

Our museum is located in the great Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains of California.

Our culture of the Washoe people, agricultural era, and silver mining of the surrounding areas display our pioneering history of Alpine County.

ALPINE COUNTY MUSEUM

PO Box 517
Markleeville, CA
96120

530.694.2317

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alpinecountymuseum.org

MUSEUM HOURS

Thursday, Friday,
Saturday, & Sunday
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Tragedy Spring and the Opening of the Gold Rush Trail

PART I

By Frank Tortorich

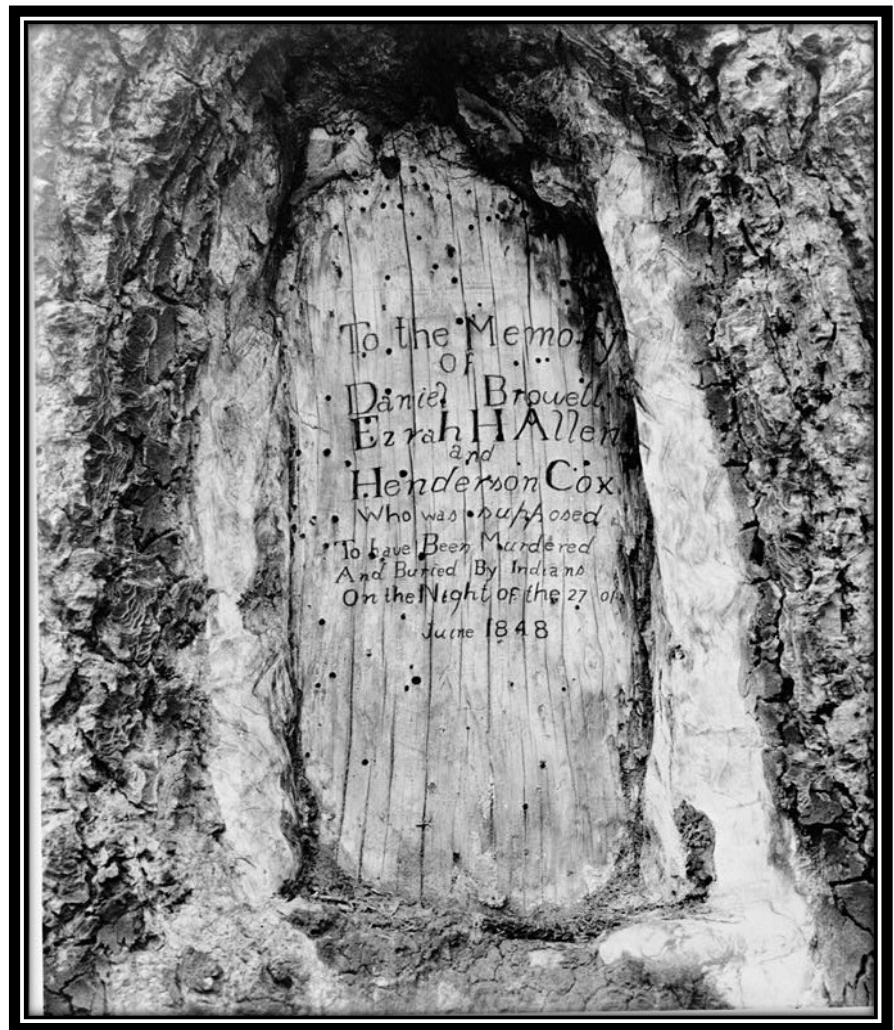


Photo by Frank Tortorich

This stump and its carving are presently housed in
the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park museum in Coloma, California

Tragedy Spring continued on page 4

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



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BY: TOM SWEENEY



What news do I have from the Alpine County Historical Society you might ask?

