

MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bridgeport, California

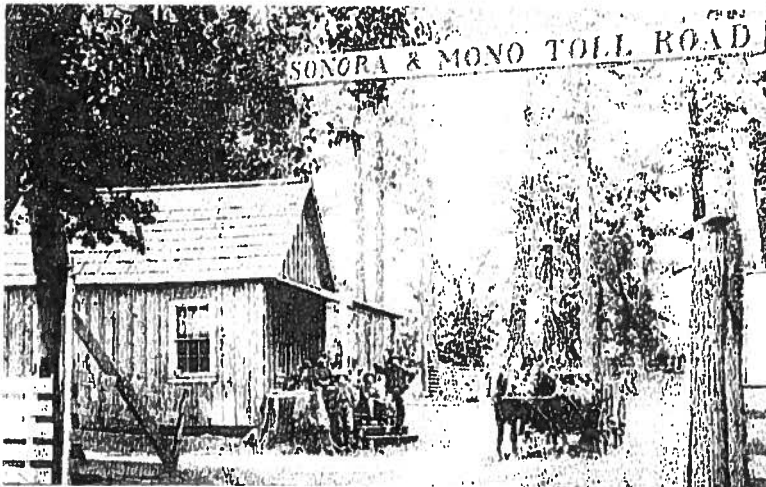
2011 NEWSLETTER

FALES HOT SPRINGS



Sam Fales about 1890.

Thirteen miles north of Bridgeport on Highway 395, just past Devil's Gate, look for a building on the left surrounded by a fence and trees. This old restaurant sits at the top of the Fales Hot Springs property, an early Mono County stage & wagon stop established by Sam Fales, a colorful character who remained on his homestead for 64 years. More about Sam in a bit. To understand more about the period, we need to start from the beginning.



The Sonora & Mono Toll Road at Sugar Pine in the 1860s.

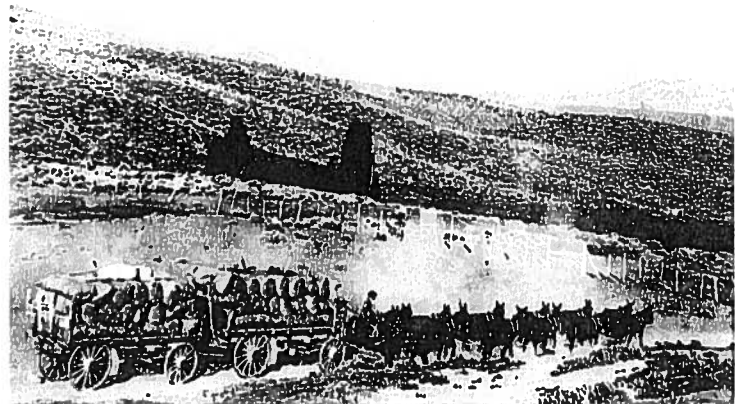
In the late 1850s, promising ore strikes at Monoville, Dogtown, Aurora, and Bodie brought fortune seekers to the Eastern Sierra in large numbers. They crossed the mountain range from Sonora using an Indian trail passable only to horse or foot traffic. Wagons had to be dismantled to get them over the pass. It was soon apparent the trail needed expansion to accommodate the invasion.

Representatives from Mono, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne Counties met in 1863 to propose the building of the Sonora & Mono Wagon Road, and to arrange financing of the project from each county. Mono County suffered a major setback in 1863 when a survey placed Aurora, their county seat, about three

miles inside the Nevada Territory. After losing its largest tax and population base, Mono County became insolvent. Out of desperation, the Board of Supervisors somehow passed a bond issue for \$10,000 to help finance the road.

The counties and the California State Legislature granted a franchise to contractor John Patterson to begin work. After three and a half miles of road was finished, it was apparent there were insufficient bonds for completion and the project was turned over to the State Line Turnpike Company, which collapsed in 1864. The next contract recipient was the newly incorporated Sonora & Mono Wagon Road Company. James Patterson, the first contractor, was a Trustee in the company.

This can of worms was not a complete godsend because once the project was finished in 1868, it was designated a toll road to offset the final \$400,000 price tag, a tidy sum then. Even with the improvements, it still took three weeks for a six-horse team to make the trip between Sonora and Bridgeport.



A 12-mule team pulling two wagons past Fales Hot Springs on the Bridgeport-Antelope Road about 1880.



Hiram Leavitt in the 1860s.

