

MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bridgeport, California

2010 Newsletter

SCHOOL DAYS

Gold was discovered in the Eastern Sierra near Dogtown in 1857. When Aurora and Bodie followed suit two years later, towns sprang up overnight and hordes of miners arrived daily. Farmers, ranchers, merchants and lumbermen were right behind them, to provide necessary services and goods for the boom, and they were soon joined by their families and.....civilization!



Looking west on Pine Street in Aurora, Nevada, about 1910.

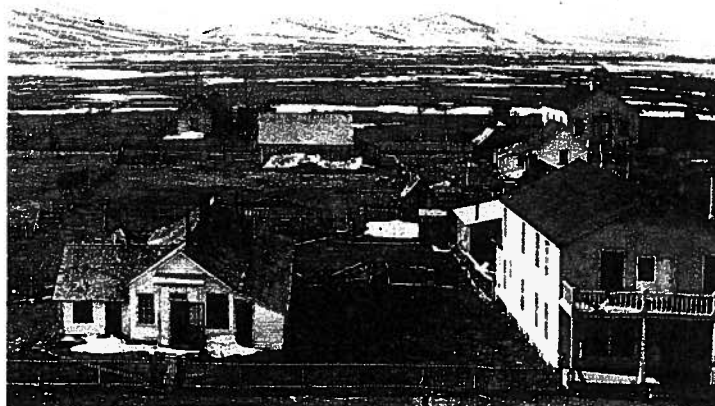
Mono County was formed in 1861, and because of its larger population, Aurora was selected as the county seat. Funds were immediately allocated for schools, and classes were held in private homes. Even though Aurora was a tough town in 1861, there were twenty children, ages four to eighteen, plus fifteen more under the age of four. The state boundary was then in dispute and Aurora was governed jointly by both California and the Nevada Territory for almost three years. A survey

in 1863 determined that Aurora was actually about three miles inside Nevada Territory, prompting the Mono County officials to relocate to Bridgeport. Aurora became the seat of Esmeralda County and the population rose to about 5000. In 1865, mining activity declined and much of Aurora burned in 1866. The 800 remaining people rebuilt the town while sporadic mining continued. A resurgence occurred in the early 1900's, but it ended during World War I.



Charles Elliott,
1870's.

Bridgeport was a busy supply depot and a growing community. A school district was established in the early 1860's and rancher Charles Elliott became the first official teacher. A college education was not required and teachers needed only to pass a standard proficiency exam to qualify. School trustees were Napoleon Hunewill, John Murphey, Hiram Leavitt, and Joseph Kingsley. Classes were held in private homes for nearly 20 years, one of which belonged to Mono County Clerk David Jeffreys. During the 1890's, this home was owned by Judge W. Virden and was known as the Virden House.



Main Street Bridgeport in 1921, looking south. The Jeffreys/Virden house is on the lower left, the DeChambeau Hotel (Victorian Hotel) is on the lower right and the 1880 schoolhouse is at top right.



Bridgeport Elementary School, 1906

In 1867, Miss Rebecca Poor began teaching in Bridgeport and she voiced the need for a real schoolhouse, but it would be another 13 years before one was built. In August of 1880, the new facility was opened to the 166 school-aged students welcomed by teacher Miss Carrie Havens, a recent arrival from Oakland. Carrie had to be good pioneer stock, knowing there were 43 more children under the age of five waiting to enter school.

Once Mono County townships were organized, they immediately petitioned the County Superintendent of Common Schools in Bridgeport to establish individual school districts to meet their specific educational needs.

The Antelope Valley was another rapidly growing community in the 1860's and education of children was of concern to the residents. The Antelope School District was established early in the decade, but the ten mile long valley required the district to be divided in half by 1868. Antelope District teacher Sarah Rickey had 16 students in her class and Belle Clapp taught 12 in the newly organized North Antelope District. Each teacher was provided with boarding and were paid \$50 monthly for a seven month school year. Other established Mono County Districts were Round Valley, Bishop Creek and Benton.



Alice Hays, about 1900.

Bridgeport teacher Alice Hays served as the Mono County Superintendent of Schools between 1874-1877, the first woman in California elected to that position and was also matriarch of a family teaching dynasty lasting over 100 years. Her term in office was not free of controversy. In 1877, John Lyford filed a lawsuit against the Benton School District, charging that the school was not properly assessed. Lyford owned the school property and he sought a lien on the school to pay off the tax debt. Because the building was county owned, the District Attorney argued it should be exempt from taxes.