Well as it is always said, I have good news and some bad news. Where should I start, well let get the bad news out of the way first. As you have probably heard or read after doing all the changes to the interior of the museum our Curator Kristiina Wiedenhoft has resigned. She did a great job in her tenure, the changes to layout of the interior gives the museum a totally different flow. So, I hope that you all will come and take a tour of the museum both inside and outside. We all wish her well in her new life adventures.

Now for good news. The notice of the vacancy has been published and from the pool of candidates was established. The interview panel is setting up the date and times for the position. I will let you know the results as soon as the decision is made. Lynette Noah is returning as the museum assistant.

The Alpine County Historical Society website is up and running and it will be an available source of current information, visit www.alpinecountymuseum.org. We are hoping to open as usual Thursday thru Sunday 10AM-4PM thru the end of September.

At our last Board of Directors meeting there was a long discussion on what activities should we plan for this season. At that time, we had no firm information on when and if we were going to open for this season. It was decided that the Markleeville Living History Walk in June and The Silver Mountain City tour would both be cancelled for this season. We felt that with the masking and social distancing requirements in place at that time it would be hard for the actors to do their usual dramatic performance.

Other summer events that we have had over the years are still under discussion and as soon as we have a final decision, we will let everyone know.

I would like to know if you have any concerns or suggestions on our plans for this summer, please email me at, tsweeneyac@gmail.com.

Hope to see you around the museum when you come by. We will be working on changes to the grounds. The annual weeding and planting day is scheduled for this month, it is a not to be missed event.

-Tom

CURATOR'S CORNER

by: Kristiina Wiedenhoft



I am happy to say that the museum can finally reopen this summer! While many things did not go quite as planned this past year, I hope you can enjoy the changes made to the museum and the new layout of exhibits. I have had a great time exploring the history and culture of Alpine County and learning so much about this beautiful area.

Working for museums and preserving and sharing history is something I absolutely love, and I am so grateful for my time here. But unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, I will no longer be able to dedicate the time and effort that this position deserves.

I am sorry to say that I have resigned as the curator of the Alpine County Museum. This was not an easy decision to make, and I am sad to have to leave so soon, especially right before we are getting back to normal at the museum.

But I am confident that the new curator will be a great asset the museum and will be able to dive right in and take over with ease. It has been a pleasure working for the Alpine County Museum and with all the members of the Historical Society.

Thank you for being so kind, welcoming, and dedicated to preserving history. I am so thankful to have been given this opportunity and experience.

-Kristiina

Website: www.alpinecountymuseum.org

Facebook: @alpinecountymuseum

Instagram: @alpinemuseum

YouTube: coming soon!