Movement over the primitive roads in wagons was very slow and exhausting. Limited daylight hours made it essential that stage & wagon stops be placed within reasonable intervals. There were a number of stops on the west side of the Sierras and new ones were quickly opened east of the Sonora Pass to to handle the increased traffic flow.

There was a land rush in 1863 along the route of the Sonora-Mono Road for establishment of stage & wagon stops. New Hampshire native Hiram Leavitt opened Leavitt Station in Indian Meadows and maintained it until 1877. The stop was the first one encountered after descending from the mountain in the area now known as Leavitt Meadows. During the winter months when travel on the pass was impossible, Leavitt broke out his snowshoes and delivered mail to Bridgeport.

German emigrant Frank Pickel operated a hotel and trading post just east of Leavitt Station in the meadow that was later named for him. The enterprise came to an abrupt end in 1870 after Pickel was found murdered in his cabin.

Leavitt moved to Bridgeport in 1877 to operate his new hotel and stage stop, The Leavitt House, which is now the Bridgeport Inn. He became a prominent citizen and served as a Mono County Judge before he died in 1901.

The most famous and enduring of the stops was one started by Archibald Samuel Fales, a Michigan teamster born on February 22, 1829. Fales was in California during the gold rush, but between 1862 & 1865, he was working in Carson City, Nevada. Sam visited Mono County in 1862 and noticed the heavy traffic on the Sonora-Mono Road. He participated in the 1863 land rush and was able to secure the Indian Hot Springs property several miles south of Sonora Junction that he later developed.

In October, 1865, Sam almost met his maker in Carson City when an angry miner tried to shoot him. He was saved by 15 year old Tom Rivington, who clubbed the assailant over the head, allowing Sam to grab the gun. The incident apparently encouraged Sam to relocate to Mono County with his brother, Tom. In 1867, the brothers purchased a five acre farm in the Antelope Valley. They worked it for the next ten years while developing the hot springs property.

In 1869, the brothers commissioned Henry Pitts of Coleville to build a two-story hotel and four bath houses on the site. The Hot Springs Hotel was fully operational by 1877, becoming a popular stop for those heading to the gold strikes at Bodie. Six fresh horses were maintained in the stable at all times for use by the stage lines. The 1880 Bridgeport Chronicle-Union ad praised the “unsurpassed steam, mud & swimming baths”, which gave patrons “speedy pain relief”.



The Hot Springs Hotel in the 1890s.



A close-up of the hotel in the 1890s. Sam is standing fourth from the right.

The most repeated Fales story recounted the time he was out collecting wood with friends when they were suddenly chased by Indians, outnumbered twenty to one. His famous punch line was, "We finally ended up in a box canyon with our backs to a cliff and they killed every damn one of us, to the last man." Sam also told about scalding his feet in hot spring water so badly one winter morning that he couldn't walk for months. While he recuperated he spent most of his time on a perpetual motion experiment which he concluded was a woman's tongue.....

In 1880, Sam married Diana Muir Clark, a widow 18 years younger, who had been managing lodging houses in Aurora and Bodie to support herself and her daughter, Minnie. Sam inherited a great cook and he became a devoted father to Minnie, who often played piano for the guests at Fales Hot Springs.

Sam found time to be active in the Mono County Chapter of the California Pioneer Society, comprised of men who took part in the 1849 California gold rush.



Diana Fales about 1880.



California Pioneer Society in 1884, Sam Fales second from the right.

The harsh Sierra winters made things interesting. Sam and Diana stocked up on supplies by snowshoeing to Bridgeport, a two day trip. Locals rode sleighs to the resort to escape cabin fever.

Fales Hot Springs served as a post office for six months in 1881. Sam earned extra money by delivering mail to Bridgeport on snowshoes.

The hot springs reached its peak in the 1890s by offering dinners and hot baths, 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Live music and dancing usually lasted late into the night.

The hot spring water was piped into small wooden tubs and tempered with cold water. The tubs were located inside small wooden shacks directly over the hot creek, allowing steam to come up through the loosely spaced floorboards.

Christmas celebrations were complete when “Santa” crawled up to the lodge chimney and called down to children by name, asking them what they wanted for Christmas. Sam absolutely loved kids and eventually everyone began calling him Grandpa Fales.

