

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SEPT-OCT 2012, NO. 7-8

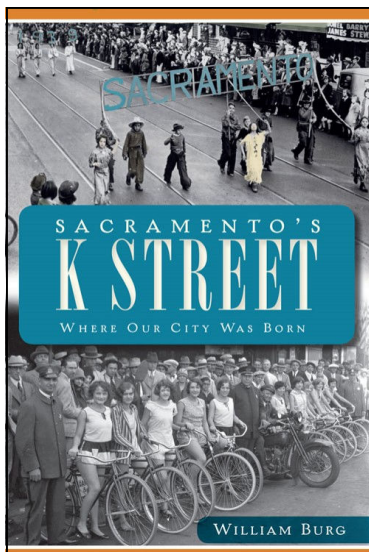
**Tuesday, Sept. 25, 7:00 PM**  
**Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Blvd., Sacramento**  
**Sacramento 1850: Settlers Revolt or Squatters Riot?**  
**An Illustrated Talk by Greg Voelm**

In August of 1850, a little army of about 45 armed settlers marched to Fourth and J Street in downtown Sacramento where they got in a shootout with the mayor, the city assessor and a posse of government supporters. The leader of the settlers, the mayor and city assessor were all shot. The next day the sheriff rode out to arrest the shooters and, in a smoky barroom fight, the sheriff and several settlers were killed. The settlers were arrested but never brought to trial, despite the fact that they had pretty much shot up the elected leaders of the town. One leader of the settlers was elected to the state legislature from his jail cell, another leader was James McClatchy who went on to found the Sacramento Bee.

Why has this story been left out of many history books? Was Sacramento covering up its Wild West past, or something deeper having to do with property and control? When the event is mentioned at all, it is usually called by the one sided term "squatter's riot" when in fact the settlers were well organized, often worked through the courts and represented a position on claiming unused land that many thought was legal. Similar issues took place throughout California at the time. You be the judge. Popular historian Greg Voelm will present a rip roaring illustrated lecture on this exciting event in hidden history. Parking is available both on and off the street at the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento.



Dr. Charles L. Robinson, about whom we will hear more.  
[www.territorialkansasonline.org](http://www.territorialkansasonline.org)



**Tuesday, October 23, 7 PM at the California State Archives, 1020 O St., Sacramento**  
***Sacramento's K Street: Where Our City Was Born* with William Burg**  
**Archives Month Program with State Archives, Sac Art Deco Society, & Sac Old City Assn.**

From its founding, K Street mirrored the entrepreneurial development of California's capital city. Initially the storefront for gold seekers trampling a path between the Sacramento River and Sutter's Fort, K Street soon became the hub of California's first stage, railroad and riverboat networks. Over the years, K Street boasted saloons and vaudeville houses, the neon buzz of jazz clubs and movie theaters, as well as the finest hotels and department stores. For the postwar generation, K Street was synonymous with Christmas shopping and teenage cruising. From the Golden Eagle and Buddy Baer's to Weinstock's and the Alhambra Theatre, join historian William Burg as he chronicles the legacy of Sacramento's K Street, once a boulevard of aspirations and bustling commerce and now home to a spirit of renewal.

SCHS vice-president William Burg wrote *Sacramento's K Street*, published by The History Press, as an urban history of Sacramento's downtown district, from the years before John Sutter arrived until the efforts to save the Alhambra Theatre. The book examines K Street's well-known role as a retail hub, but also explores its role as a transportation corridor, center for nightlife and entertainment, and mixed-use residential neighborhood. Well-known aspects of Sacramento history like the Gold Rush and Transcontinental Railroad are intimately tied to K Street, but they serve as prologue to Sacramento's urban legacy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this legacy has been lost to time and redevelopment, but enough evidence remains to rebuild some of the stories from Sacramento's most recognizable business boulevard. This presentation will include images and stories that were not used in the book. Copies of the book will be available for sale and signing. Take light rail, use free evening street parking, or look for a Parking sign directing you to the lot opposite the Archives, which MAY be available. If so, the entrance will be off 10th Street.

## Murphy's Comedians: A Bit of K Street Vaudeville History

By William Burg

One of my duties as SCHS Vice-President is answering public inquiries via the SCHS voicemail and email inbox. Most inquiries are people looking for other organizations, like the Center for Sacramento History, the Sacramento History Museum, the City of Sacramento's historic preservation department, or, most recently, information about Old Sacramento's enormously popular underground sidewalks tours. Others call us seeking information about antiques, either asking if we want to acquire their collection or asking for an "Antiques Roadshow" type expert to assess their antiques. The former I refer to the Center for Sacramento History archive, the latter are generally ignored unless I know an expert (I recently referred a caller to a local expert on Civil War swords.) But some inquiries lead to fascinating revelations about Sacramento history.