Tragedy In Paradise PART I continued from page 1

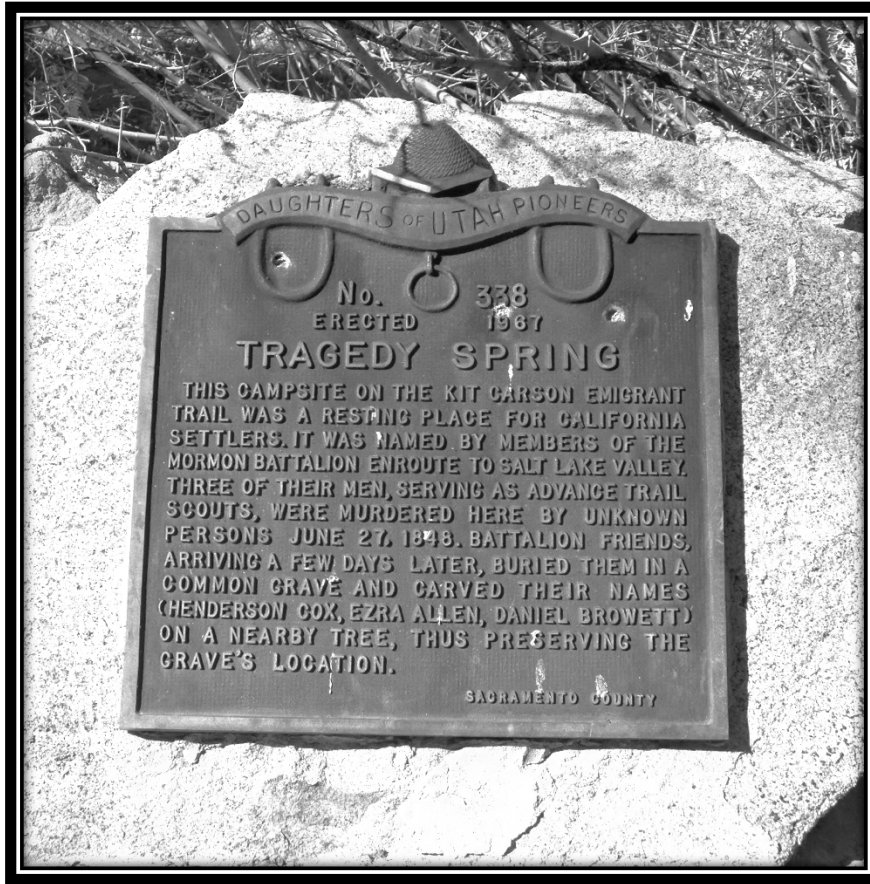


Photo by Frank Tortorich, September 2019

This plaque was attached onto a granite rock at the base of the trail to the grave on Tragedy Spring Road on September 2, 1967, by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers

INTRODUCTION

When I was very young my parents often took me into the Sierra Nevada for a day of fishing, picnicking, or camping at Silver Lake. It was on these trips that I first became aware of Tragedy Spring just

¹ There is only one spring at Tragedy Spring, though many mistakenly refer to it as Tragedy Springs.. The location is near California State Route 88, about two miles west of Silver Lake. The Oregon-California Trail runs from Missouri to Pocatello, Idaho. At that point the trail splits, with the California Trail headed southwest into the Humboldt River basin of present-day Nevada.

off California State Route 88. We often stopped to drink from the spring and walk up to view the grave. In the 1960s a rock wall was built at the edge of the highway with a drinking fountain and the Daughters of Utah Pioneers bronze marker attached to the wall.

In 1978, my wife Mary Ann and I were recruited as US Forest Service volunteers to research the Carson River Route of the California Emigrant Trail for the Amador Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest.

Tragedy Spring is one of the most historic locations along the Carson River Route.¹ It seemed a good place to begin our research as we knew very little about emigrant trail history.

Our research naturally led us to the emigrant trail journals, of which there are many. We found that published versions of the same journal often differed from one another because of editing and transcription. These different versions made for interesting reading. Editors and transcribers

often sought to correct spelling, punctuation, or attempted to make the text easier to understand in today's vernacular. The changes sometimes showed the bias of the editor. In this article we have footnoted each quote to let the reader know which version of the journal is being used.²

In this paper we explore the interesting details that explain why this site became famous. We offer opinions about the events that took place at Tragedy Spring to augment the primary source documentation surrounding those events that sometimes fail to answer remaining questions.

² "Extracts from the Journal of Henry W. Bigler," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, "Bigler," October 1932, Vol 5, no 4, 148, states of the transcription "... It is a true copy of the original journal." However, page 155, offers the following correction obviously added to the original journal: "...camped on the Carson River though at that time we had no name for it only the one we gave it that was 'Pilot River.'"

These opinions are based on forty-plus years of studying the research findings of the Carson River Route and Tragedy Spring stories.

We attempt to offer some possible explanations of why, in the summer of 1848, three discharged soldiers of the Mormon Battalion died at this specific location, supposedly killed by Indians; what events brought them to the West Coast in the first place; and why they were scouting this Indian trail. In addition, why did this Indian trail become the primary route to the California gold fields?³ And what became of the members of this party as they continued east to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Perhaps, in exploring these questions, we can better understand why the simple tree inscription in the opening photo has puzzled so many.