Benton Elementary School, 1906.

The case dragged on without resolution until 1880, when a school tax was passed to take care of the problem. When this fiasco began, the tax bill was only \$41.99. Once the matter was settled, it amounted to \$1405.77.

In 1877, Bodie was experiencing a major influx of people due to the discovery of rich gold strikes. A school district was formed after a petition was filed stating there were 25 to 40 children of school age in Bodie with more arriving almost daily. During the same year, Antelope Valley was divided into three separate districts consisting of Antelope, North Antelope, and South Antelope.

In March of 1878, the first Bodie class was held in the Cary Building on South Main Street. Teacher Belle Donnally greeted ten students the first day and two weeks later she had 40. After three months, 78 students were enrolled, ages five to seventeen. Belle was paid \$100 monthly, about the same as miners received and she taught through 1881. She would earn every penny of her salary.

Construction began on a new Bodie schoolhouse on Green Street in late 1878, funded with a special school tax. It opened to 164 students in January of 1879. Prior to the 1900's, there were few indoor toilets and most people used outdoor facilities, commonly known as outhouses. One childish prank involved tipping the "water closets" over, causing those in need to look for large bushes. Another prank in 1880 produced more disastrous results, when a disgruntled student burned the school building to the ground. The district bought the Bon Ton Lodging House as a replacement and it was moved to the Green Street lot. The new larger school had an enrollment of 615 students, with an average daily attendance of 117.

In 1880, county school districts included Bodie; with five teachers, Bridgeport; with two, and one teacher each at Benton, Antelope, North Antelope, South Antelope, and Lake. Lake District was better known as Mammoth City.

Lundy became a district in 1881 and a school was built with local contributions. It was open between April and October and was closed during the harsh winters. In 1882, Lundy had 33 students, Bodie had 285, Bridgeport 85, Benton 36, Antelope 26, North Antelope 26, and South Antelope 37. The total attendance in Mono County schools that year was 528. Lake District was not mentioned in this report or later ones. The Lundy school was destroyed by snow slides during the 1890-1891 winter, but it was rebuilt with county funds.



The last Bodie School in the 1970's.

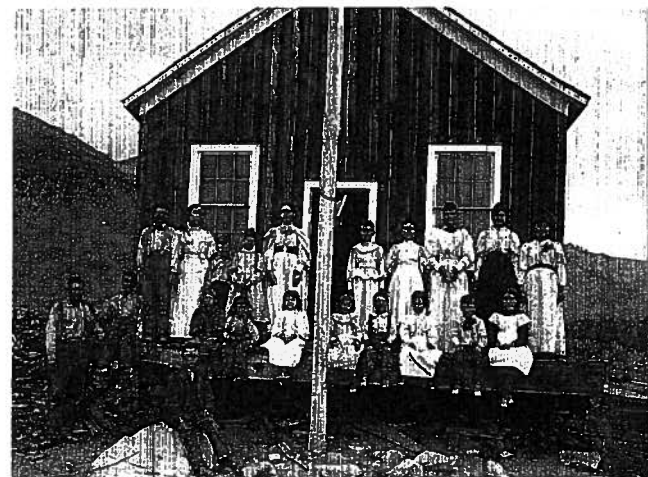


Annie Dolan, 1891-1892.

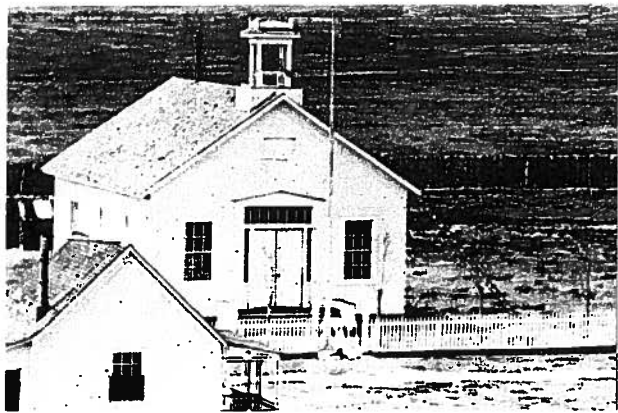
In the early 1880's, the Patterson Mining District in the Sweetwater Mountains was the source of new activity during the Bodie slowdown. Miners rushed to set up the towns of Clinton, Cameron and Star City and the Clinton School District was established in 1883 with 21 students. A building in Bodie was purchased for \$35 and moved to Clinton to be used as a schoolhouse. Enrollment was down to 15 in 1886 and mining operations were decreasing. By 1891, the bonanza was over but education persisted, and Annie Dolan was hired as the Clinton teacher in 1893. Annie was a sister of James Dolan, the future Mono County Sheriff. The Clinton School District closed in 1894, and Annie lost her job. She married rancher Will Roach and settled in the Sweetwater Valley, had children, and taught at the Indian school.