Sam’s brother, Tom, lived and worked at the hot springs for about 20 years. He was part of the Fales comedy team and he entertained children with ventriloquism and a papier mache dummy. Tom went on to serve as Justice of the Peace in Bridgeport, holding court upstairs in “The Brick”, a building now known as the gift shop at Ken’s Sporting Goods. In 1891, he was the magistrate on the Ah Quong Tai case when Tai was arraigned for murdering a Paiute Indian. A deadly confrontation between the Indians and the local population resulted in Tai’s death.

Minnie married teacher Clay Hampton at the hot springs in 1886, an affair attended by 150 people and the Bridgeport Brass Band. The marriage was short lived and by the early 1890s, Minnie had married sheep rancher J. G. Pimentel. In 1893, their son, Archie Samuel Pimentel was born, named for his grandpa.

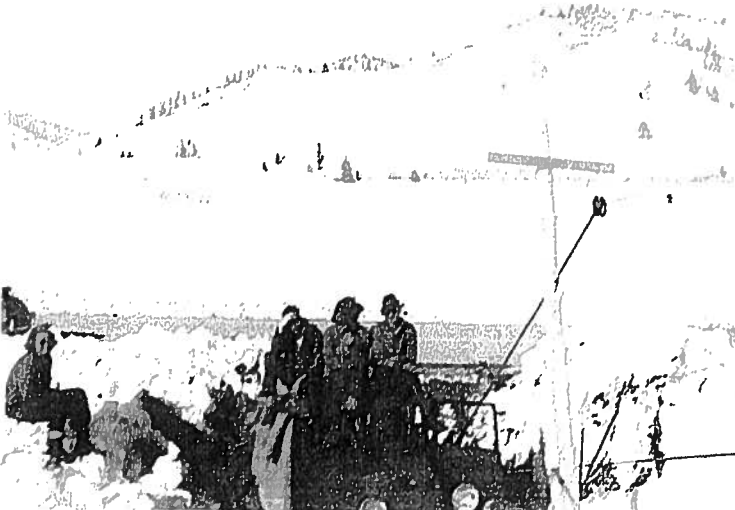
Sam frequently fibbed about his age and most people had no idea just how old he was. Diana’s sudden death in 1902 at the age of 54 instantly aged Sam and he never quite recovered from the loss.

During the early 1900s, Minnie & Archie helped Sam manage the resort. In addition, they also operated the Mono Paoha Shop, a market and post office located in “The Brick”. Complete with a gas pump, the store was in direct competition with the adjacent Wedertz Market, now the Bridgeport General Store.



Arch & Minnie Pimentel about 1902.

In 1908, 79 year old Sam Fales leased his resort to J. M. Mawer of Coleville, the former director of the Mono County Hospital. Mawer renovated the baths and made some other improvements. He advertised the medicinal springs, hot baths and swimming pool in the Bridgeport Chronicle-Union and mentioned that “careful & competent attendants” were standing by to assist patrons. In 1925, two Los Angeles couples, the Llewellyn’s and the Reuben’s, acquired the lease together and constructed a new swimming pool and covered it with a shed. Electricity was supplied to the lodge with a Delco generator, powered by a car engine. During lease periods, Sam, Minnie, and Archie continued to live in the lodge and they often hosted private parties.



The Devil’s Gate Ski Run during the 1920s.

In the 1920s, Bridgeport brothers Slick & Merrick Bryant installed a ski run three miles south of Fales Hot Springs near Devil’s Gate. Customers were pulled up to a 200 foot vertical rise while hanging onto a 750 foot tow rope attached to a vehicle axle, powered by a small gasoline motor. The run lasted until World War II, open whenever there were sufficient riders to warrant operation. Nearby Fales Hot Springs offered lodging and meals.

Sam delighted in keeping visitors in hysterics while sitting beside the fireplace in his rocking chair. Guests were his biggest treat and the socializing rejuvenated him. Grandpa Sam Fales was 104, eight months and four days old when he died on October 26, 1933. He was buried in the Bridgeport Cemetery beside Diana.

Minnie Pimentel retired in the 1930s and lived at Twin Lakes & in San Francisco. Archie continued to manage the resort until June 1, 1940, when Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Reed of West Portal signed a lease with an option to purchase. They remodeled the lodge which included a cocktail lounge and dance floor. On August 6, 1940, the official opening was attended by county officials, who dedicated the new two-sided fireplace by placing their handprints in the wet cement.



Beverly MacIver & Sam in 1928.



A group of ladies at the lodge in 1940.

