

Museum Matters

January-February-March 2021

Volume 2021 No. 1



Douglas County Historical Society

1477 US Highway 395 N. Suite B
Gardnerville, NV 89410-5214

Monday-Friday,
11 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Closed Saturday & Sunday

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official newsletter of the
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The Life of a Basque Sheepherder



Mendiko Euskaldun Cluba's Basque Exhibit at the
Carson Valley Museum & Cultural Center

DOUGLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY TRUSTEE MEETINGS

Trustee meetings are held on the third Thursday of every month at the
Carson Valley Museum & Cultural Center at 3:00 p.m.

Members and friends are always welcome to attend.

January 21, February 18, and March 18, 2021

*"The Douglas County Historical Society seeks to
enrich lives by preserving local history and
making it accessible to our communities and visitors."*

From the Basque Country to the Sheep Camps of the Carson Valley

or in Basque: “Eskual—Heritik Carson Valley—ko Artzain Kanpamendurat”



Many first-generation immigrants were still alive when the local Basque Club “Mendiko Euskaldun Cluba” came together in 1981, dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Basque culture.

When the Carson Valley Museum & Cultural Center opened in the old Douglas High School, the club created the “Tribute to Shepherders in Carson Valley” exhibit. Headed by Anita Izoco, the exhibit committee not only collected the artifacts and photographs on exhibit, but also the tales of Basque pioneers and their challenges facing a new home in a land with languages and customs that were completely foreign to them.

The Basque are among the most ancient people of Europe, living continuously in the region known as the Basque Country “Euskal Herria”. Their language has no known link to any other, giving rise to numerous

theories and speculations surrounding the mystery of their origins. Leaving their homeland that straddled the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain, they arrived with a deeply ingrained work ethic. Along with their ability to learn quickly, adapt to new circumstances, and remain loyal over time, this allowed these early settlers to prosper. Starting out working as shepherders, most went on to open their own businesses.

They either bought their own ranches after a few years of saving, or went into the hotel business. These hotels were at the heart of a Basque immigrant’s life. They went to the hotels to look for work, have social gatherings, to attend weddings, christenings, funerals, and even play in handball tournaments. Many women would come to the Overland, French, or East Fork hotels to have their babies, with the hotel operator’s wife acting as midwife.

The 1848 gold rush in California lured many Basques, and from there they moved into Nevada and other states. Although they had never herded sheep in their native land, they became highly sought after because of their skill and dedication. The payroll records of Dangberg Land and Livestock Company here in the Carson Valley show the first Basques working for them in 1896. It was a time when there were huge herds of sheep roaming our landscape and the surrounding mountains.

Running sheep was not for everyone. Going for months on end without seeing or speaking to another human being was challenging. It was a lonely and demanding life, testing the limits of personal tolerance and abilities.

In the earliest times, they would have just a bedroll, but the museum exhibit shows the elements necessary to survive in a typical summer camp set-up that developed from that. Over the years, pick-up trucks, water storage containers, and lanterns have changed, but the basics have remained the same.

Two animals accompanied the shepherd: a donkey to carry his saddlebags and supplies, and a dog (usually a border collie) to help herd the sheep and keep the extreme loneliness at bay. At first candles were most often used, being lighter and easier to carry. The fire pit and Dutch oven provided warmth and sustenance. The unexpected snowstorm, a typical occurrence in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, could easily take your life. It was a job filled with hardships and danger.

Many shepherders left their mark, documenting the endless hours and days on their own, by carving into the bark of the noble aspen trees. Etching their name and the date in a lyrical handwritten script, they proclaimed, “I am here!” Many drew pictures of the women they missed and loved, prize fighters and other people who were notable at the time, or even simple images like a running deer. The exhibit contains a section of a tree, donated by the United States Forest Service, that shows these arborglyphs (or tree drawings). The groves of aspens provided a welcome and sheltering shade for the herder during the high heat of summer.

The shepherds hook was most often used during lambing and shearing times back at the ranch. They would grab the back leg of the sheep to guide it. It took special observational and empathetic knowledge to understand and handle a herd, keeping it safe as it moved to new pastures.

The mural backdrop is by artist R. K. Sutherland. It captures the feeling of the landscape. Although the shepherd was surrounded by breath-taking grandeur and beauty, it was the closeness of the families and Basque community in Carson Valley that gave the herder the support system he needed. The Club maintains this popular exhibit.