The residents of the "Mono Lake Valley" established the Mono Lake School District in 1888 because their children were commuting four to seven miles daily one way to attend school in Lundy, a commute consisting of walking or riding on horseback or wagon on bad roads.

Teacher Cornelia Richards became the Superintendent of Schools in 1890 and served for two years while still working in Bodie. Forty-two students were enrolled in Bodie, with an average daily attendance of 24, an indication of the poor economic climate at the time.



Mono Lake School in 1896.
Teacher Emma Farneman is standing on the porch, second from the left.

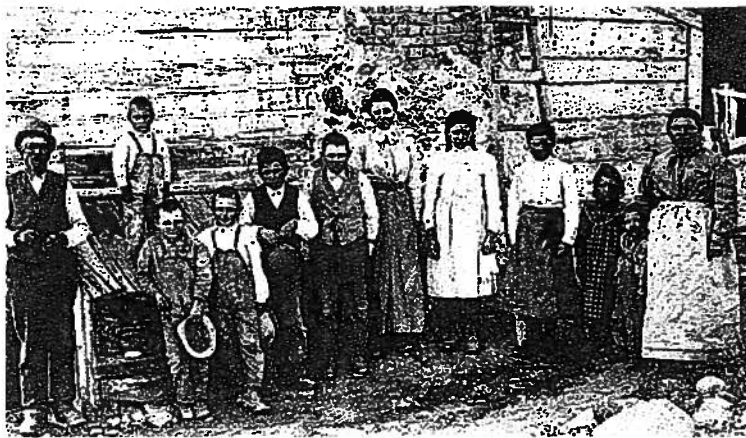


Bridgeport Elementary, about 1900.

In 1894, the depressed economy forced a school tax election to be held in Bridgeport to raise \$600 for repairs to the school and to hire an additional teacher. A \$500 Bodie school tax was passed in 1895 to maintain the school for 10 months and to make necessary repairs. More school taxes were passed during the remainder of the 1890's. By 1896, Bridgeport had 66 school-aged children, with an enrollment of 50. Bodie's enrollment was 132 with an average attendance of 85.

A state approved school district was established in the 1890's at the Scanavino Goat Ranch on the north end of the Mono Basin. Giuseppe and Mary Scanavino had 12 children. They were both firm believers in education, but the Mono Lake School was 16 miles across the lake. After receiving permission for the facility, Giuseppe built a schoolhouse next to his home. The new institution was also made available to neighboring school-aged children.

The school was an official county site, designated as the Grammar School of the Scanavino District and operated until 1922. Mary Roux was the first teacher and Nellie O'Malley was hired in 1899. Nellie was paid \$15 monthly plus lodging to instruct nine students.



The Scanavino's in 1907, L-R Giuseppe, Paul, Joe, Steve, Peter, Louis, Kate, Mary, Idell, Theresa, David and Maria. Giuseppe died in 1908.

In 1904, Clara Hardy taught eight Scanavino children, ages 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, & 14. Other teachers hired were Nellie Currie, Nellie Laughlin, Myrtle McKnight, and Kate Scanavino acted as a substitute. Joe Scanavino graduated in 1914 and was later elected as the Mono County Supervisor for the Bodie District in the 1930's.

Other young ladies began their careers at the turn of the century. Ella Cody was born and raised in Bodie. After graduating from high school in Virginia City she passed the Mono County proficiency exam in 1900, and was hired as the Bodie teacher. There were 131 students enrolled, with an average daily attendance of 68. Ella married Victor Cain in 1904 and began devoting time to producing her own students, but her teaching career did not end there.