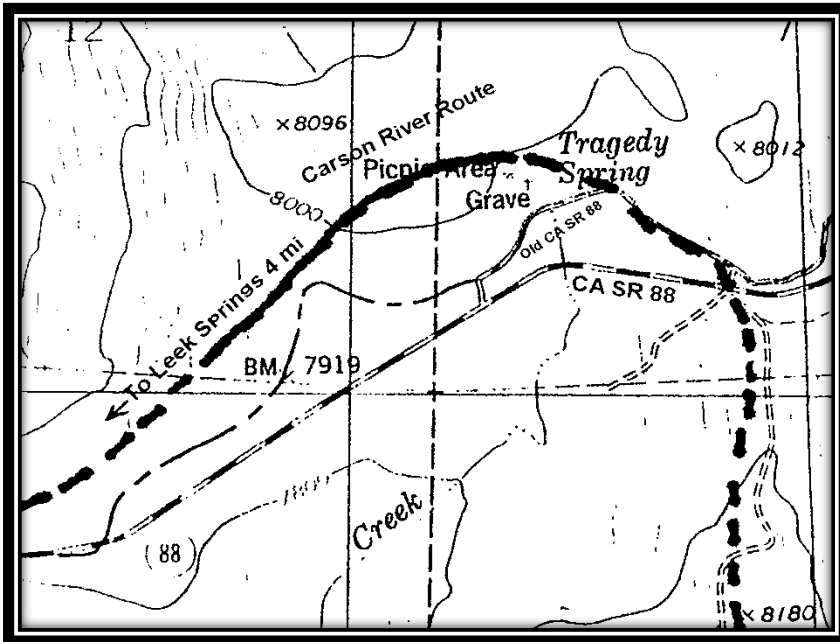
vigilante murder just a few miles east of the Mississippi River in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844. The nearby city of Nauvoo was the most recent home to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, Saints, or Mormons). The Mormons were led by their founder and beloved president Joseph Smith. Smith and his brother Hyrum were, on June 27, in jail in Carthage, having been charged with closing down an opposition newspaper in Nauvoo. A mob gathered nearby, attacked the jail, and killed Joseph and Hyrum.⁴ These murders were a continuation of the persistent persecutions of the Mormon people by non-Mormon Americans. After this event the violence against the Mormons escalated. Families were accosted, barns, and homes burned down.⁵

The killing of Joseph Smith fragmented the church. Debates erupted over who should lead it. Brigham Young was at that time the President of the Quorum of Twelve, or second in command after Joseph Smith, and so assumed the interim leadership role.⁶ Eventually Young was chosen to become president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

By the end of September of 1845 it was clear to the leaders of the church that the Saints would have to sell or abandon their farms and homes in Nauvoo, for their own safety and leave for a new home somewhere beyond the Rocky Mountains.⁷ Rumors of various destinations spread.—Eventually the Salt Lake Valley in Mexican territory became their destination.

On February 4, 1846, the first group of Saints crossed the frozen Mississippi River into Iowa, a difficult winter trek.

In June the Mormons, after an exhausting winter, halted their migration for a few weeks at a site they named Mount Pisgah in Iowa. During this early migration, Brigham Young sent his nephew, Elder Jessie Little, to Washington to seek financial



Grave and SR 88 and Carson River Route
graphics added by Frank Tortorich

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The story of Tragedy Spring is the account of 45 men, and one woman, seeking to rejoin their community of faith in the Salt Lake Valley. The inception of their odyssey can be traced to a

³ Frank Tortorich, *Gold Rush Trail: A Guide To The Carson River Route* (Wagon Wheel Tours, 1998, revised 2016).

⁴ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 546-50.

⁵ J. Leonard Arrington and Davis Britton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 94.

