
ALPINE REVIEW

The Story of Lame Tom

by Karen Dustman

The true “pioneers” of Alpine County were the native Washoe. Unfortunately, little was written about them in the early days. So it was a real treat to stumble across a 1927 *Record-Courier* article detailing the life of Markleeville resident “Lame Tom”!



"Lame Tom" (Assu), about 1900 (*courtesy of Alpine County Historical Society*).

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Historical Society of Alpine County
P.O. Box 517 Markleeville, CA 96120
Phone 530-694-2317 - Fax 530-694-1087
Email: alpinemuseum@yahoo.com Website: alpinecountymuseum.org

Alpine County Museum

The Alpine County Museum is located in the heart of Markleeville, off Montgomery Street, on top of the hill at the end of School House Road.

The museum features exhibits on Blacksmithing, the Old Webster School, Silver Mountain City, Jail, Basque Oven, early Alpine County's pioneer families, Native Washoe people, local mining, farming, and cattle ranching.

The museum is open Memorial Day weekend through October, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.

Museum Curator: Jim Boyd

President's Message

Greetings from Tom!

The next quarterly Historical Society meeting is **Saturday August 18th**. As usual, it is a potluck, starting at **Noon** with the main course being Pizza baked in the Basque Oven by our team of dedicated bakers, along with cinnamon rolls as one of the desserts, followed by a short meeting. At 2 p.m. the Markleeville Players will once again present an always spectacular and nearly accurate, almost absolutely historically correct rendition of the J. Marklee Shooting.

What has been happening at the Museum in since our May meeting?

- Our Volunteer coffee introductory meeting drew individuals with an interest in spending time helping the Museum.
- The Museum Clean-Up and Planting day has added a nice look to the Museum grounds. Come on up and see how you can be part of this.
- May Quarterly Membership Meeting was at Turtle Rock Park.
- Basque Oven Bread Baking – our oven crew tested bread-baking in the oven, bringing their own dough – a great learning experience.
- The “Rediscover Woodfords” event was sponsored by the Mad Dog Café (not a Historical Society event) and included a history walk of Woodfords with a large cast of Chautauqua characters, in vintage costume. A large crowd braved windy conditions and a great time was had by all!
- The Markleeville Living History Walk was more successful than we had hoped. All of the costumed actors drew a crowd in themselves, and our crew and our attendees had a great time and learned a lot about our town.
- The Walt Monroe and Local Artists art show also drew a crowd to the Museum Complex.

Our Photo Display in the Administration Building has been receiving very good reviews from all who have seen it. It is interesting the response I get from individuals I see studying the pictures. General questions include who put the collection together, and many remark how interesting they are. One especially gratifying comment was from a gentleman who pointed to a spot on one of the early Grover photos and said, “I can remember sitting right there by the fence.”

It is nearly finished; just a few more photos need to be sponsored and then we will hang the next group in the building. If you have not been into the Administration Building to see them photos you should take the time to visit and “Step Back in Time” just for a little while.

Interested in learning more about possibly volunteering in some capacity at your museum? Call Jim Boyd, curator, at 694-2317. We are planning another coffee and special guided tour of the museum and grounds for those who are interested.

Curator's Corner

The summer is progressing quite rapidly. By the time you read this we will have completed all the spring activities, the Markleeville Historic Walk, and the Alpine Artists Art Exhibit featuring Walt Monroe together with works by Art Monroe, Dede Lyons, and Walter Long. The Silver Mountain City Tour will be rapidly approaching, signaling the end of the Summer activities.

As a curator I spend a considerable portion of my time thinking about the events and people that have created the unique identity of Alpine County. I then use the artifacts and photos the museum has been given to define and interpret the stories to hopefully make a great experience for visitors. During the 18 months of my tenure, I have spent considerable time contemplating the major historical themes that play out through Alpine County History. I have mostly come up with questions. The leading question is, "what were the character traits and reasoning which led men and women to stay rather than pass through Alpine County?" Was it the beauty of the area? Economic opportunity? Entrepreneurship? While many did pass through, emigrants, miners and tourists, why did the few choose to stay? Alpine County has never been an easy place to make a living and there was always a new strike down the road, whether the El Dorado they sought was gold, commerce, or merely agriculture. The ones who stayed took the roles of protector, provider, entrepreneur, conservator and user. They were the few, the helpers, the brave and the stubborn.

It was not an easy geography to tame. The elements were always at odds with man's struggle to gain a foothold. Water comes down in layers or sheets and, in the worst cases, both, one after the other, and in copious quantities. The earth provided but it never gave easily. Valleys could be green and verdant, but just as easily, white or dry. The trees could provide warmth in the hearth or fire in the hills. The mountains gave minerals, but never in amounts necessary to create ongoing security; and when it did, a new competitor appeared over the hill or in some cases, across the oceans.

The old photos seem to show men chopping, cutting, digging, lifting, driving, fishing, and hunting until, at the end, and none too soon, they could join the sit-and-spit club. Even today, there seems to be far more working and much less taming. The roads need work each spring. The snows are removed each year. Dams are checked, canals are repaired. Fish are stocked. Cabins are opened and cleaned. The people have made it through another winter.