In 1900, Cordelia Hays, daughter of Alice Hays, was teaching at Bridgeport. Cordelia continued to teach in Bridgeport after she was elected Superintendent of Schools in 1902, and later taught at Bodie. She married Mono County Sheriff James Dolan in 1912, and became Annie Dolan's sister-in-law.



Ella Cody, 1900.



Cordelia Hays Dolan, 1912.

During the early 1900's, Bodie was still in a mining decline, but the town had a viable school district. Bodie competed with strikes at Tonopah and Goldfield, and the new activity in Aurora. World War I put restrictions on mining, but Bodie remained active because of James Cain and others like him. The Aurora venture attracted some speculators from Mono County, whose children attended the local school.



Aurora students in 1913. Frank Dolan is on the left with the white shirt and tie, Helen Cain is third from the right with bangs. Helen later taught at Bodie.



Recess at Masonic, 1913-14.

Rich gold discoveries made in Masonic in 1904 caused a rush of activity. The Masonic School District was formed in 1911 and the schoolhouse was opened in Middle Town Masonic to handle 17 students, first taught by local merchant Minnie Smith. The school served Upper, Middle and Lower Towns of Masonic through the late 1920's.

Cordelia Dolan resigned as the Superintendent and from teaching in 1913 upon the birth of her daughter, Alice. Cordelia's term as Superintendent was finished by her mother, Alice Hays, who was elected to serve four more years. When Alice retired in 1918, she had spent a total of 40 years on the Mono County Board of Education.

Mono County Sheriff James Dolan was killed in the line of duty on July 25, 1915. Cordelia moved to Aurora with little Alice to teach there for two years, living with her friends James and Lile Cain. Cordelia continued to teach after a move to Palo Alto in 1917 with her daughter. Summers were spent in Bridgeport.



Alice Dolan in Aurora about 1916.

County schools in 1928 included Bridgeport, Bodie, Benton, Antelope Union, South Antelope, Chalfant, Montgomery City, Oasis, Lee Vining, Farrington, Mono Lake, and Silverado. Oasis was east of the White Mountains, Montgomery City was north of Benton, Farrington was south of Lee Vining, and Silverado was at the base of the Sweetwater Mountains.



Helen Cain in the late 1920's.

A contributing factor in Bodie's decline was a fire started by a three year old boy behind the Sawdust Corner Saloon on June 23, 1932. The blaze quickly became an inferno and spread to other structures. Attempts to fight the fire were futile because fire hoses were clogged with debris. Once water flowed, it was too late and the majority of town was destroyed within 90 minutes. The school survived, but Bodie never recovered from the tragedy.

During the 1930's, the sparse Bodie population and fewer children often did not justify a school, but they managed with teachers like Ella Cain's daughter Helen, who taught during the 1932-1933 school year, and Ella herself, who held down the fort during the 1933-1934 period.

Ella was easy going, with a good sense of humor. She would sit in her rocking chair and read while the children studied. She leaned back too far once, broke the chair and landed on the floor with her feet straight up in the air. Ella was OK, but student concentration was gone and the episode had everyone, including Ella, laughing for years.

In 1935, twenty-two year old Alice Dolan, daughter of Cornelia Dolan, granddaughter of Alice Hays, and niece of Annie Dolan, was hired as the Bodie teacher. She had eight students on her first day, but nine were needed to stay open, so Alice bribed Johnny Desoto a quarter to show up. Most of the students were children of miners; several from Dogtown. Alice was famous for keeping the school open for business, even during storms. Former student Bobbie Jean (Bickerstaff) Johnson remembers her Bodie years, "as a big plus in my life with Alice as my guide." Alice remained in Bodie through 1937 and then moved on to positions in Weaverville and Elk Grove.



Alice Dolan at the Bodie school with students in 1999.

Alice also taught high school English at U. S. Army bases in Germany. Her last assignment was at Mt. Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, where she taught English for 22 years, while serving as a Career Guidance Counselor. Alice retired in 1977 and continues to spend summers at her Bridgeport home. She has acted as a guide on student tours of Bodie, sharing her personal experiences. Alice's memory is second to none and she still reads without her glasses at the age of 96. She truly is an amazing woman.