⁶ J. Leonard Arrington, *Brigham Young American Moses* (Urbana Chicago: University Illinois Press, 1986), 114.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

assistance from the federal government to aid their exodus from the United States.⁸ At Mount Pisgah, on June 26, 1846, US Army Captain James Allen brought an answer to Young's request for help. The answer came in the form of a letter from President James K. Polk, who requested 500 men from the migrating Mormons to enlist into the US Army,⁹ under the command of US Army General Stephen Watts Kearny.¹⁰ They were to aid the nation in its war with Mexico, declared just a few weeks earlier. Needing the money to support the migration, Mormon leader Brigham Young encouraged this one-year enlistment.

This request from President Polk did not sit well with the Mormon community. The United States was considered by many Mormons to be their enemy. Joining the US Army and leaving their families to migrate without them was repugnant.¹¹

*... President Young encouraged the men by assuring them that their families should be cared for, that they should fare as well as his did, and that he would see that they were helped along. He also predicted that not one of these who might enlist would fall by the hands of the nation's foe, that their only fighting would be with wild beast.*¹²

By the end of July, Captain Allen, promoted to Colonel Allen, had collected a list of Mormon volunteers that would take on the identity of the Mormon Battalion. The US Army allowed the battalion to select their own officers and form their own companies.¹³ The count was thus: 22 officers and 474 enlisted, for a total of 496 men. Four other men would join up in route, bringing the total to 500.¹⁴ The battalion organized themselves into five companies of 100. Each company was allowed four laundresses for a total of twenty laundresses.¹⁵

The Mormon Battalion was dispatched to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and inducted into the US Army of the West under the command of General Kearny.

Kearny was ordered to lead the Army of the West to California by way of the Santa Fe Trail. He was charged to occupy Santa Fe in Mexican territory, and then proceed on to Mexican California to take command of it for the United States.

On August 13, 1846, the US Army of the West, including the Mormon Battalion, began their march to California.

After six difficult months of travel, three groups separated from the main Mormon Battalion because of illness and fatigue, and the numbers fell to 335 and five women.¹⁶ Those groups were sent to Fort Pueblo (Colorado) for the winter and would be known as the sick detachments.¹⁷

The Battalion, under the direct command of Philip St. George Cooke, pioneered a new road across the Southwest, arriving in southern California on January 29, 1847. They found the war in California over. Brigham Young's bold prophecy that no man would die in battle was fulfilled.

The Mormon Battalion members were discharged from the US Army in July of 1847 and left to their own resources to somehow reunite with their families and other members of their faith who had accompanied the westward Mormon migration. At that time they did not know that the Saints' final destination was the Great Salt Lake Valley.¹⁸

Upon discharge, the members broke into several groups. Seventy-nine men reenlisted in the army for another six months. Several men returned by the way they came to join their families still in Iowa or Winter Quarters in Nebraska. Some chose to follow the Old Spanish Trail out of southern California, hoping to find the migrating Saints. Fifty-one

⁸ Arrington, 128.

⁹ Norma Baldwin Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion: U.S. Army of the West 1846-1848* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁰ Pronounced KAR ney in Nebraska and KER ney in California. Family uses KAR ney.

¹¹ Sgt. Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History Of The Mormon Battalion In The Mexican War: 1846-1847* (Chicago, Illinois: The Rio Grande Press Inc., 1881, reprint 1964), 116.

¹² Tyler, 118.

¹³ Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30. The five women were: Melissa Coray, laundress; Susan Davis, laundress; Lydia Hunter, laundress; Phebe Brown, laundress. Nancy Brown Davis' name does not show on the rosters as a laundress but does appear in her family journal. Ricketts only lists 16 laundresses by name, so Nancy may have been one of the names not recorded.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 229-46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

members traveled up the coast to Yerba Buena (today's San Francisco). However, the bulk of the discharged Mormons traveled north over Tejon Pass and through central California to Sutter's Fort to get supplies.¹⁹ They were planning to head east over the Sierra Nevada by way of the four-year-old Truckee River Route,¹⁹ later to be known as the Donner Trail, to join their families and church.