Happenings at the Museum

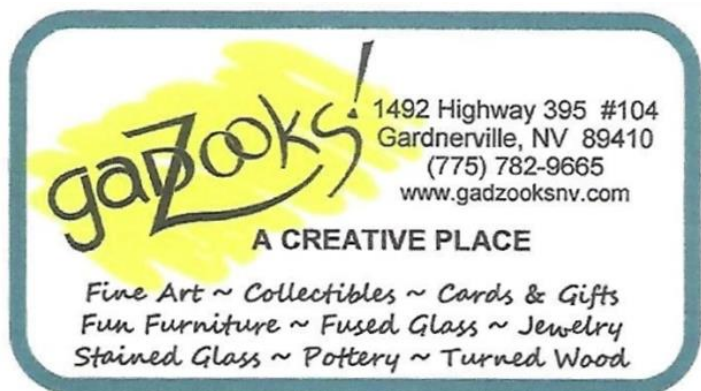
Finding creative solutions during turbulent times



Though 2020 was a disastrous year for our annual fundraising and special programs, we were fortunate that 2019 and 2020 were great years for grants! The Douglas County Historical Society completed the repair of the front entry steps at the old Douglas High School. We received \$35,400 of the total cost of \$37,470 from the Nevada Commission for Cultural Centers & Historic Preservation.

We also completed the Edwin L. Wiegand Ranching and Agricultural Heritage Exhibit. Through their challenge grant of \$229,500 and \$210,000 in member contributions this new exhibit is now open. The installation of the artifacts will be an ongoing project throughout 2021. Donations for this and other ancillary items would be greatly appreciated.

Finally, the entrance to the Courthouse Museum in Genoa will get a facelift with a \$53,000 grant from the Nevada Commission for Cultural Centers & Historic Preservation. This project will begin early spring.



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Contact the DCHS at 775-782-2555 to advertise in our newsletter or for other sponsorship opportunities.

DCHS Volunteers


2020 Volunteers of the Year at Genoa Museum and CCM&CC

by Linda Lechien, DCHS President

The Genoa Courthouse Museum Volunteers of the Year for 2020 are a special duo: mother Carol Hall and her daughter Meaghan. Carol and Meaghan prefer to work together and have been volunteering since 2013. Carol always knew that when the time came to retire, she would be moving to Carson Valley where she and her family often visited on vacations. Carol says she loves being a part of sharing our Valley's rich history with visitors because in Genoa the pioneer story is very much alive.

Meaghan grew up in the Bay Area, vacationing every year with her family in the Tahoe area. She moved to Gardnerville in 2014, taking a once a week drive all around the Valley. Most often, she ended up in Genoa and says she loves the smell of pine trees, our majestic mountains, and the history found here. Since her mother was already a volunteer, it was only natural for her to join her mother there. Her first day happened to be during Candy Dance in 2015 and she was so proud to be part of something so special.

Joanne Blessing is the Gardnerville Museum Volunteer of the Year for 2020. Before graduating from Chapel Hill School for Girls in Brookline, Massachusetts, she used to visit her grandfather in Amsterdam, New York. It was there she developed a love for history and how it influenced and shaped her family. After graduating from Chamberlayne Jr. College in Boston, she was hired by the Boston Hospital for Women as secretary for their clinic. In the late 1960s she and a few of her friends decided to leave their jobs and move west. In 1970 Joanne settled in Gardnerville and in April 2011 she started volunteering for our museum. Joanne began researching her family history in 2019 and became a member of Daughters of the American Revolution, followed by membership in Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War.




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Jack Za is creating a historical musical about the Carson Valley
For more information: jzamus12@gmail.com
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The Douglas County Historical Society seeks to enrich lives by preserving local history and making it accessible to our communities and visitors.

