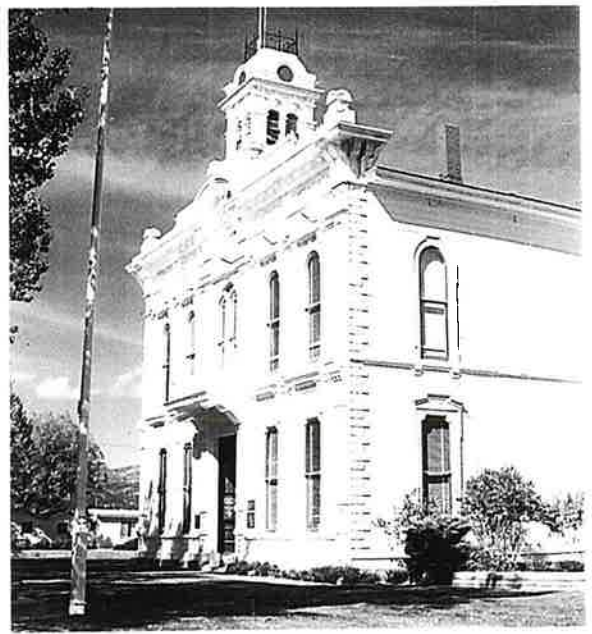


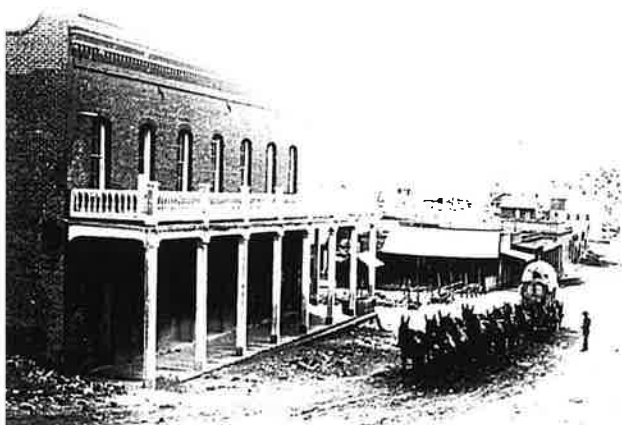
Mono County Historical Society Bridgeport, CA 93517 2019 Newsletter Mono County Courthouse



The impressive Mono County Courthouse in Bridgeport was built in 1880 and is recognized as being the second oldest operating courthouse in California. The number one spot belongs to the Mariposa County facility on the west side of the Sierras that was built in 1856. Those who admire the Bridgeport structure usually do not realize that it was not the first Mono County Courthouse.

The California Legislature created Mono County on April 24, 1861 from portions of Calaveras, Mariposa and Fresno Counties after being petitioned by residents of Aurora, hub of the Esmeralda Mining District. Aurora became the county seat with its larger population and promising future, while nearby Bridgeport was still a small settlement known as Big Meadows.

Aurora was located on the disputed border between California and the Nevada Territory, about 36 travel miles east of Bridgeport. It was not officially surveyed until September of 1863, causing both California and Nevada to make claim to it. After the Mono County elections of June 1, 1861, courthouse and office space was rented in several different buildings including the brick two-story Preble & Devoe's Hall, later known as the Esmeralda Hotel. Judges Moutric and Baldwin were the first to swing gavels and dispense justice in Aurora, Mono County, California.

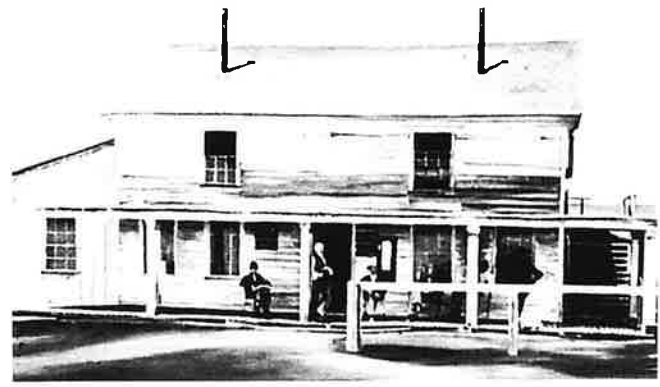


The Esmeralda Hotel in Aurora in 1913.

