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Fall 2005

Recollections of a '49er.

The following is excerpted from "Recollections of a '49er," by Edward W. McIlhany. First published in 1908 when the author was 80 years old, it is currently being edited for republication by the Museum Association. The book should be available by the summer of 2006. Included with the reprint will be biographical narratives of many of the '49ers that came to California with McIlhany. These 80 members of the Charlestown, (West) Virginia Mining Company left Charlestown, Virginia March 27th 1849, crossed the Plains and arrived near Marysville, California September 1st. Here they split into messes of half a dozen or more and proceeded to various gold diggings all over the northern part of the state. McIlhany and a number of his compatriots soon found their way into what is now Plumas County. We pick up McIlhany's story after he has visited Rich Bar on the East Branch North Fork Feather River after its discovery in the late spring of 1850:

Men were coming in from another direction, and from the information that I received from them I concluded that I would prospect about a little. East about ten or twelve miles I came to a pretty vale, afterwards called "Spanish Valley." I then went on following the "Blazed Trail" through the pine timber, and I came to a very large beautiful valley with a stream of water running through it. It was called later "The American Grass Valley." I camped there and rested my mules. I enjoyed everything so much, the scenery was beautiful, just as nature had formed it and there were plenty of deer in the valley. When traveling along the trail I could frequently see signs of bear.

I left there still on my mare and about noon I came to another pretty depression. It was afterwards called "Willow Valley." I spent noon at this place. I then started out and finally reached the Feather River, and



Edward Washington McIlhany, Onion Valley, 1851. Oil by Thomas C. Moore, member of the Charlestown Virginia Mining Company.

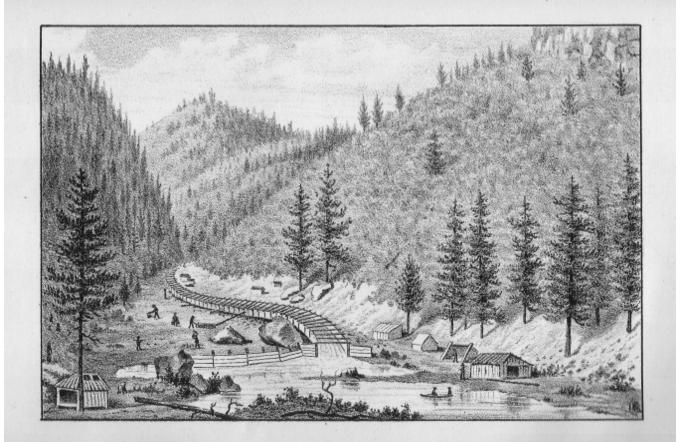
Courtesy Oakland Museum of California.

then Onion Valley, named for the great quantity of wild onions that grew there. It was here by the next year I built a large store and went into the mercantile business. By that time the mountains were getting full of prospecting miners, coming in by the hundreds, going in every direction, with packs on their backs and some with one mule pack.

About three miles from there, going down a very steep hill from Onion Valley on the east I came to a little stream that was called "Poorman's Creek," in spite of the very rich mines discovered there. It was soon filled from one end to the other with miners taking out thousands of dollars, the gold mostly being coarse. That little stream emptied into another small stream called Hopkins Creek that was rich also and emptied into Nelson Creek, that I had crossed. Some four or five miles south of Onion Valley there was another rich stream called Rabbit Creek. Onion Valley became the headquarters for all these surrounding mines, where the miners came to buy goods, gamble, and spend their money in different ways. I bought two more mules, which made my number six. Trade was good there at that time, and there were lots of small tents and shacks with goods in them for sale.

I concluded that as goods were high at Rich Bar on the North Fork Feather River, that I would load my mules with goods and take them over there to sell. I started, taking the trail that I had come over. I knew just where to camp. My first camp was in Willow Valley. I staked my mare out after unloading my mules and let the mules loose to graze. I was then using what was called the little cross tree packsaddles.