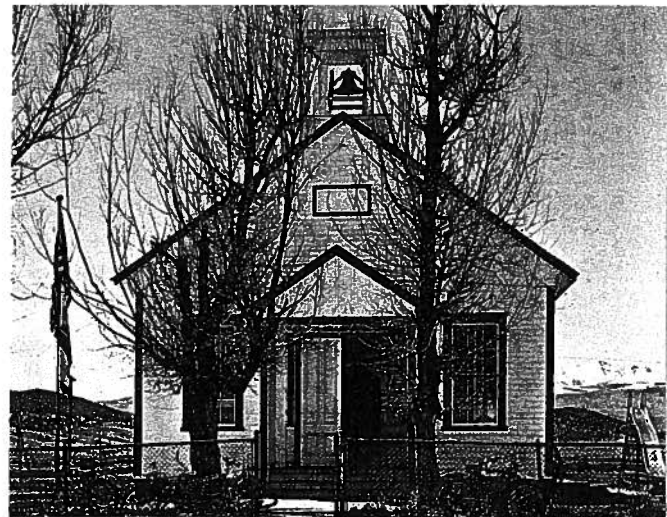
Time waits for no one and the same applies to old institutions. The Bodie School District was suspended in 1943 for lack of pupils and in 1947 it merged with Bridgeport. Victor Cain bought the property from the county in 1952.

For many years, Mono County graduates attended high schools that were out of the county in order to obtain their secondary educations. High schools were opened in Lee Vining and Coleville in 1940, and Mammoth in 1973, but grammar school remained the place where basics were taught and where many lasting friendships were forged.

A new Bridgeport school was built in 1964. The old facility that served continuously for 84 years was moved to Bridgeport Park and reopened in 1965 as the Mono County Museum.

The Eastern Sierra has always been a unique place for a child to grow. Before modern times, children were expected to work as hard as their parents to help put food on the table. As a result, school attendance was a hardship on families. Truant officers rounded up absentee students and returned them to class, but this did not solve the problem. Teachers had the responsibility of convincing parents that education was worth the sacrifice.

This newsletter honors all teachers, but it especially salutes the pioneer men and women who endured many hardships struggling to provide children with important knowledge and skills. In doing so, they left behind lasting foundations for future generations.

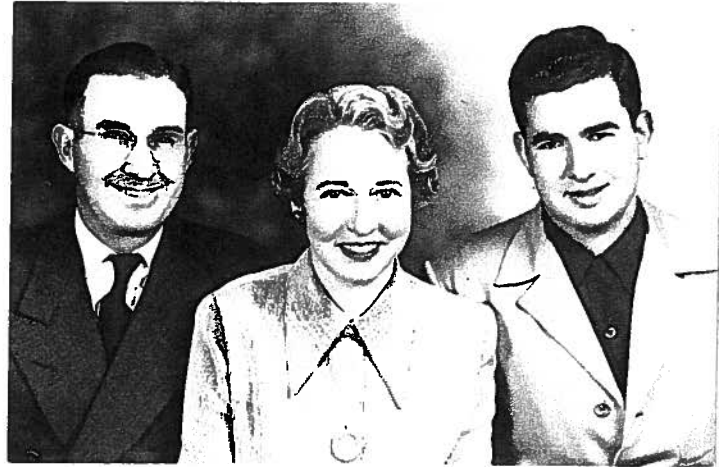


Bridgeport Elementary in 1964, before the move.

IN MEMORIAM

Marci Bryant left us on January 28, 2009 at the age of 103. She was born Kathryn Marceline Guilfoyle in Shortsville, New York on April 9, 1905. Her parents were Irish emigrants and Marci was the middle child of three brothers and two sisters. She managed to outlive them all.

Marci attended business school and became a bookkeeper. She met Murven Bryant when he was attending the Rochester School of Music. Murven was better known as Slick because of the way he combed his hair. Slick and Marci married in 1930 in Reno and made Bridgeport their home. Their son, Danny was born in 1931. Marci worked for the Mono County Tax Collector while Slick rented out four cabins and operated a gas station on the land where Albert's Meat Market is now located. One door east was the Bryant family store, the Eastern Sierra Grocery. Slick was later part owner of the Monitor Café & Bar, east of the store.



Slick, Marci, & Danny Bryant about 1950.

During the 1930's, winters were more severe and the roads were often closed. People usually stayed home and entertained friends, but there were always the dances at Bryant Hall. Slick and his orchestra played regularly at the hall and in Bodie. When the weather cleared, Fales Hot Springs was a popular destination for fun and good food. Marci loved to dance and visit with friends, but she also enjoyed a good Nevada slot machine now and then.