In November 1861 the Nevada Legislature created Esmeralda County and believing Aurora to be in their jurisdiction, made it their county seat, but officials were not appointed until June of 1863. California and Nevada courts operated in Aurora at the same time, giving residents a choice of either system, and the right to vote in each county. In September of 1863 the entities appointed a joint commission to work with the U.S. Surveyor to confirm the boundary between California and Nevada. When it was announced on September 16 that Aurora was about three miles inside the Nevada border, Mono County Treasurer William Feat refused to leave. Business was conducted as usual until Feat died in 1864 and county records were transferred to the temporary county seat at Big Meadows, now called Bridgeport. In 1864, after Mono County voters decided that the county seat

should remain in Bridgeport, courthouse space was leased in the American Hotel across the East Walker River in the original townsite. Mono County lawyer James Goodall became the first Superior Court Judge to officiate in the new seat of government.

Mono County bought the American Hotel from J.C. Kingsley in 1865. By 1866 it was too small to handle the increased gold rush activity and additional space was leased upstairs in the Bryant & Reese Store across the street.



The American Hotel Building in the 1870s.

In the late 1870s after the town center relocated west of the East Walker, plans were made to build a new courthouse on land donated by merchant Amasa Foster Bryant and his wife Eliza. The Board of Supervisors initially dragged their feet on the project, but were stimulated to act on it after receiving a petition to move the county seat to Bodie, which had the largest population base at the time. The Supervisors refused to acknowledge authenticity of the petition signatures and immediately solicited bids for courthouse construction. On June 29, 1880 the contract was awarded to Charles Anton, Samuel Hopkins, James Caine and John Roberts after they submitted a low bid of \$23,900. The partners posted a \$6,000 surety bond and agreed to a mandatory completion date of December 15, 1880.



Charles Anton

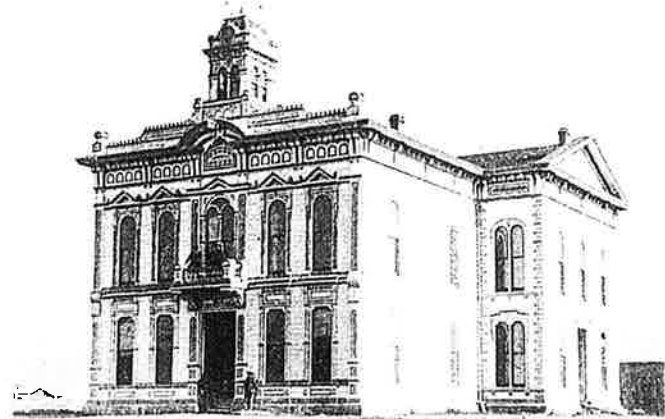


Samuel Hopkins

The courthouse was designed by Caine and Roberts and was a model of Victorian architecture with a distinct New England appearance. Measuring 74x80 feet, it was built in the form of a Greek Cross. Foundation footings were cut rocks set two feet deep on a three-foot base, grouted with cement, secured by one and a half inch anchors. The 30-inch exterior masonry was composed of cut granite. The interior design included 16-foot ceilings, 10-foot wide hallways, and two 32x40 foot court-rooms upstairs accessed by a 10-foot wide staircase. Floors were made with Oregon pine. Stairs and railings were made

of Spanish cedar. Water supply for the modern interior fire hydrants and wash basins was provided by a 3000-gallon tank that was installed on the roof.