After I ate my supper, I was sitting in camp just about dusk. I happened to be the only one in the valley that night. While sitting there I heard a noise, the cracking of twigs, and I looked around and I saw three very large grizzly bears, the first that I ever saw in California. I had heard by this time from old timers, that the grizzly bear would never attack you unless they were crippled, except the old she-bear with cubs, and it was never safe to go near them unless prepared. These three bears sat up on their hind legs. They looked at me steadily and



RICH BAR, MIDDLE FORK OF FEATHER RIVER, FROM & PAINTING MADE IN 1831, IN POSSESSION OF MR.F. B. WHITING, QUINCY,

Lithograph of an oil painting of Rich Bar Middle Fork Feather River 1851, by Thomas C. Moore, member of the Charlestown Virginia Mining Company. Donated in 1890 to the Mining Bureau, it survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, and was eventually brought to Sacramento where it hung in an undisclosed state office before inexplicably disappearing in the early 1980s.

From Fariss & Smth's Illustrated History of Plumas, Lassen & Sierra Counties, 1882.

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I at them. Thoughts passed through my mind, "Was I safe?" at the same time feeling a delightful pleasure to look at these large wild animals. After gazing at me steadily for a time, they got down on all fours and quietly walked away out of sight. I had no weapon but a butcher knife with me, which I always carried around my waist, and a pocketknife. Even if I had had a rifle, I would not have fired for fear of crippling one and they might get to me and tear me up. I was pleased that they had left, but was glad that I had seen these great animals that frequented that part of the country.

I sat quite a while meditating about the wonders of California. The discoveries of gold and the many things that I had seen that were so interesting - never to be forgotten. Finding that my mules and my horse were quiet, I became sleepy and retired, feeling that I would be safe. I slept peacefully until the appearance of another day.

Loading up I passed through American Valley and camped at Spanish Ranch for the night. The next day in the afternoon I reached the Rich Bar that I had started for. My load consisted of twenty gallons of whisky in two ten-gallon kegs each. The other five mules were loaded with 250 pounds each of sugar, coffee, bacon, rice, and potatoes and a few other things. Very soon there were buyers come to buy my goods. I sold the whisky for \$16.00 a gallon, which brought \$320.00. The balance of the goods I sold for \$2.00 a pound, which gave me about \$3,000.00 in gold dust. I saw the two men that I had left there getting along nicely and making money fast.

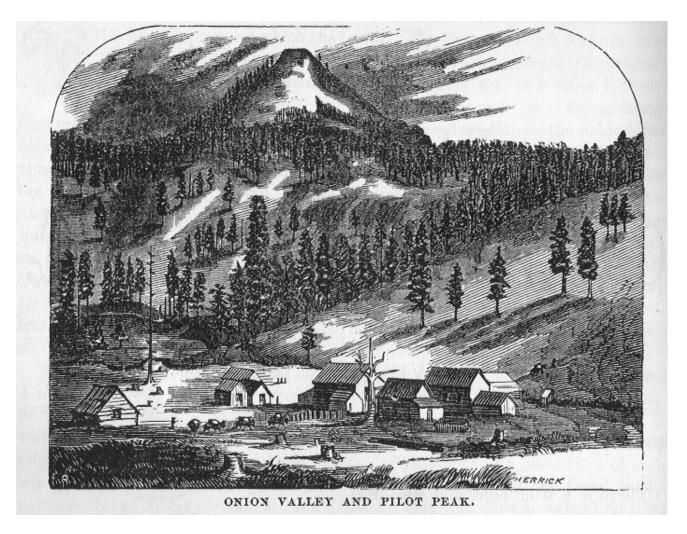
I made my return trip to Onion Valley in due time, nothing of special interest happening on my return trip. Onion Valley was still filling up rapidly with miners and emigrants coming into and also passing out to other mines. I remained there and made several trips to the near mines, of course making big profits all the time. I felt hopeful and cheerful. My health then was good, the air in that country was pure and the water was so clear and cool that all was enjoyable during my stay that fall at Onion Valley. That was in '50.

