took the helm of the organization deserve special recognition.

Historical Society Presidents Since Founding

(one year terms)

Emmett Perry 1954-55
Germude Kettleman 1955-56
Medora Johnson 1957-58, 1958-59
Amy Boynton 1959-60, 1960-61

By the February 23, 1955 the research committee structure had developed as follows:

Transportation- Mr. Barbour
Library (Publications & bulletins)
Historic Sites-
War History
Industry & Agriculture
Religion
Education
Genealogy-Mrs. Carey
Fairs and Festivals- Mrs. Bennett
Arts & Crafts- Mrs. Boone
Museum- Mrs. Johnson
California Indian History
Cemetery-Mrs. Carey

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Page 5
Society Programs and Traditions
The earliest programs of the Society were the monthly, (with summers off), membership meetings. Ask any of our old timers what they remember most and they will mention the potluck meetings. Each October the Annual Meeting was held as a special meeting with a special program. As attendance at monthly meetings declined, News & Notes took over as the primary means of communicating with members. The quarterly Historian has been maintained as the primary vehicle for more scholarly recording and sharing of our local history.

With the advent of the museum, the Annual Barbecue became more of the big event of the year and as funding needs grew it was replaced by Grooving in the Grove and later the Century Business Dinner and Legends of California Wine Auction and Dinner. Other events like the Biennial Wild Flower Show and Art Exhibit were museum based but were produced by Society members and volunteers.

A Museum is Born
In 1954 the idea of a museum was born and now, 38 years later, the museum is still being born. Years of vision, hard work, and countless volunteer and staff hours have produced one of the few agricultural and local history museums to be accredited by the American Association of Museums in the five western states and the only one in California.

On July 28th, 1966, Clifford C. Wisdom, Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors signed the agreement that established the San Joaquin County Historical Museum at Micke Grove Park. It had been an idea since 1954 and now the Historical Society under the leadership of Naomi Carey was in the museum business. The first museum facility was an 800 square foot section of the new Micke Grove Park Machine Shop. On October 2, 1967 the new "temporary" home of the San Joaquin County Historical Museum was opened for business.

All of the things that had been collected and stored in members' basements, closets and attics began to arrive. Museum Director Medora Johnson, Celia Myers, Fran Welch and other volunteers began the process of cataloguing using standards that had been developed by California State Parks. While that was going on, planning for the new 12 acre museum site was under way and the Botanic Garden, south of the parking lot, was under construction and that was soon followed by the Micke Building. Society volunteers performed all of the exhibit construction and collections care and it is to their credit that accreditation came so soon. By 1973 the Micke Exhibits were open and the museum hosted its first Wildflower Show. The paid staff consisted of Medora, Emil Beglau, Kathy Mettler, Alice Perry, Edith Peters and Fran Welch. Everyone was part-time and volunteered more.

A more telling comment from Celia Myers' compendium Medora and the Museum, describes the fledgling institution: "There was heat but during the colder season, portable space heaters were needed to make the areas comfortable where we worked. There was no cooling.--There was no running water. I kept a package of towelettes with which to freshen my hands. The toilet facilities were located in the adjacent work area and were used by the entire male park crew so we chose to use the ladies restrooms located near the swimming pool about three blocks away."

Under Medora's direction, museum development really began to roll. She had a strong work ethic and took the Boy Scout motto, "be prepared" very seriously in her dealings with the Historical Society Board and the County Board of Supervisors. Fears were voiced then and since that "the museum was the tail shaking the dog".

Recollection- Robert Bonta August 23, 2004
"There were fears that the Society would end up with major financial and management responsibilities that it was ill prepared for and that the traditional functions of the Society would atrophy in the process."

Page 6
From 1966 to 1985 there were two distinct entities operating under the governance of the San Joaquin County Historical Society. One was “Medora’s museum” and the other was the traditional historical society. In 1985, after the passing of Medora Johnson in 1980, and after the Board commissioned a feasibility study for fund raising, the two operations were consolidated as the San Joaquin County Historical Society & Museum. The museum gained a redeveloped fund raising board and the Society gained a professional staff to help support the consolidated programs of both entities. Just as some feared and others hoped, the museum did grow and the society membership with it.

Unfortunately, due to the demise of many of the most senior Society members and new boards and committees that consisted of business leaders and not “hands on” volunteer event and program coordinators, traditional Society activities did diminish. This writer hopes that, on the occasion of the organization’s 50th anniversary, the Board, staff and volunteers will re-institute some of the traditional programs and adjust the content and scheduling for the current mix of members and attract more new, and younger members to the mix of active members.

**Sign Posts of Growth**

These sign posts, each a decade apart are indicators of the advancements of the Society and later Society & Museum operations and cannot possibly describe the tremendous number of hours and great talents that were required to accomplish all the work that was performed. That required many minute books which provide a fascinating picture of the history of our organization.

**1954**

**Facilities:** The living rooms and kitchens of dedicated members and volunteers.

**Collections:** First Gift Contracts drawn, seven issues of early newspapers, some photographs and the bell from the Woodbridge College.

**Budget:** None, but a balance of $144.75 in the bank which included $57.00 in gifts for the Woodbridge College Monument.

**Membership:** 43 members

**1964**

**Facilities:** None, meetings were held in homes, the Lodi Library and special meetings were held in the Julia Harrison Micke Building in Micke Grove Park.

**Collections:** More newspapers, some books on the Mother Lode.

**Budget:** $223.12 balance on hand.

**Membership:** 134 attended the 1966 Annual Meeting.

**1974**

**Facilities:** Meetings were held in the Julia Harrison Micke Memorial Auditorium and the Board meetings were held in the “small room” (probably the Solarium) and in board members’ homes.