Tax revenues financed the project, but it was necessary for the county to obtain a loan for an additional \$18,000. The Supervisors met on October 22 to authorize the Chairman to negotiate the loan and surety bond. The warrants were drawn on the Courthouse Fund to J.N. Sinimus and other parties, and the loan was guaranteed by ranchers Richard Kirman and Thomas Rickey.



The new courthouse in 1881-1882.

Courthouse construction was not finished by December 15, forfeiting the contract and bond, but on December 20 the Supervisors voted to extend the mandatory completion date to February 7, 1881. On March 22, the Supervisors noted that the construction was not finished but, "it has so far approached completion that it is capable of occupancy, and whereas the public necessity and convenience demand the immediate occupancy of the same", that "thirty days further time will be granted for completion of the same and penalty and damages be waived." Even though construction was not finished until April 1, 1881, the first trial in the building was heard on March 23, presided over by Superior Judge Robert Briggs. District Attorney William O. Parker charged George Morton with stealing bullion from the Bodie Standard Consolidated Mine but the trial quickly ended after the main prosecution witness recanted his grand jury testimony.

Judge Briggs was a lawyer in Missouri and Wisconsin before moving to California in 1852. He practiced law in Jackson with his son and built a large home there. In 1864 he became the Amador County District Attorney but in 1865 he was sued by a competitor over the title. Briggs then bought a printing press and published the Union Advocate newspaper. In 1878 he moved to Bodie, practiced law and served as the registrar for the U.S. Land Office while his family remained in Amador County. In 1879 he was elected as the Presiding Mono County Superior Court Judge, represented by the "Know Nothing" Party. He was very vocal, describing the ramshackle American Hotel to the Board of Supervisors as "a disgrace to the county". Briggs died at Bridgeport in 1886 while serving his second term and Bodie lawyer Oscar Hakes was appointed to finish the term. Hakes was elected to the office in 1888.

After the courthouse construction was done, residents formally christened the structure with a torchlight procession while pulling a dog kennel on a bier to represent the American Hotel. Final cost of the project was \$31,000. Mono County paid \$26,000 of the amount and the balance was picked up by bondsmen. Additional work and incidentals pushed the total to over \$40,000. The Supervisors expressed concern on October 4, 1881 that some of the offices were being used for sleeping purposes, so they ordered no one would, "be allowed to sleep therein except the Janitor of the building".

The new courthouse was larger than the American Hotel, but more space was required for Justice Court arraignments, so the county rented the second story of the Brick Saloon. The Brick was built in 1880 by farmer Andrew Severe, who also built what is now known as the 1881 Coffee Cafe. When the American Hotel was sold at public auction in October 1883, Severe bought it and hauled it to his farm to store hay. The Chronicle-Union newspaper commented, "To what use has this noble structure come at last?" The hotel lot was sold in 1887 to teamster Wash Brandon.

Interesting times prevailed after the courthouse opened. Presiding in Division Two was Judge Marcus Wiggin who was elected in 1880 to a six-year term. He inherited a case that originated in Aurora in the early 1860s when it was the Mono County Seat. Taxes in 1861-1862 had been collected in Aurora, but not in 1863 because the Mono County Treasury had insufficient funds to pay the outstanding warrants.

After Bridgeport became the county seat, officials refused payment on previously issued warrants because they felt expenses that occurred in and for Aurora should be paid by Esmeralda County officials. A lawsuit was filed against Mono County Treasurer Zachary Tinkum by the notorious one-armed lawyer Patrick Reddy, who demanded payment of 51 warrants belonging to him that totaled \$16,000. The warrants dated from 1862 to 1863 and were drawn on the Mono County Treasury by County Clerk-Auditor Richard Wilson. All the warrants were endorsed, "Presented and not paid for want of funds, Wm. Feast, County Treasurer."

Tinkum denied the authority of Wilson and Feast, denied their official existence, denied that there was any Mono County government before 1864, and alleged that neither Wilson nor Feast were eligible to hold office at all, both being non-residents of Mono County and California. It was questioned whether Aurora was ever in the State of California, and if legal Mono County officials existed in Aurora between February 8, 1862 and December 13, 1863. After much turmoil, Judge Wiggin ruled against Reddy.