Some one had put up a cabin about ten logs high and had left it in just that way, without chinking it or putting a roof on it. There had been a place started there for butchering beeves and packing the meat to the miners. Beeves frequently netted \$350 a head in this way. During the time that I was there I met two men that had crossed the Plains with me. They were glad to meet me but had been unfortunate in mining. Where the beeves were butchered we soon found out that the bears would come there in the night to eat the entrails.

Sitting around the campfire one night there were six of us concluded to try to kill a bear. We were all anxious to kill one. There was a very large pine tree that had been cut down about fifty yards from where the beeves were butchered. The limbs had been cut off of this tree for fires. We made our plan; five of us, each with a rifle, were to get behind that log. It was arranged that I should give the word when to fire. It was a pretty night and very quiet. We got all arranged with our rifles pointing over the log, waiting for the bears to come. Finally we heard them coming down the mountain. They were making a kind of a growling noise. The hillside was not very steep. They came to the place where they had been in the habit of eating. They followed the scent of the entrails to where it was and they commenced eating. There were three of them. Two would eat and one would sit up and watch; then that one would get down and eat and another one would sit up. I whispered to the boys that just so soon as another one stood up, I would give the word to fire. This was all done in a whisper. One of the men had a double-barreled rifle. Finally one bear sat up and I gave the word to fire.

The report was loud, but so closely together that it seemed that there was only one rifle discharged. Almost instantly all of us ran to this log cabin and climbed on top of it. One man said, "What did you run for?" Others said, "We ran because you did." The feeling was, I suppose, that we felt safer on the logs than we would have on the ground in the event that we had not killed the bear. The dog heard the shot and smelled the bear. He broke loose from his man and ran. The man, instead of running to the log cabin, climbed a tree that was close by and went up about thirty feet and was perched there, looking on. I remarked, "Boys, I hear that dog after the bear; we have crippled one. Let us run quickly and try and rescue the dog, as I would not have him killed for all the bear in California."

We jumped off the cabin, grabbed a revolver or two, and one of the men an axe, having one rifle still

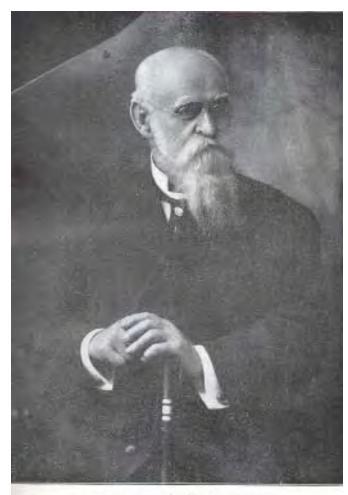


The mining camp of Onion Valley with a mule train coming in. This scene was a familiar one to Ed McIlhany. From Hutching's Magazine

loaded. We ran up the mountain 300 or 400 yards and found the bear and dog rolling over and fighting together. The bear had the dog hugged up in his forepaws and we were afraid to shoot for fear of killing the dog. Thomas slipped up with his axe and gave the bear a blow on the head, which stunned him. Another powerful blow on the skull killed him. I immediately examined the dog, and to my delight found that he was uninjured. In our delight at having killed the first bear, we took off our hats and waved them and yelled. We all took hold of the brute and it being down hill we very easily reached the place where the butchering was done. The man that was up in the top of the tree saw that we had killed the bear. We told him all was safe and to come down, and we had a big laugh over it. He said, "I saw you boys run for the cabin and it was impossible for me to hold the

dog, so I took to the tree for safety."

We hoisted the bear up with the pulleys at the butcher's stand and dressed him nicely. He was very fat and the meat very white. We sat around the campfire that night and had a big talk, going over the whole program and enjoying the reminiscences very much. We cut the bear in quarters and keeping some for ourselves loaded the rest on mules and packed it down to Poorman's Creek to sell to the miners. We sold it for 75 cents per pound, and as the bear weighed 450 pounds dressed we came out pretty well on the deal. It was then getting pretty late in the fall. I told Thomas that I was going to continue in the packing business and not mine, as we had been so successful in our packing enterprise. I asked him to join me in the business and he said he did not have any money to amount to anything. I told him



HOWARD WARHINGTON MCILHANY Edward Washington McIlhany, age 80, Kansas City, Missouri, 1908.