But perhaps the story is far less about taming than just plain building. First and foremost the story is about building character: about getting up each day, winter, spring, summer, or fall, and doing what needs to be done today. For that is the price of survival in the mountains, from beginning to ending of the story.

But with building character also comes building community. No one can live alone with any comfort. The call of society in the mountains is the call to participate in community. Some can live alone; Monty Wolfe comes to mind. But that is as unique as Thoreau moving to Walden Pond. Far more common are the participants in society working to build community. To see that no one is left behind who is willing to work, join, and contribute. This is, perhaps, the great theme of Alpine County.

Jim Boyd, Curator

alpinemuseum@yahoo.com

530-694-2317

www.alpinecountymuseum.org

The Story of Lame Tom *continued from page 1*

In the early 1900s, Lame Tom (his real name was Assu) lived in a wickiup just below the old wooden schoolhouse on Schoolhouse Hill. By then, he was an elderly gentleman. He shared his humble abode with a friend with the euphonious name of *Zon-ha-gen-mal-anay*, popularly known as “Squealing Aleck.”

Lame Tom was a son of Chief Possic (or Possuk), a Washoe captain living near the Hot Springs who was said to have been a guide in the early days for John Fremont’s party. Noted basket-maker Dat-So-La-Lee married into their family.

In his youth, Lame Tom was acclaimed as a hunter. But tragedy struck one night while he camped out alone. A large, heavy log rolled off his campfire and onto his leg while he slept, and the burning wood pinned him “like a vise.”

The brave young man did the unthinkable: he amputated his own leg with a hunting knife to free himself, and “crawled many miles home” to his camp.



The log pinned his leg like a vise.

Amazingly, he survived. But Lame Tom could no longer hunt. Instead he took up the art of arrowhead-making -- soon becoming one of the “most proficient of all the arrowhead makers.” He would shape a flake of obsidian by cradling it in his palm with buckskin, then striking the edge of the stone with a piece of buckhorn (antler) lashed to a length of greasewood. The only

person who could equal him was noted arrowhead-maker Poker Charlie (Tillebow Behang), another son of Chief Possic. (A little family rivalry, perhaps!)

Lame Tom also crafted bows made of cedar and sinew, and would sell a bow and arrow set to local lads for “two bits” (25 cents). He also taught them how to weave snowshoes.



Lame Tom, possibly outside his home on Montgomery Street in Markleeville. (Photo courtesy of Alpine County Historical Society)

Due to his injury, Lame Tom was permitted to marry two wives, an important form of social support. Both wives were employed in or near Markleeville: Maley worked for the

Musser family, while Susie was employed by Harriet Grover. Interestingly enough, Squealing Aleck (Lame Tom's friend) had *three* wives, and an astonishing ten daughters.

Lame Tom passed away in 1910. So it's a delight to be able to connect these photographs from the Alpine County Museum with his story, thanks to the old *Record-Courier* article from 1927.

Stop in at the Museum next time you visit Markleeville: there's more great information here about the local Washoe heritage, including this stunning collection of local arrowheads. Who knows, perhaps some of these might even have been crafted by Lame Tom (Assu) or his talented brother, Poker Charlie.



Local arrowheads and display in the Washoe Exhibit at Alpine County Museum.

The Alpine Artists Exhibit

The Alpine Artists Exhibit held a Reception on July 27, 2018 for its new exhibit, at the Alpine County Historical Museum.

This year continues to feature works by Walt Monroe, and includes art by noted regional artists Art Monroe, Dede Lyons, A.J. Chalmers, and Walter Long, all artists living in, or with connections to, Alpine County, California. Walt Monroe and Walter Long are both well-known for their paintings throughout the Carson Valley. Alex J. Chalmers was the son of “Lord” Lewis Chalmers, mining magnate of Silver Mountain City. Alex was not only a talented draftsman but also possessed considerable talent working in oils and captured rare views of Alpine scenes in the 1880s. Dede Lyons was the co-owner and operator of the Alpine Hotel in Markleeville and has left a considerable collection of pen-and-ink drawings as well as watercolors. In her early 20s she was known in the Sacramento and San Francisco art scenes and associated with the artists at the prominent Crocker Art Gallery. Art Monroe, a brother of Walt, worked as a carpenter in Alpine County and painted in his free time.

The works to be shown represent the many impressions of Alpine County, both of the land and the lives of the residents and visitors.

The art show will continue through **August 27th, 2018**, so come and see it for yourself! The Alpine County Historical Museum is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday through Sunday and is located on Schoolhouse Road in Markleeville, CA.

The Washo Elders picnic lunch at the Museum

On May 31 the Washo Elders were hosted to a BBQ lunch on the Museum lawn and picnic tables. The Hung-A-Lel-Ti community hosts a luncheon the fourth Thursday of each month for the Elders including Gardnerville and Carson City members. Great care is taken to have a healthy and delicious lunch. Lunch is prepared by the Hung-A-Lel-Ti and the Dresslerville staff. There was a big turnout and the plan is to have another lunch here later this summer. A highlight of the event was the attendance of an Anthony descendent who grew up at the old school on the Museum grounds.