En route, however, they encountered a messenger from President Brigham Young near what is now the town of Truckee, California. A letter dictated by Young communicated that the Salt Lake Valley was to be the destination and future home of the Saints. However, since the pioneers in the valley were in destitute circumstances, Young recommended that only those men with ample funds and adequate provisions should proceed east to join them. The others were asked to remain in California and labor until spring, then bring along their earnings and provisions.²⁰

Many of the discharged Mormons that stayed found work in northern California with Captain John Sutter at his fort, located in present-day Sacramento. Sutter sent six Mormon men to work for James Marshall in building a sawmill in the Coloma Valley along the south fork of the American River. These men were: Henry Bigler, Azariah Smith, Alexander Stephens, James S. Brown, William Johnston, and William Berger.²¹ They were the first to witness Marshall's discovery of gold in the tail race of the mill on January 24, 1848, and to correctly document the date of the discovery.²²

Two of these men, Henry William Bigler²³ and Azariah Smith,²⁴ journaled a near daily account of their experiences, from their first day of their enlistment in the battalion, after their discharge, until their arrival in Salt Lake Valley. It is these two first-hand, eye-witness accounts that will be used as

the primary sources for the events at Tragedy Spring.

There are several other journals that describe the events, however, most do not add significant details to the story. There is always an exception: Addison Pratt's²⁵ journal does add some detail not found elsewhere, and it will be cited.

STARTING THE JOURNEY TO THE SALT LAKE VALLEY

Henry William Bigler:

April, 1848. The next day Sunday the 9th prity much all the boys come together to talk over matters and things in regard to making arrangements for going up to the Great Salt Lake and come to some understanding when we should make the start &c and the decision was that all be ready by the first of june except 8 who was ready and expected to start with an express the next Saturday through I believe to the States. It was further decided that we send out a few men as pioneers before that time to pioneer out a route across the Sierra Nevada and if possible find a much nearer way than to go the truckey route and shun Crossing the Truckey River 27 times as we were informed by Mr. Brannan we would have to do if we went that route and very deep and rapid.²⁶

It seems logical that the group sought information from any source possible for an alternative to the Truckee River Route. Most early day wagon trails were originally Indian trails, then trapper trails, and finally improved for wagons.²⁷ So, it is logical that the company would scout existing Indian trails, which proved to be the correct decision.

¹⁹ Emigrant trails usually followed rivers; eight trails were so named, i.e. Truckee River Route.

²⁰ Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*. 176.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

²² James Marshall claimed the date of gold discovery was January 19, but the two Mormon journalists disagreed.

²³ Erwin G. Gudde, *Bigler's Chronicle Of The West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962).

²⁴ David L. Bigler, *The Gold Discovery Journal: Of Azariah Smith* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1990).

²⁵ Addison Pratt's Journal is in the History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

²⁶ *Utah Quarterly*, "Bigler," 148.

²⁷ Eight emigrant trails usually followed rivers and were so named, i.e. Truckee River Route. Additional reading: LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and Fur Trade of the War West, Vol 1* (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2000).

In the spring of 1848, a group of Mormons²⁸ consisting of 45 men,²⁹ one woman,³⁰ 17 wagons, two brass canons purchased from Sutter, along with 150 oxen and 150 horses and mules.³¹ They assembled in a valley just east of Placerville that Bigler called "Pleasant Valley." It retains the name today.

One member from the group went about six miles farther up the trail to build a corral to hold the 300 animals while waiting to begin their journey. He told the others "this place looks like a park."³² His name was James Sly "Sly Park," and serves as a recreation area today.

Bigler:

(July) the 5th, made an early start still keeping to the divide and by 9 am we roaled up to the front camp Here they concluded to stop a few days as they found a nice little valley (though about 2 miles on the south to the waters of the Mocosamy³³) for our stock and to send out some men to examine the route and look for three of our company viz.