From Recollections of a '49er.

that it was all right, as I had plenty. He finally agreed to go with me. I found a number of men in Marysville who had started stores way up in the mountains and were looking for transportation to get goods in. I found that they were willing to pay big prices. There were several trains of mules that had come in from Old Mexico. They had everything necessary for each mule to pack very heavy loads. I found one train of mules for sale. It contained about thirty head, with everything complete for packing. I made arrangements with a party who had come from Poorman's Creek to lay in a large supply of goods for the winter. He bought the goods in Marysville and they were delivered to me in camp, which was close by. I was very busy, anxious to learn how to pack and help my foreman to balance and arrange each mule's load. I had to talk to him by signs and pointing my fin-

ger. In speaking to me he called me "Patron," and to Thomas "Mr. Charley." We started the next day and after four days more reached Poorman's Creek, delivered the goods and received \$3,000.00 in gold for that trip. Thomas remarked, "Mac, we are making money fast." It was good news to him, as he had had such bad luck. We returned to Onion Valley and camped there for the night. The mules were sent to a valley about three miles off, where there was fine grass. The clouds were flying by high and very swiftly. We felt a little fearful of a storm, as it was getting late and the snows were very deep in the mountains in the winter. Thomas and I had each a large gum blanket with a hole in the center that we could put over our heads, one also to put under the bed and another on top to protect us from the rain. We went to bed and awoke the next morning and found two feet of snow and still snowing very fast. Camp was roused immediately as I was afraid that I might lose my mules. We were camped by the side of the log cabin where we killed the bear. Thomas and I started out to look for the mules, and we had quite a mountain to climb. We found it very tiresome. After going about a mile Thomas said that he was going to give out and leaned up against a pine tree. I encouraged him to come on and in about a quarter of a mile he said that he could not go any further. I cut a switch, intending to whip him to keep him from going to sleep and freezing to death. Just at that time we heard the bell. The boys were coming in the right direction. I said, "Charley, here comes the mules; cheer up." We put him on a mule and we soon got down to camp. It was still snowing very fast, the snow getting deeper all the time. The cook had plenty of warm coffee, some boiled beans warmed over and some cold tortillas. Thomas, after drinking warm coffee and eating, was all right.

McIlhany's narrative continues about the fierceness of this storm and the number of mules and men who died. He came through all right and went on to describe his many adventures as a mule packer. This is a small part of his book about his life encounters in Plumas County, Sisikyou County, the Colorado Gold Rush, and his life as a livestock agent in Missouri. McIlhany was born in Loudoun County, Virginia June 6th 1828. Although we know a great deal about his family, many of his activities, and other aspects of his life, despite enormous time and effort we still have not learned when and where he died.

Plumas County Museum Association, Inc.

Holiday Gifts!

Don't forget the Museum when you are doing your Holiday shopping this season. You can purchase books, jewelry, dvds, videos, t-shirts, coffee mugs, caps, and other items at the Museum or you can buy them ON-LINE at **www.plumasmuseum.org.** You can shop from the comfort of your home and support the museum, too!



Call 530-283-6320 or email pcmuseum@psln.com. Master card and Visa are gladly accepted. Remember, Plumas County Museum Association members receive a 10% discount on most publications!

Thank you to all our new and renewing members!

New Members

Individuals: *Betty Gallagher*, Quincy; *Ruth B. Gage*, New Jersey; *Sally Thomas*, Portola. Couples: *John & Carol Kolb*, Quincy, *Jim Marty & family*, Quincy; *Doug & Sally Clarke*, Walnut Creek; *Wayne & Rose Tyson*, San Diego. Patrons: *Laura MacGregor*, Chester. Corporate: *Tim O' Brien*, Lake Almanor.