This summer, a woman named Melissa Hays sent an email asking if we knew anything about a theater fire in approximately 1920-1925. At first I assumed she was referring to one of the fires at the Hippodrome Theater, but she claimed that her grandfather Harry Hays was part owner of the theater, and along with his wife Ruby Kisman, partners in a vaudeville troupe called Murphy's Comedians. The Hippodrome was owned by Marcus Loew, and the theater was no longer used for vaudeville performances after 1918. According to Albert Flink's *A Century of Cinema in Sacramento*, a book on local theater history, the only theater

that closed in 1925 was the M&M Theatre on 7<sup>th</sup> Street between K and L. This provided an intriguing lead, but there were no easily available photos of the M&M. Melissa had **photos of her grandparents in front of a theater**, but there was no sign or address visible. Was the M&M her grandparents' theater?

A trip to the California State Library's "California Room" provided the evidence needed to make the connection. The 1924 and 1925 Sacramento City Directories listed the M&M Theatre, managed by J.A. Menard, and the same directories included Harry Hays, listed as stage manager for the M&M Theatre. A visit to the microfilm room revealed two Sacra-



Harry Hays and Ruby Kisman on stage at the M&M Theatre, c. 1925. Melissa Hays collection

mento Bee articles about the M&M Theatre. The first was a 1922 article about the planned re-decoration and reopening of the former "People's Theater" as the M&M, managed by J.A. Menard, with a \$10,000 interior designed by C.F. Ruhau, who had recently finished the \$1,000,000 Grauman Theater in Los Angeles. The article also mentioned that the stock company of Murphy's Comedians would be the M&M's troupe of actors.

The second article, on December 13, 1924, was about a fire at the M&M that occurred on Sunday December 12. A.E. Williams and Harry Hays were mentioned as the operators of the theater. The fire chief theorized that the fire was caused by a gas heater in a dressing room. Other members of the local actors' and musicians' union prepared benefit performances at the Tuesday Club to assist the actors in replacing their losses of wardrobe and props. The previous day's paper, Sunday December 12, included an ad for what would have been the M&M's final performance, the four-act melodrama "Ishmael," a romance of Virginia, starring Billy Wade in the title role and Ruby Kisman as Claudia Merlin. The fire that Sunday morning dropped the final curtain on the M&M Theatre, and Harry and Ruby moved on to San Diego after the fire to work at the Savoy Theatre. According to their granddaughter, the couple had traveled with Murphy's Comedians across Louisiana and Texas for 12 years before settling in Sacramento, after working on board the "Cotton Blossom" show boat. Murphy's was led by Horace Murphy, who later went on to act in cowboy films in Hollywood.

The 1920s were a high water mark for Sacramento's theater and movie business: the "riverboat" movie craze was at its peak, and Sacramento was a popular location for Hollywood productions requiring rivers and riverboats. Sacramento's theatrical and movie community included dozens of small theaters, and some of the city's most iconic picture palaces, including the Fox Senator and the Alhambra, opened during this decade. Actors like Harry and Ruby, with experience on showboats and Southern stages, saw opportunity in Sacramento, but their theatrical run was cut short by a disastrous fire. (Cont'd. page 3)



While many of the inquiries to the SCHS email and voicemail are simply referrals to other organizations or questions about upcoming meetings, occasionally they open doors to little-known chapters of Sacramento history, and stories of the fascinating people who have called Sacramento home.

**SOCA Home Tour Features Poverty Ridge  
22nd street, between U & V  
Sunday September 16, 10-4**

By William Burg



Roan-Didion House, 2000 22nd St. Photo Lisa Oulette

The 2012 SOCA Home Tour includes exclusive looks inside some of Sacramento's most beautiful historic homes, including the seldom-seen upstairs level of the Ella K. McClatchy Library, formerly the McClatchy Home, and the Roan-Didion House, designed by Sacramento's masters of Prairie architecture Seadler & Hoen and best known as Joan Didion's residence during her teenage years in Sacramento.

The Poverty Ridge neighborhood, located atop Sacramento's only prominent hill, tried to re-brand itself as "Sutter's Terrace" in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but was unable to extricate itself from its past as a redoubt for those escaping Sacramento's early floods. The colorful name did not prevent some of Sacramento's most prominent names from building homes in the neighborhood, including Sacramento mayor and real estate developer Dan Carmichael and Buffalo Brewery founder Henry Grau. Served by streetcars on 21<sup>st</sup> Street and T Street, the ridge offered unparalleled views of downtown Sacramento, just minutes away by streetcar.