In 1937, Slick and Marci opened Slick's Court, Bridgeport's first motor lodge, and it was a local landmark for more than five decades. Marci recalled, "We began with three small log cabins, each with a bathroom, a combination kitchen, bedroom and living quarters. People had to bring their own bedding. The rent was \$1.50 a day and \$2.00 if I had to do the maid work." Marci was not enthused about the changing times and felt the old days were more relaxed and that people were much friendlier.

Slick passed away in 1977. Marci and her son Danny continued to operate Slick's Court until they sold it in 1988 and it became the Silver Maple Inn. Marci and Danny traveled the world together, including Ireland, which they referred to as the Holy Land. A friend asked Marci if she brought back any holy water and Marci replied, "I don't know, but I drank everything they put in front of me." We celebrate a life well lived.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PHOTOS FOR THIS NEWSLETTER

Bridgeport Chronicle Union newspaper
 Alice Dolan, Bridgeport, CA
 Terri Geissinger, Bodie Historic State Park
 Diane Evans Kurt, Silverdale, WA

Eunice Bettencourt Langreder, Gardnerville, NV
 Mono County Museum, Bridgeport, CA
 Lynda Bryant Pemberton, Bridgeport, CA
 Joseph Scanavino, Virginia Beach, VA

- Big Bad Bodie, James Watson & Doug Brodie, Xlibris Corporation.
- Bodie 1859-1900, Frank S. Wedertz, Sierra Media Inc/Chalfant Press, Bishop, CA.
- Bodie 1859-1962, Terri Lynn Geissinger, Arcadia Publishing, San Francisco, CA.
- Bodie's Gold, Marguerite Sprague, University of Nevada Press, Reno, NV.
- (The) Highest School in California, Everett V. O'Rourke, Spilman Printing, Sacramento, CA.
- Marceline Bryant Looks Back, Martin Strelneck, Summer 2002 Article, Mammoth Sierra Magazine, Mammoth Lakes, CA.
- Mono Diggings, Frank S. Wedertz, Chalfant Press, Bishop, CA.
- My Bodie Days 1935-1937, Bobbie Jean Johnson, private printing.
- Poag's Guide to Storekeepers and Shootists of Bodie, Larry Poag, Western Places Publishing, Lake Grove, OR.
- (The) Story of Bodie, Ella M. Cain, Fearon Publishers, San Francisco, CA.
- (The) Story of Early Mono County, Ella M. Cain, Fearon Publishers, San Francisco, CA.

The Mono County Historical Society Board of Trustees maintains and administers the Mono County Museum. No funds are received from Mono County and the docent is the only paid employee. Unless otherwise specified, all funds received from memberships, donations, admissions and sales are used to staff, improve and maintain the Mono County Museum.

The Mono County Museum is open May 27 to September 30, 2010, Tuesday through Saturday, 9AM to 4PM.
 Admission: Adults & teens 13+/\$2.00, Seniors 55+/\$1.50, Children 6-12/\$1.00, Children under 6 are free.
 The 2010 Founder's Day Celebration will be held on Saturday, September 4.

The "By" Day buggy exhibit project fund has a total of \$1635.00 available. MCHS is hoping to acquire a small building formerly owned by the Sturgeon family of Bridgeport to display the buggy, but other structures are also being considered. Mono County Public Works will install a slab and footings, and the plan is to install the exhibit on the north side of the museum.

Use the coupon below for donations, new memberships, and membership renewals. Life and Patron memberships are good for life. All other memberships are renewable each year, current between January 1 & December 31. MCHS is a registered non-profit organization per Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code and a public charity under Section 509(a)2. (FEIN # 77-0191728, CA Tax ID # C0457896) All memberships, donations and contributions are tax deductible. Visit our website at www.monocomuseum.org. Museum telephone: 760-932-5281.

The MCHS Board of Trustees are: Kent Stoddard/President & Curator, Hank Cole/Vice-President & Founder's Day Chairman, Josie Annett/Treasurer, Pat Daniels/Secretary & Docent, Lynda Pemberton and Ed Oliver/Non-Officer Voting Trustees.

MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION - RENEWALS - DONATIONS

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 \$25.00 SUSTAINING
 \$50.00 ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS
 \$100.00 LIFE
 \$500.00 PATRON
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