We would like to thank the following people for their generous donations:

Marilyn Britton: One framed black and white photograph of the 1932 Rotary Club standing in front of Hotel Quincy. Sandy Coots: One wooden lined matchbox from "The Lancer," and one package of "Amazon Pins -Adamantine Steel" straight sewing pins. Marilyn Cotter Demain & Joan Cotter Hollenbeck: One wooden level, one black "U.S. Stove Co." heater on legs, a set of planing knives, one wood handled rasp and grass cutter. California Dept. of Water Resources: One scratch-plate seismometer used on Frenchman Dam from 1959 to 1992. Gayle DuPont: One oil painting of a logging scene by her brother, Gary Whipple, entitled "Charlie's Side." Bob Edwards: One small bar of soap from Hotel Quincy, and one small bottle of cinnamon oil from Grover Bros. Rexal Pharmacy in Quincy. Charles M. Ellwood: Six cooking booklets, four Quincy High School rosters, five 'Pine Breeze,' an assortment of postcards, crochet instructions from 1939, one soldier with dog poster, five ladies hats, and two baking powder cans. Feather River Bulletin: A collection of 334 photographs. Barry Gossett: One 1920s kerosene heater with machine made glass. Guidici Family: Two perfume atomizers with accoutrements, two hair curling irons and a book from 1889. Ken Henrici: One talcum can, one bank statement and six cancelled checks dated May, 1922. Jerry Holland: A collection of papers, photographs, genealogy, and the family tree of Gary Whipple (dec). Don Johns: A collection of sixteen black and white photographs of logging at Bucks Lake Road, The Egbert brothers' airplane at Sky Harbor airport, and Clover Valley loggers. Lois B. Jones: One framed aerial photograph of American Valley in 1941. Diane Lawson: One Indian Valley Creamery milk can from the Taylorsville Creamery, one tin box with Engles Mining Company label that held prescriptions for Dorothy Fisher, circa 1930, and two cloisonné enamel purses and a compact. Quincy United Methodist Church: One black typewriter. Ron Miller: A collection of nineteen items: Plumas County maps, Chinese artifacts, bottles, books, a 1917 billhead, Farmers Almanacs dated 1864 to 1943, 56 books dated 1872 to 1928, one box of ECV related documents, sections from "The Feather River Bulletin" dated 1954 to 1972, and one sheet metal and brass nozzle known as a monitor used for hydraulic mining. Ruth Reid: One booklet; Constitution, By-laws & Rules of Order of Indian Valley Lodge No.136, I.O.O.F., dated 1867 that belonged to the Thomas Hughes family of Meadow Valley, and needlework with the Hughes family names dated 1852 to 1853, obituary from 1895, Bob Moon's interview with The Green Mountain Gazette dated 9/4/1979, and a remnant of a \$4.00 bill dated 1859. **Robert Ridley:** One steel curved sword with steel handle and knuckle guard, has gold painted sunburst design. Ronald Rude: Five black and white photographs of Sloat Mill and the Plumas House. Doris Seibold: One iron carriage step. Sharyn Wood: A collection of photographs, one war ration book half-filled with stamps, booklets, photographs of F. Dunker, Harry Jones, and Stanley and Susan Dolphin.



Reflections of a Registrar -

My experience working with artifacts has taught me how little I really know about the past. The everyday things that we take for granted, like washing clothes for instance, were once quite difficult to accomplish. Lights and heat were another story entirely. Either you had candle light or hurricane lamps, a fireplace or small "footed" heaters. One certainly did not come home and flip a switch for light and heat.

I enjoy working with the documents and photographs from so long ago. It puts a face and a presence on individuals and families that are no longer with us. It teaches how our community came to be what it is today, and who helped it to become this way.

I also get to enjoy many very old medicine containers, toys and games, books, razors and other personal artifacts that show life as it was fifty years ago, a hundred years ago, and even further back. It's a glimmer into what life was like before snow plows and electric gadgets became the norm.

Working with artifacts teaches me new things everyday. And puts into perspective just how easy life is for us today, compared to what it once was living in the mountains. - *Laure Gage, Museum Registrar*

Assistant Director Lori Simpson (back) tries to maintain order with the "Thursday Morning Bunch." Although the children behave well, their group leader, Brain Walmer, sometimes needs supervision.