**Collections:** Rapid growth in agricultural equipment and hand and foot powered tools.

**Budget:** Society operating accounts and the museum operating fund totaled $21,814.37. The primary sources were: memberships, trips and book sales.

**Membership:** 221 members included 206 regular members, 9 corporations, and 3 students.

**Staff:** Museum Director, Registrar, Maintenance

**1984**

**Facilities:** Erickson Building, Micke Building, Delta Building, Tree & Vine Building. Occasionally Board meetings were held in board members homes or offices.

**Collections:** Large and growing agricultural equipment, photographs, textiles, ethnographic materials, household and business artifacts and records, County Historic Records.

**Budget:** $138,973 was the consolidated Society & Museum budget.

**Membership:** 433 and includes non-county residents.

**Staff:** Society & Museum Director, Administrative Manager, Curator of Exhibits and Collections, Collections Manager, two Security and Maintenance workers.

**1994**


**Collections:** Slower growth in collecting, increased emphasis on filling in the collections.
The last decade is characterized by an increased emphasis on volunteerism, especially within the Docent Council, Agricultural Equipment Committee and fund raising events. That emphasis has been precipitated by declining County financial support, reductions in available grant programs and a couple of severe fluctuations in the economy and investment performance. The last decade has also seen tremendous growth in education programs: Growth in Valley Days, the advent of Pioneer School and Living History Camp. Our staff has grown with the two professional Curator positions and that has brought us increased value in educational programming and increases in the number of students served and a vastly improved exhibit program that includes more in house exhibits and more frequent traveling exhibits through our participation in the California Exhibit Resources Alliance. No historical society or museum can survive and prosper without increasing donorship and our donors have made a lot of progress possible.

A Look Forward

Where do we go from here? I asked our staff to get out their crystal balls and the responses were both thoughtful and representative of the creativity of our staff and wonderful volunteers.

Administration and membership services Staff growth is expected to be very conservative and greatly assisted by increasing numbers and the specialized services of volunteers. Funding will be more heavily dependent on local donorship and membership support. There will be some grants available but growth in that area is expected to be slow. There will be an increased reliance on admissions, user fees and pay as you go type programming. Members will derive increased service through member only events and member discounts. News & Notes and The Historian will still be the anchors of member to member communication. There will be increased emphasis on monographs and other publications and a continued increase in the range and quality of gift shop offerings. There will be a renewed emphasis on programming for adult members and visitors. An effort will be made to bring back some of the Society’s traditional program events such as potluck meetings, show and tell, annual dinner, etc.

Education Department We have been polling members and adult visitors and have found an increased interest in programs for youth adapted to the interests of adults such as Valley Days for Adults or Trails West for Adults. More local authors will be featured at the museum along with quarterly seminars and work shops. There has been an interest in curatorial and research skills subjects, such as the preservation of personal collections, display techniques and writing workshops. We have a great venue for teaching vanishing crafts such as blacksmithing, quilting, old style cooking, traditional basket weaving and doll making. For young people we expect an increase in curriculum or theme based tours as the museum grows. The idea of mini-Valley Days for younger students has been suggested. We are also looking forward to increased programming for high school age students and more work/study opportunities. A dedicated education facility is planned to help meet the needs of the growing education programs.
Collections and Exhibits
Recent advances in exhibit production have stimulated new suggestions from members, visitors and staff. We plan to put in place a three year schedule of rotating and changing exhibits which will help the museum market its exhibits to more sponsors at the $3,000 and beyond level. Regular updates of major exhibits in each building will be developed and a children’s component will be developed in each exhibit building.

The collections records will be fully digitized to improve staff and researcher access and keep collections management costs as low as possible. All collections storage will be consolidated on site with the construction of a 12,000 sq. ft. collections conservation and storage facility. Staff increases should include an Exhibit Preparator position.

Closing
This has been a pretty fast romp through 50 years of Society activities and history. I have spent proportionally more time and space on the origins and early days of the Society since many of us remember most of the later years. It was a personal pleasure to have the opportunity to go back beyond my 27 years with the Society and relive some of the history and discover stories that I was unaware of. The minute books and other documents are replete with the evidence of just how hard our board, volunteers and staff have worked over the years and the patience and diligence that was required to achieve what we have. Personal credit also belongs to all the members who have steadfastly maintained their membership and taken an active part in events and projects. In serving you we have also been able to serve the people of San Joaquin County as well. Likewise our partners in County government deserve our appreciation. While the levels of support have certainly varied over the years, there has always been some level of support and assistance for the Society & Museum and that recognition of excellence in service reflects well on all of us.

Special Note:
The minute books and budgets supply a great deal of information and preserve an outstanding record of our Society operations. However, little was discovered in terms of photographs or memorabilia on our Society prior to 1966. It is understandable that more material was retained after the museum was established and provided a place to store and access that material.

We are indebted to Evelyn Olson, daughter of Williard Robinson for a photograph and clipping that had been safeguarded in her family records.

Thanks also to Ralph Wetmore, Mary Ellen Estrada, daughter of Celia and Elwood Myers and David Johnson for checking their treasure boxes. David is still looking.

If anyone has or has knowledge of photographs or other Society memorabilia, please call the museum office. We can scan those images and return them almost immediately. Those items would also make a much appreciated addition to the Society & Museum archives and a copy could be returned to our donor.

The person who gets to write the 75th Anniversary edition will bless you.

Mrs. Medora Johnson touring a class through the Micke Building, c. 1967
Moving the Calaveras School to the Museum, June 22, 1976


Supervisor George Barber (on tractor) and Society President Robert Bonta and Supervisor Yoshikawa break ground for the Tree & Vine Building, 1978

Annual Barbecue, 1974
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