The Brick Saloon in 1896.



Zachary Tinkum, 1880s.

Zachary Tinkum started out as a lumberman with two sawmills and spent time in Aurora during the early 1860s. After he sold the sawmills in 1865 he invested the profits in the Esmeralda Mining District but lost his shirt when ore production failed. In 1867 he was elected Mono County Sheriff and after serving an eight-year term, successfully ran for Mono County Treasurer in 1875. Things got lively about 1883 when Tinkum was arrested and charged with conflict of interest because of services he provided during courthouse construction. He performed his official duties from a jail cell until he was cleared, and then he was re-elected.

In 1882, District Attorney William Parker was removed from office by Judge Robert Briggs for, "willful neglect of his official duties" because he accepted \$100 to stop prosecution of the Sunday Law, which prohibited commercial activity during a day of worship. Parker was later reinstated, and somewhat vindicated in 1914 when his son Patrick Parker was elected the Mono County Superior Court Judge.



William O. Parker, 1880s.

Judges were not immune from accusations of malfeasance. Criminal charges were brought against Judge Marcus Wiggin in February of 1883 by District Attorney Parker who accused him of accepting a \$500 fee for handling a case being heard by the Board of Supervisors, and for ordering an administrator in a probate case to pay a \$2,000 fee to the court which Wiggin allegedly took possession of, and then postponed the matter for about a year. The California State Assembly and Senate removed Judge Wiggin from office in 1884.

After the Bridgeport town center moved across the East Walker, several Chinese men took over buildings that were deserted on the other side of the river. Merchant Ah Quong Tai dealt in the general Indian trade, gambling, whisky and opium. In June 1891 numerous well-armed Paiute Indians from Bodie, Mono Lake and the Walker Lake Reservation came to Bridgeport searching for Poker Tom, who was last seen there in mid-April. Poker Tom had won \$50 playing poker with the Chinamen and then shopped at the Bryant Store before presumably returning to the Walker Lake Reservation.



h Quong Tai, 1890s.

The Indian delegation had suspicions about Ah Quong Tai after they found a dismembered human torso in the East Walker River. Assisted by Mono County Sheriff Michael Cody, the Indians searched Tai's store and noticed blood spots on the floor. After boards were pulled up and additional blood was discovered, Tai was arrested and charged with murder. After further investigation it was revealed that Tai had planned to flee after the killing, but was stalled when he was unable to sell his merchandise before leaving.



Sheriff Cody, 1890s.

A closed arraignment was quickly held in the Justice Court above the Brick Saloon. Tai was represented by attorneys John Murphey and William Parker. Justice Thomas Fales, brother of Sam Fales, presided. Indians surrounded the building and guarded other escape routes. After Tai was released due to insufficient evidence, they grabbed him and threatened to burn the town if anyone interfered. Women and children were sequestered in hotels and armed deputies were placed at the courthouse and jail. Tai was taken to the Day Ranch, killed and dismembered. After the danger passed, the Mono County Grand Jury decided there had actually been enough evidence, including a confession, to hold Tai over for trial on the charge of murder.

Officials were criticized for not providing Tai with better protection and for not arresting his killers but the Indians were satisfied that justice was served and the matter was dropped. Sheriff Cody did not seek reelection in 1892. He was the father of future Bodie teacher Ella Cain.