We would like to thank these generous people for donating to the Museum's monetary fund:

Lois Alexander, Quincy; Tony & T.J. Amundsen, Pittsburg; Andy & Gayle Anderson, Quincy; Phyllis Orr Baldwin, San Antonio, TX; George & Dorothy Bartlett, Portola; Louise Bertocchi, Meadow Valley; Mildred Bloom, Woodburn, OR; Glenn & Ruth Carpenter, Quincy; Patsy Carpenter, Oroville; Dr. Al Clover, Modesto; Patrick & Janna Cook, Graeagle; John & Ardith Farris, Palm Springs, CA; Feather River Inn, Blairsden; Bruce & Wilda Forbes, Chico; Drs. Greg & Beth Gilman, Quincy; Charles & Margaret Goodart, Quincy; James & Virginia Gossett, Quincy; Marianna Hoolhorst, Berkeley; Ted & Betty Hoskins, Quincy; Don & Margaret Johns, Quincy; Duane & Marlene Labs, Meadow Valley; Jewel Lawry, Meadow Valley; Darleen Lyon, Quincy; Raymond & Mary Ann Mathes, Quincy; Steve McCallum, Beaverton, OR; Bobbie Monroe, Meadow Valley; David Myrick, Santa Barbara; Richard & Carol Neville, San Jose; Eugene & Barbara Norman, Quincy; Joan Normington, Placerville; Carol Paoli, Quincy; Orphie & Kay Pierson, Quincy; Theodore & Elaine Peters, Montague; Ruth Reid, Quincy; Zola Stokes, Quincy; Lucille Tonkin, Mt. Shasta; Thomas & Diane Uchytil, Quincy; Cora White, Quincy; Dr. David Whitney, Twain.

Won't you join these wonderful people by sending your donation today? Thanks!

Memorial Donations

These are the foundation of the museum's archives. Whenever a Memorial Donation is made in a loved one's name, a Museum Memorial card is sent to the family, the person's name and biography is entered into the Perpetual Memorial Volumes, and the donor's name is added to the Memorial. Since the last newsletter, donations have been given to the museum in memory of the following people: Wilma Abernethy, Oregon; Shaina Belot, Meadow Valley; Scott Caskie, Graeagle; Frank Clem, Quincy; Chuck Darragh, Rush Creek; Rich DeMars, Lodi; W.K. (Bill) Fenton, Santa Cruz; Louise Foote, Greenville; Robert Hall, Quincy; Valerie Kibbee, Grass Valley; Rafa Perez, Clio; Elinor Shelton, Quincy; Dr. Mark Whitney, M.D., Quincy.

$oldsymbol{D}$ irector's $oldsymbol{D}$ ialogue



On behalf of the Museum, its staff, directors, and trustees I would like to wish all of you the very best of the Holiday season and a Happy New Year. We have had an extremely busy and eventful year at the Museum. The 1875 Hall-Lawry Home is now spruced up with its new coat of paint. An electric upgrade was performed, plumbing work done, and the new roof is slated to go on sometime soon with volunteer labor. Our Spanish Peak Logging Railroad project is still moving steadily ahead thanks to its dedicated crew and community support. We hope to begin work on the actual railbed this spring. We hosted numerous tours and functions with the help of our wonderful docents and volunteers, and staff have made many public presentations. We are currently working hard on republishing a book on reminiscences of the California Gold Rush (see the feature story). Additionally, we are working with Museum Trustee Ginger Gramm on her Farmstead program with our aim being the restoration of the 1864 Taylorsville School. Although it is owned by Plumas County, it is sadly in deep neglect and in need of restoration work as soon as possible. Despite high gas prices, from reports we understand that Plumas County's other museums had good visitor numbers this year; we have hosted over 9,000 visitors to date. Quincy photographer Martha Flynn has had an excellent exhibit of New Orleans on the Stella Miller Mezzanine Gallery this fall, and our new display case donated by the Killibrews of Chester showcases the Maidu basket collection like never before. Our map and photo partnership with California State University, Chico is still working nicely. The university is digitally scanning much of our photograph collection and a great portion of our map collection. You can view these images by visiting their website at www.csuchico.edu and following the links. I would also like to welcome our newest members to the Museum and encourage all of you a to drop by for a visit to YOUR Museum!