**Help keep your history alive!
Join the Douglas County Historical
Society**

Membership Benefits:

- Free admission to both museums
- 10% discount at Museum Bookstores
- Bimonthly DCHS Newsletter & member updates
- Invitations to special events
- Discounts on special programs
- Volunteer opportunities
- Free admission to our DCHS Lecture Series

Annual Membership Dues:

- ___ \$ 20 Student
- ___ \$ 30 Individual
- ___ \$ 40 Couple
- ___ \$ 40 Family - Parents & Children under 17
- ___ \$ 20 Senior Individual (60+)
- ___ \$ 30 Senior Couple (60+)
- ___ \$500 Lifetime Individual
- ___ \$750 Lifetime Couple

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Return this page along with your dues to:

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- ☐ I am interested in volunteering at the museums.
Please call me.

To All Members:

Please make sure that the Museum has your correct address, phone number, and email. Thank you!

The Membership Committee

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In Memory of**

**Kenneth D. Gardner, Jr.
Mahlon Hussman
Barbara Kowalski
Louis "Louie" Micheo
Joyce Neddenriep
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*The Douglas County Historical Society
accepts monetary gifts as
memorials to honor your loved ones.
To make or discuss a donation,
please visit or call our front office.*

*Donations may also be mailed to:
Douglas County Historical Society
1477 US Highway 395 North, Suite B
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V&T Exhibit Funding Campaign

Our new Virginia & Truckee Railroad Exhibit continues to grow. We are seeking related artifacts, ephemera, and paraphernalia in addition to cash donations to enhance the items already here. If you have a donation to contribute, please contact us at 775 782-2555 from Monday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. You can also email DCHS@historicnv.org.

DCHS Wish List – Can You Help?



- White Printer Paper
- Forever Postage Stamps
- Metal 5-Bike Rack

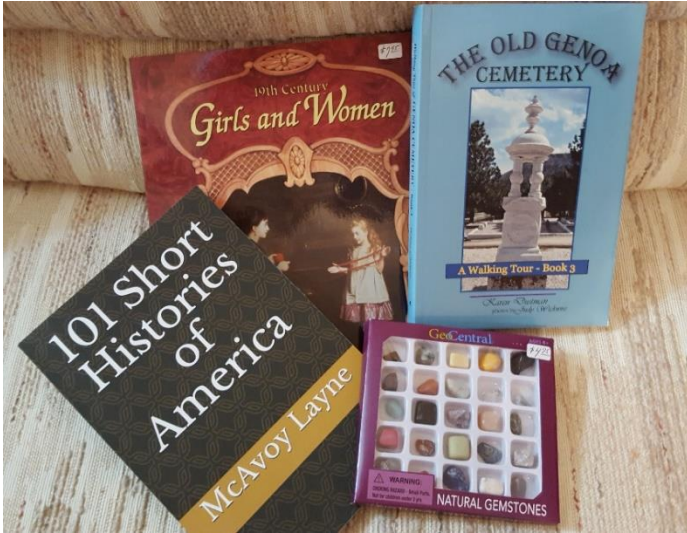
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From the Bookstore



Winter is a good time to read about our local history. We have two new books by local authors, hot off the press, ready for you to buy and enjoy. You will be supporting our museum with your purchases.

Karen Dustman's ***The Old Genoa Cemetery: A Walking Tour--Book 3*** is now selling, along with books 1 and 2. This is an excellent cold season read, as Karen has stories about the people whose graves she visits, along with fascinating footnotes and often pictures.