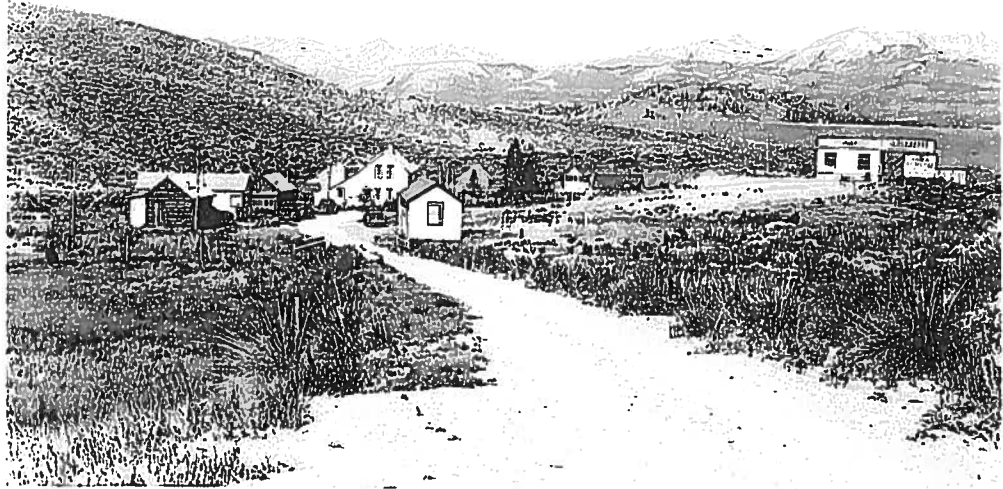
The Bridgeport Chronicle-Union announced in August of 1940 that Fales Hot Springs was *the* place to “dine, dance and romance”. Housekeeping cabins with baths were \$2.00 per day for doubles and \$1.50 for singles. Sleeping cabins with a bath were 50 cents extra. Special Sunday dinners included fried rabbit or baked Virginia Ham for \$1.00 or steak for \$1.25, all complete with wine or a cocktail.

Each guest at the 1940 Christmas Eve party was given a Christmas tree, presents, and was served supper at the 10pm buffet, all for \$2.50 per person. How times have changed.

Nearly 75 customers were at the spring opening on May 26, 1941. They were provided with paper hats, noisemakers, and full course turkey and ham dinners. Dancing lasted until the early morning hours. Carnival Night was held on June 25, 1941 at “*The Friendly Tavern*”. The Bridgeport Chronicle-Union failed to mention the three slot machines in the lodge that were always part of the action.

Arbeck & Ruby Jorgensen bought Fales Hot Springs in 1943, which included the modern cabins, baths, swimming pool, and the lodge, still featuring the Special Sunday dinners. A Richfield gas station was built on the highway during the mid-1940s, a successful venture that helped sustain the resort during hard times.

Arbeck was killed in an auto accident on Sonora Pass in 1947. Ruby eventually recovered from her loss and operated Fales Hot Springs for the next nine years.



FALES HOT SPRINGS

On U. S. Hwy. 395, near Bridgeport, in Scenic Mono County, California
Fales Hot Springs in 1946. (Courtesy Frashers Fotos Collection)





Minnie Pimentel in 1948 beside a portrait of her mother.

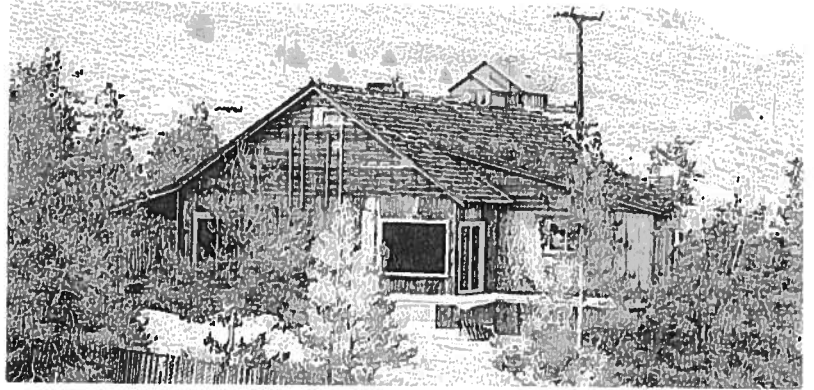
In 1947, after deciding to maintain just one residence, Minnie Pimentel moved into the former DeChambeau house in Bridgeport. She remained active until her death in 1951. She didn't live to see what happened next.