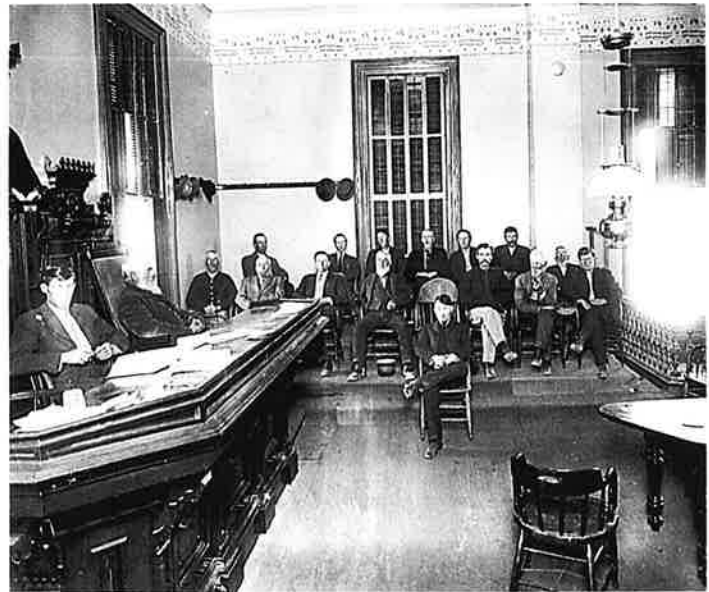
Superior Court Judges from 1890 on include William Virden (1890-1902), John Murphey (1902-1914), Patrick Parker (1914-1948), Walter Evans (1948-1972), Harry Roberts (1972-1985), Edward Denton (1985-1998), Edward Forstenzer (1988-2010) and Stan Eller (1998-2018). Prior to becoming judges, Murphey, Evans, Denton and Eller served as Mono County District Attorney. The population growth in south Mono County eventually required the leasing of courthouse and office space in Mammoth Lakes until a permanent facility was built in 2011. Due to the proximity of the county jail, arraignments are held in Bridgeport. Trials are scheduled in both courts. Current magistrates are Presiding Judge Mark Magit and Assistant Presiding Judge Gerald F. Mohun, Jr.

The Bridgeport Courthouse was originally heated during the winters with wood stoves using 35-40 cords of wood stored outside. County Clerk George Delury Senior, who served between 1899-1926, stoked fires each day and placed ink bottles in the vault at night to prevent them from freezing. Outdoor toilet facilities were commonly used before indoor plumbing was installed in the 1930s. Plumbing and electrical installation was difficult due to the lack of enough crawlspace, but the courthouse and community had electricity by 1935 although there were no street lights in Bridgeport until 1960.

Fire in the courthouse had always been of concern and from the beginning the Supervisors made provisions for fire prevention and firefighting equipment. No incidents occurred until a Sunday afternoon in 1960 when County Clerk George Delury Junior was alone in the courthouse and a small oil-burning stove exploded. He kept his wits and was able to put out the fire with a well-placed fire extinguisher. During the early 2000s another fire was discovered in the courthouse late one day which was quickly controlled by members of the Bridgeport Volunteer Fire Department, who just happened to be meeting across the street. The structure has experienced its share of earthquakes but it has managed to escape serious damage for 120 years.

For many years the Sheriff's office was in the courthouse, though the jail and attached Sheriff's residence were located on Bryant Street. By 1963, the need for more office and jail space required construction of a separate office and modern jail facility. In 1965, to allow for larger attendance at Board of Supervisor meetings, a Court Annex was built on Bryant Street to accommodate the Mono County Office of Education, County Library, Welfare Department and the Building and Planning Departments. In 1974, the Library was moved into the new Court Annex 2 along with the County Auditor, Assessor and the Treasurer.

The cannon displayed on the courthouse lawn was donated in 1914 by Bodie icon James Cain. It was made in 1881 by Jules Renault, a machinist at the Standard Mill and was named "The Irwin" in honor of the mill superintendent, William Irwin. The cannon was never fired until 1979 when pranksters set it off early on the morning of the 4th of July. It was then quickly rendered inoperative.



Judge Pat Parker in front of the Grand Jury, mid-1910s.

In 1974 the Bridgeport Courthouse was restored to its original condition. Windows, sills and trim that were subjected to drastic climate changes for 94 years were duplicated by skilled labor. Great care was taken to match graining of the doors, a nearly lost painting skill. Extra sanding and sandblasting removed old coats of paint. Electronic chimes were installed in the cupola in 1979 to strike each hour. An extra coat of paint in 1980 prepared the courthouse for its centennial celebration.