Scott J. Lawson, Director







Your Museum Association's finances are in order. A budget for FY2005 - 2006 has been adopted by the Board of Trustees, ensuring that various projects and programs will be carried on as in the past. Please be sure to check your mailing label for the expiration date of your membership. Most come due this time of year. We depend a great deal on your

membership dues to operate the museum's programs and appreciate your attention in this matter.

We accept cash, checks, and credit cards, by phone, mail, or over the counter, and we'll send you a nice "thank you" letter that will both warm your heart and keep the taxman happy. We're looking forward to your response. If you would like to talk to me, call 530-283-6320 - Happy Holidays!

Dr. David Whitney, Treasurer.

Plumas County Museum Association Inc.

Survey Completed on Plumas County's Newest Railroad.



Almost all of the on-the-ground survey work has been completed by surveyors/ engineers Jim Webster, Rich Knoettgen, John Kolb, John Schmidt, with sometimes rod man, Scott Lawson. Surveying the line and the topography required taking in all trees over 12 inches in diameter within a 60-foot wide swath for the entire 5/8 mile route. Soper-Wheeler Lumber Co. has offered to provide the construction of the railbed and Jim Marty, Registered Pro-



fessional Forester, has offered to handle the Department of Forestry requirements. Meanwhile, restoration work on the engine itself has been rapidly moving along thanks to our dedicated volunteers headed up by Sandy Coots.

VARIEL HOME NEEDS DOCENTS!

The 1878 Variel Home continues to be one of the main attractions at the museum, with most visitors interested in touring it. Assistant Director Lori Simpson noted this past summer we were able to provide tours on most Saturdays, and a few Sundays with the expert volunteering of the following docents: Millie Burris, Ann Castaldini, Don Johns, Cheryl Roberts & Norberta Schmidt. Unfortunately, one of our most dependable Variel Home Docents, Marilyn Britton, had surgery and was not able to give tours this summer. Get well soon, Marilyn! We also lost the services of Millie Burris after she sustained a fall in August. We wish you a speedy recovery too, Millie.

In the fall months, we were unable to provide steady docent tours of the Variel Home due to a lack of docents, so tours fell upon the staff when it was possible for them to leave the front desk, according to Simpson. Due to this situation strategic planning for the next year is in order to provide a stable and consistent schedule of tours on the weekends and possibly some days and hours during the week. This will require commitment on the part of our current docents and recruitment of new docents to help us achieve this goal. Anyone interested in volunteering to keep the Variel Home open for visitation during the upcoming 2006 season, please contact Lori at 283-6320. Variel Home Docent training will be provided. We want to thank all our Variel Home Docents for all their dedication throughout the years.

Shaina Marie Belot

Museum staff and docents were saddened at the tragic passing of one of our youngest docents and museum supporters. Seventeen-yearl old Shaina Belot died October 15th as the result of a traffic accident. As a young girl Shaina volunteered at the museum with her grandmother Barbara Pricer, giving tours for several years. She will be greatly missed. Our thoughts are with her family at this difficult time.



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EXPERT HELP (STILL) WANTED (BADLY).

We are looking for someone with computer graphics and equipment to volunteer to take over creating our newsletters twice a year. Although we have a basic format and size we need to stick to, there is room for all kinds of creativity. If you would like to help out staff by taking on this project please give us a call at the museum.

EXHIBITS on the Mezzanine

October-December: Martha Flynn, Photography, New Orleans in Retrospect.

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 8-5, closed Sundays and Mondays.

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Please check your mailing label for your membership **EXPIRATION DATE**. Due to increased printing and postage costs, we cannot send newsletters to non-renewing addresses.

Individual \$25, Family \$35, Patron \$100, Sustaining \$1000, Corporate \$150

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