On February 19, 1952, the Fales lodge exploded and burned to the ground while the Ventura Butane Company was filling the fuel tank. Ruby Jorgensen and two guests narrowly escaped with their lives. Ventura Butane was sued for damages and Ruby was ultimately awarded a \$30,540 judgment in 1953.

Ruby used the settlement in 1954 to construct a restaurant on the highway near the gas station. The addition was an instant success and it attracted new business. In the spring of 1955, the Chronicle-Union reported that a group had met in the lounge to watch the Academy Awards presentation on television. A new swimming pool was built next to the bath houses, directly behind the site of the old lodge.

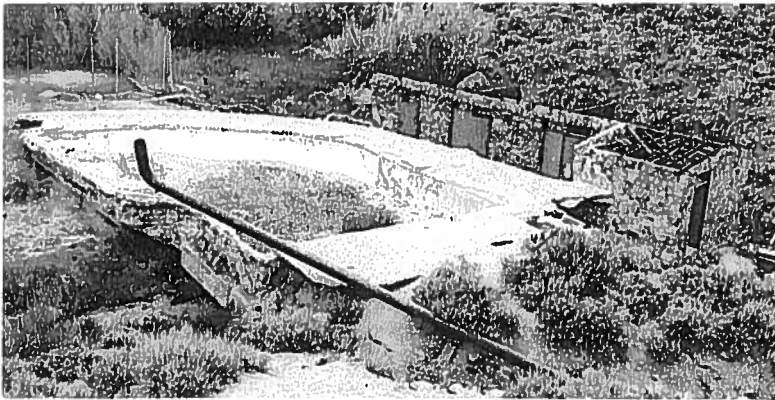
Bridgeport resident H.W. (Smitty) Smyth remembers hunting in the area near Fales in the 1950s with his friend, Jim Westlake. They swore neither would take a bath until each got a deer. After taking care of the important business, they headed straight for the hot springs and soaked in the tubs. Later in the lounge they partook of liquid refreshment at the bar.

By January of 1956, Ruby had been through enough personal grief and decided to sell Fales Hot Springs to Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Kotch of Lake Arrowhead.



This is a 2010 photo of the Fales restaurant and lounge.

The new ownership only lasted until the Spring of 1957, when Mr. & Mrs. Glen O'Hara of San Bernardino bought the business. The restaurant served Basque-style meals and the lounge was a popular watering hole. The bath houses and four cabins were still operational. Many Bridgeport children learned to swim in the pool. Local contractor Bob



This is all that remains of the bath houses and swimming pool.

Barnes tended bar at Fales in the 1960s. He confirmed it was a popular spot with great food. When O'Hara sold the resort to Jim Gossett in 1969, most everything was in good working order and Gossett had a good business for ten years. Resort Development took it over in 1979.

Succeeding owners of the property had different ideas how to revitalize and modernize the resort. When the cabins were torn down, new units were to replace them. Expensive piping was installed near the springs, and a form for an Olympic-sized pool was dug. None of the projects were completed.

The gas station was torn down in 1990, mainly due to the advent of fuel efficiency. There was also an unsuccessful attempt to establish a ski training area behind the resort, but with the cabins gone and the bath houses in a state of decay, Fales Hot Springs became just a fond memory.

Bill Brown and Diane Tuley-Brown of Sweetwater Project LLC have owned the property since 2003. They hope to obtain building permits to renovate the restaurant into a livable space and eventually open it up to the public. The McMillan side of Bill's family had lived in Bodie on Green Street in a house that is still standing. They owned a dairy on the north end of Bodie and spent time in Masonic during the 1920s. Bill's great-grandmother, Carrie McMillan Faudre, was the manager and cook at Fales from the 1910s into the 1920s and his grandmother, Mildred Brown, was a waitress.

Bill's father, 90 year old Elwood Brown, knew Sam Fales personally and described him as "a great old guy", who sat in his rocking chair telling humorous stories. He remembers Sam going to the hot creek each morning, filling a ladle with hot water and drinking it. This ritual may have contributed to his longevity. It obviously didn't kill him.