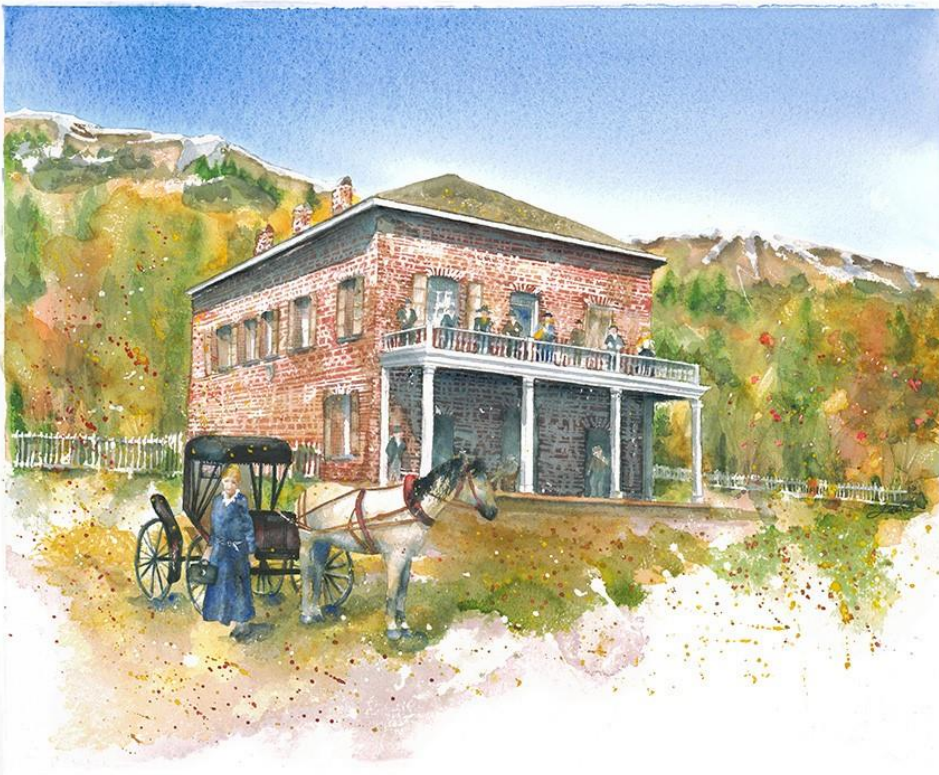
McAvoy Layne lives in Lake Tahoe. Many of us know him better as Mark Twain, as he has portrayed him for over 30 years with 4,000 plus performances. His book, ***101 Short Histories of America*** is enjoyable

and funny. It has a real Twain sense of humor. Read a story a day. It will leave you laughing, (or at least smiling), regardless of COVID or the weather!

For the kids, we have another book by Bobbie Kalman, a favorite children's author. This one is ***19th Century Girls and Women***. It is sure to be enjoyed, with pictures and stories that make learning fun. For older children we also have boxes of polished natural gemstones to enjoy. Each gem name is on the back of the box. Come visit us!

DCHS Members receive 10% off their purchases from our bookstores.

End of Year Giving



Our End of Year Giving card is now available for purchase in our bookstores.

We sincerely thank the following parties for their work and contribution towards this campaign.

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Dennis Robert Little

TREASURES FROM THE VAULT

Basque Artifacts from the Overland Hotel & Bar

In 2021, the Douglas County Historical Society will be focusing on the different cultures which have been part of creating Douglas County as we know it today. This issue we are highlighting exhibits that relate to Basque culture. We recently received several interesting items from the Overland Hotel in Gardnerville. This Basque Hotel was a central gathering place for locals.



This wooden sign with red and green lettering on a white background was one of the restaurant's exterior signs. After so many years outside, it shows deterioration from the weather. It is on exhibit in the downstairs hallway at the Carson Valley Museum & Cultural Center in Gardnerville.

Nearby is an exhibit with Jai Alai baskets and a carved image of a man dressed in traditional Basque clothing playing the game. There is a signed poster of the professional 'Pelota' player, Ruben Beloki. The autographed message reads, "Para Overland Hotel con afecto, Ruben Beloki". Basque Pelota is the name for a variety of court sports played with a ball.

Upstairs at CVM&CC near the large Basque Sheep Camp exhibit, are a traditional drum and flute used in Basque music. The musician holds and plays the drum or 'tamboril' with one hand, and plays the flute or 'txistu' with the other hand. There is also carved wooden figure showing how the two instruments are played together.



These local artifacts were received through the generous donations from people just like you. Donations like this permit us to continue our commitment to our organizational Mission Statement, which reads, "***The Douglas County Historical Society seeks to enrich lives by preserving local history and making it accessible to our communities and visitors.***"

If you have artifacts that you would like to donate to DCHS, please contact the Curator, Gail Allen, at 775-782-2555 or Curator@HistoricNV.org.

DOUGLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
1477 US Highway 395 N, Suite B
Gardnerville, NV 89410-5214



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*Please give us a call if you wish to
sponsor or host a DCHS event or activity.*

DCHS Upcoming Events

Per governmental directives regarding attendance we have temporarily suspended face-to-face events. We are in the process of moving our programs to online social media. DCHS members will receive email blasts detailing our programs and social media links, lectures and other special features as they become available. We also encourage you to follow us on Facebook

Douglas County Historical Society, Nevada

for a listing of all our upcoming events.

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