Judy Wickwire, ACHS Director

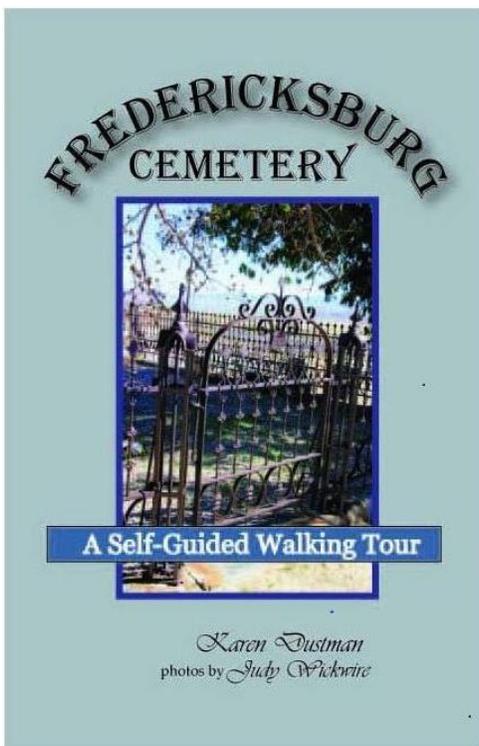
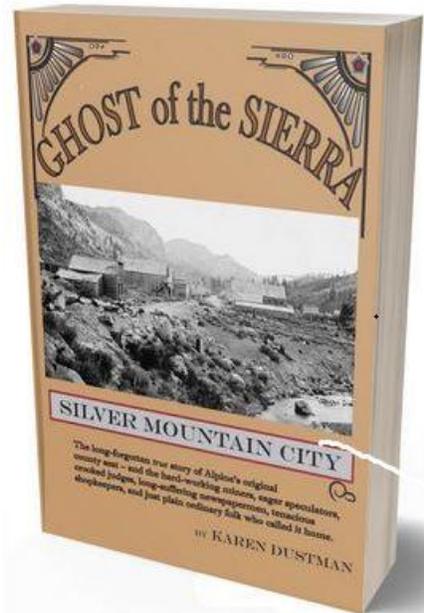


Books available from our local authors:

The two books pictured below are featured books by local authors/photographers. Copies are available at the Alpine County Museum. We also have walking and driving tours in the area, oral histories, and much more.

Silver Mountain City: "The" definitive history of old Silver Mountain City, Alpine County's original county seat from 1864 to 1875. From pilfering politicians to star-crossed marriages, eager miners to swiftly-hung murderers, the fascinating stories of Silver Mountain come to life in these pages.

Filled with vintage illustrations and photos.



Fredericksburg Cemetery: Take a fascinating tour of Fredericksburg Cemetery with this book in hand to discover the stories *behind* the silent stones! Located on Foothill Road, this tiny gem of a cemetery dates back over a century and is the final resting place of many Alpine pioneers. Graves you can visit here include a Civil War veteran; California's first woman sheriff; and several early miners and ranchers. Explore local history through these pages and learn about Alpine's once-booming silver mines, its ranches and timber industry, the building of Blue Lakes Dam, and much more!

Wonderful photos by talented local photographer Judy Wickwire.

Miscellaneous Musings

Are you a modern-world Historical Society Member who would like to receive this **Newsletter by email**, rather than on paper? If so (or if you want both), just forward your name and email address to us at alpinemuseum@yahoo.com.

Stolen Basque oven plaque at Museum complex. In late August, the plaque was removed from the Basque oven building. We hope that whoever removed it is enjoying it as much as our visitors miss the chance to learn the story of the oven. If you have any information, please contact Jim at the Museum. There is a \$150.00 reward offered for information or its return.

The museum is looking for Volunteers to help with exhibits, filing, and acting as docents for the coming year. Debbi Waldear and Ginger Craik volunteered their time this year putting together the Walt Monroe and Friends Art show now on display in the Museum through August. There is a long list of things you could help our Curator with. If you have time, please contact the museum to help.

Check out our **Website** at www.alpinecountymuseum.org and be sure to add us to your favorites and bookmark us for announcements and additional information. And of course come visit us!



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The Historical Society of Alpine County

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Membership dues are tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

Coming events

- **August 18th - Basque Oven Pizza Bake** and quarterly membership meeting, starting at noon. The **Markleeville Players** will also entertain us at 2 p.m. that same afternoon with a humorous re-enactment of the early Markleeville saga of the shooting of **J. Marklee!**
- **September 29th** - Can you believe it, the Silver Mountain Tour this year is already full! Call Karen Dustman if you're interested in a spot for *next* year! 694-2122
- **Basque Oven Baking Day** - Watch your email for the next date and time. The last baking day was a lot of fun, and each time Rick and crew are working on just-right timing for different sized breads. Come and be part of the fun.

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