Old roofing was replaced in 2007 with metal sheeting. An enclosed elevator and a covered staircase were installed to the rear of the building. New indoor carpeting was laid, the offices were remodeled, handicapped accessible restrooms were built and a wheelchair-accessible ramp was added. Regular maintenance and care should allow the old girl to last another century.



The courthouse is very prominent in the center of this photo from 1904.

SOURCES OF PHOTOS AND INFORMATION FOR THIS NEWSLETTER

Mono County Museum Archives The Bridgeport Chronicle-Union
Mono County Clerk-Recorder Shannon Kendall

Aurora Nevada 1860-1960, Clifford Alpheus Shaw, 2018, CreateSpace Publishing, N. Charleston, SC
Bodle Bonanza, Warren Loose, 1979, Nevada Publications, Las Vegas, NV
Mono County Courthouse, Dorothy Roberts/Arlene Reveal, 1980, Mono County Friends of the Library
Mono Diggings, Frank S. Wedertz, 1978, Community Printing & Publishing, Bishop, CA

THE MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Mono County Historical Society and the Mono County Museum are funded by memberships, donations, admissions and sales. The Mono County Tourism & Film Commission has supported MCHS the past four years by reimbursing the costs for calendar production. The Museum Curator and the Board of Trustees are volunteers. The Museum Docent is the only paid employee.

During 2019 the museum is open May 23 through September 30, Tuesday through Saturday, 9am-4pm, telephone 760-932-5281. Admissions are: Adults/\$2.00, Seniors 55+/\$1.50, Children 6-17/\$1.00. Children under six are free. The Docent is Pam Haas-Duhart. Visit our website at www.monocomuseum.org. The Founder's Day Celebration this year is scheduled Friday, August 30 through Monday, September 4. The annual quilt exhibit will be held on Saturday, September 1.

The coupon below is for new memberships, membership renewals and donations. Patron and Life Memberships are valid for life. All other memberships are renewable each year effective January 1. MCHS is a nonprofit organization per Section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code and a public charity under Section 509a2, Federal Tax ID # 77-0191728. Memberships and donations are tax deductible. The MCHS Board of Trustees consists of President/Curator Kent Stoddard, Secretary Nancy Alaniz, Treasurer Josie Annett, and Nonofficer Voting Trustees Lynda Bryant Pemberton and Mary Lent.

PASSINGS

AUGIE HESS, 1914-2018

Augie died on October 20, five days short of age 104. Born to Gus Hess and Lula Charlie, a Mono Basin Paiute Indian, Augie was an inspirational hardworking man who pioneered Sierra downhill ski races. He was a gifted baseball player and served in the Army Air Corps during WWII. Augie married Harriett Haworth, a widow with two children, and they had daughters Vineca and Heidi. He was very active and took up golf later in life, putting younger guys to shame and enjoyed driving his 1937 Cord automobile in local parades.

ED OLIVER, 1947-2018

Ed died on September 26 at the age of 71. He grew up surfing in Redondo Beach, married Nancy May, had two children and moved to Bridgeport in 1994. Ed was a faithful supporter of the historical society and was the museum docent for two years, filling in later as needed. He also volunteered as the MCHS Treasurer and Vice President and worked the MCHS sales booth each year during at the July 4th and Founder's Day celebrations. Ed's sales totals gave birth to the rumor that he could sell ice to an Eskimo.

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MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS, RENEWALS AND DONATIONS

___ \$10.00 Individual ___ \$15.00 Family ___ \$25.00 Sustaining ___ \$50.00 Organization/Business
___ \$100.00 Life ___ \$500.00 Patron ___ Donation_____

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Make checks payable to MCHS. Mail coupon and remittance to PO Box 417, Bridgeport, CA 93517