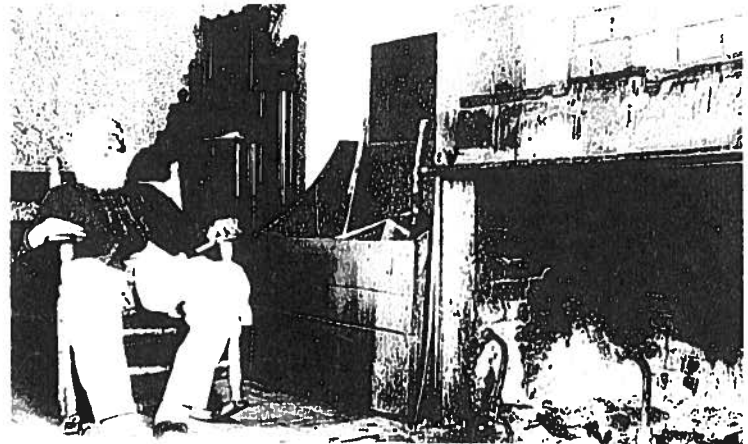
Sam once asked Elwood if he knew the best place to catch fish. When Elwood said "no", Sam told him the best spot was under the bridge. When asked "why", Sam replied, "They go under the bridge to stay out of the rain!"

Right up until the very last, Grandpa Fales could be found sitting in his rocking chair waiting for his next victim.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PHOTOS

- Mono County Assessor's Office, Bridgeport, CA.
- Mono County Clerk/Recorder's Office, Bridgeport, CA.
- Mono County Museum, Bridgeport, CA.

- Michael Barlow, Bishop Historical Society, Bishop, CA.
- Bob Barnes, Bridgeport, CA.
- Abbie Bridges, Mono County Librarian, Bridgeport, CA.
- Bill Brown, Saratoga, CA.
- Elwood Brown, Palo Alto, CA.
- Mark Davis, Southern Mono Historical Society, Mammoth Lakes, CA.
- Alice Dolan, Bridgeport, CA.
- Henry Golas, Frashers Fotos Collection, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Eunice Betancourt Langreder, Gardnerville, NV.
- Steve Love, Newhall, CA.
- Lynda Bryant Pemberton, Bridgeport, CA.
- H. W. Smyth, Bridgeport, CA.



Sam Fales by his fireplace shortly before the end.

- Bridgeport Chronicle-Union Newspaper*, Bridgeport, CA.
- Mono Diggings*, Frank S. Wedertz, Chalfant Press, Bishop, CA.
- Naming the Eastern Sierra*, Marguerite Sowaal, Chalfant Press, Bishop, CA.
- The Story of Early Mono County*, Ella Cain, Fearon Publishers, San Francisco, CA.

MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS, RENEWALS, AND DONATIONS

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Make checks payable to the Mono County Historical Society
 Mail this coupon and remittance to Mono County Historical Society, PO Box 417, Bridgeport, CA 93517

MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INFORMATION

The Mono County Historical Society Board of Trustees administers the Mono County Museum. No monetary assistance is received from Mono County and the docent is the only paid employee. All funds received from memberships, donations, admissions, and merchandise sales are used to staff, improve, and maintain the Mono County Museum.

The museum will be open May 26 through September 30, 2011, Tuesday through Saturday, 9AM to 4PM. Admission: Adults & Teens 13-17/\$2.00, Seniors 55+/\$1.50, Children 6-12/\$1.00, Children under 6/Free. The museum can be reached during operating hours at 760-932-5281. Website: www.monocomuseum.org.

The 2011 Founder's Day Celebration will be held on Saturday, September 3. The Founder's Day Committee Chairperson this year is Missy Reid. This annual event features team roping at the Centennial Ranch Arena and hay wagon rides. Vendors and music will be on the courthouse lawn. Memorial Hall will host the popular quilt exhibit, melodrama, and Indian Taco stand. After the evening dinner, there be a dessert auction and historical presentation.

MCHS did not obtain the old Sturgeon building that was meant to display the George Byron Day buggy and the proposed donation of the buggy was withdrawn due to the lack of an approved display venue. The designated fund was discontinued, donors were notified, and each specified that the monies be redirected to the MCHS operating fund to benefit the Mono County Museum.

The coupon on page seven of this newsletter is to be used for new memberships, membership renewals, and donations. Life and Patron memberships are good for life. All other memberships are renewable each year, effective January 1. 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. Memberships and donations are tax deductible.

The Mono County Historical Society Board of Trustees wishes to thank everyone who supports their efforts to keep the Mono County Museum open. The Trustees are: Kent Stoddard/President & Curator, Hank Cole/Vice President, Josie Annett/Treasurer, Nancy Alaniz/Secretary, Lynda Pemberton and Ed Oliver/Non-Officer Voting Trustees.