The home tour is accompanied by a street fair featuring local contractors, businesses, artists, artisans, and local history and nonprofit organizations. The street fair also features live music by Autumn Sky, Clemon Charles and the Garage Jazz Architects, and popsicles by Popcycle. Tickets are available at the Avid Reader (Broadway), Collected Works, the 57<sup>th</sup> Street Antique Mall, Time Tested Books, or online at <http://socahtour.brownpapertickets.com>.

## **We Are Where We Eat**

By Maryellen Burns

Cal Humanities, formerly known as the California Council for the Humanities, recently funded **We Are Where We Eat**, a project that chronicles the stories of Sacramento's home cooks, shopkeepers, agricultural leaders, food experts, barkeepers and more. From the immigrants who brought their home kitchens with them in the 1800's to the restaurateurs who set trends in the Sacramento Valley of today, **We Are Where We Eat** gives voice to ways in which where we produce our food affects our feelings about home, community and culture.

Programs will be held throughout Sacramento County. Soon Arcade, Galt, and Elk Grove Libraries will host mini-workshops to gather regional recipes and family stories. See page 4 and [we-are-where-we-eat.com](http://we-are-where-we-eat.com) for more details. The Rancho Cordova Historical Society will exhibit photographs, menus, fruit and vegetable labels, and other local food. More programs will be announced as scheduled.

You're invited to share your stories, memories and regional recipes, too. If you have a **recipe** to contribute where did you get it and how has it held up over the years? Are you involved in **agriculture**, the **wine** or **food** business, and if so, how? Want to capture the stories of where you eat, and with whom? Share your history in a one-one-one private interview with Elaine Corn, a contributing reporter for Capital Public Radio and go home with a disk of your recording. The project culminates in a food time line, culinary map, series of public conversations and a forum entitled *Savor Sacramento* May 31 through June 1, 2013.

—Program support by Cal Humanities, independent state partner to the National Council for Humanities. Additional program partners include the Sacramento Public Library and Capital Public Radio. Sponsors include SCHS, the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society, and the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom.



Early street vendor, 4th & I St., c. 1923. Railroads commonly rolled carts out for workers and passengers. CSRM

# **2010-2011 Board of Directors**

President: Patricia Turse  
Vice President: William Burg  
Corresponding Secretary: Illa Collin  
Treasurer: Dan Winkelman  
History Consortium: Dr. Bob LaPerrière

Please deliver by September 1, 2012

# **Members-at-Large**

Maryellen Burns-Dabaghian, Clare Ellis, Tom Herzog,  
Greg Voelm, Greg Wellman, and Lisa Wire

**Membership:** Jenan Saunders

# **GOLDEN NUGGETS**

Published at least bimonthly, September to June  
Editorial & Layout: Patricia Turse  
Email: [info@sachistoricalociety.org](mailto:info@sachistoricalociety.org)



# **OUT & ABOUT**

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
Sept. 8 Saturday	10 AM to 2 PM	<b>Folsom Powerhouse Electric Fair</b> Celebrate the Grand Opening of the new Folsom Powerhouse Visitor Center by recalling the 1895 Electric Carnival. Docent tours of the new exhibits and the powerhouse, kids' activities, food. Free admission and some nearby free parking.	Folsom Powerhouse SHP 9980 Greenback Lane, Folsom 916-988-4843 fair/tour information 988-0205 general park information
Sept 14 Friday	7 PM	<b>A Community Cooks</b> Food historian Maryellen Burns presents a regional history of Sacramento's community cookbooks and cookbook authors, as well as food-related ephemera. Free!	Sacramento Book Collectors Arcade Library 2443 Marconi Avenue, Sacramento (916)264-2700
Sept. 22 Saturday	1 PM to 4 PM	<b>We Are Where We Eat</b> Mini seminars for those involved in agriculture or the wine or food business and those who have special food-related stories to share as this exciting new cultural program launches.	Arcade Library 2443 Marconi Avenue, Sacramento
Sept. 29 Saturday	1 PM to 4 PM		Marion Lawrence Library 1000 Caroline Ave., Galt
Oct. 20 Saturday	10 AM to 3 PM		Elk Grove Library 8900 Elk Grove Blvd., Elk Grove
Sept. 28, Oct. 26 Friday	Noon to 1 PM	<b>Tour the California State Archives</b> Monthly overview tour of resources within. Free.	Archives Tour Coordinator 916-653-7715