Browett, Allen & Cox who had left our camp on the 25th of june to look out a pass while the company was gathering as yet we had not heard anything –from them and the camp began to feel uneasy about them, accordeingly we sent out ten men to look for them while the rest of us took the stock down into the little valley which we called Slys Park after one of our men who found it and there built a couple Corrals and awaited the return of the ten men who returned on the 14 of july and reported they seen nothing of the 3 men neither any signs after passing a certain point they discovered a pass but it would have to be worked.³⁴

Azariah Smith:

Wednesday July the 5th... Brother Danial Browett, Ezra H. Allen & Henderson Cox have gone over the Mountains, to find the best pass, ...³⁵

Tragedy Spring and the Opening of the Gold Rush Trail: PART II

Available on the Alpine County Museum website
www.alpinecountymuseum.org on July 1, 2021

²⁸ This first group of discharged battalion members, with a few other Mormons who had not accompanied the Battalion, to head east became known as the Holmes-Thompson company. Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*. 204.

²⁹ Five non battalion members were included in that count. Rickett, *Mormon Battalion*, 222.

³⁰ Melissa Coray, wife of William Coray.

³¹ Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*, 205.

³² Gudde, 113.

³³ Irene Dankin Padden, ed., *Journal of Madison Berryman Moorman: 1850-1851* (San Francisco, California Historical Society, 1948), 84. entry of September 22, 1850, "... The Co[n]sumnes, commonly called McCosma..." 23.

³⁴ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 152.

³⁵ David L. Bigler, ed., *The Gold Discovery Journal of Azariah Smith* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 125.

Secondhand Smoke

What is Secondhand Smoke?^{1,2}

Secondhand smoke is a mix of two types of burning tobacco.

- One comes from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar, or pipe.
- The other is exhaled by a smoker.

Health Risks^{1,2}

- Secondhand smoke can be as harmful as smoking.
 - » It has over 7,000 chemicals, about 70 of which can cause cancer.
 - » It kills over 41,000 non-smoking adults in the U.S. every year.
 - » It can cause heart disease, lung disease, stroke in non-smokers.
 - » It can also cause cancer.
- Secondhand smoke slows healing.
- Kids who breathe it get sick more often. They are at risk for:
 - » Ear infections
 - » Colds
 - » Asthma attacks
 - » Bronchitis and pneumonia
 - » Coughing, wheezing
 - » Shortness of breath
- Babies are at higher risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Secondhand smoke can harm pets, too.

Limit the Risk

- Any contact with secondhand smoke can be harmful. No level is safe.
- Keep your home and car smoke-free.
 - » In California, it is illegal to smoke in a car if anyone is under 18 years old.³
- Ask people not to smoke in your home or car. Going to another room, or opening windows, is not enough.
- Make sure that no one smoke around your kids. Be firm.
- If you smoke, stop!



**Call for FREE help to quit smoking!
1-800-NO-BUTTS**

¹ National Cancer Institute (2018). *Secondhand Smoke and Cancer*.

² CDC (2018). *Secondhand Smoke (SHS) Facts*.

³ California Legislative Information. *Health and Safety Code, Article 2.5. Smoking in Motor Vehicles*.

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A selection of available pictures can be viewed at the Museum and all of the Historical Society Events.

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The museum is dependent upon donations, retail sales and historical society memberships for its continued operation. Our goal as an organization is to preserve the rich history of Alpine County and the surrounding area. It is through our volunteers continued support that we can continue to achieve this goal.

2021 CALENDAR OF EVENTS



JUNE

JUNE 12, 2021
9:00 am – Museum
Annual Planting Day

Markleeville Living History Walk – In-person Cancelled. Short-Stories will be posted @ www.alpinecountymuseum.org

JULY

Check website for updates.

AUGUST

Check website for updates.

SEPTEMBER

Check website for updates.

Silver Mountain City Tour - Cancelled



The Historical Society of Alpine County
PO BOX 517, Markleeville, CA 96120

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