

First passenger train through the Feather River Canyon, August 21, 1910.



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# ARTHUR KEDDIE'S RAILROAD DREAM

## THE WESTERN PACIFIC AND ITS LAST SPIKE

Men had dreamed of a transcontinental railroad through the Feather River Canyon since at least the early 1860s. For one man in particular, Arthur W. Keddie, this was almost an obsession. Born in Scotland in 1842, Keddie had come to California from Canada via Panama in 1863 and then to Plumas County in 1864, where he made his home in Quincy – living there until his death in 1924.

Keddie was trained as a surveyor and was closely associated with the early history of Plumas County, doing much of the early surveying, laying out every township in the county, and priding himself on providing accurate, carefully prepared reports and maps – many of which are still being used by researchers today.

One of the first professional

jobs that came Keddie's way was that of exploring the North Fork of the Feather River for the newly-organized Oroville and Beckwourth Pass Wagon Road Company. Beckwourth Pass, a Sierra crossing more than 2,000 feet lower in elevation than Donner Pass, had been used for centuries as a Native American thoroughfare, but was "discovered" by and named for mountain man, scout, and explorer James Beckwourth in 1850 and was a popular gateway into California for covered wagon trains.

Making his canyon reconnaissance in the dead of winter, Keddie was impressed by the scarcity of snow he encountered along the North Fork of the Feather River, and in his diary and letters Keddie wrote:

*Our job is to explore the North Fork to Oroville, then go to the Middle Fork past Nelson Point as far as Beckwourth Pass, and report as to which is the best for a winter road. If the North Fork*

*is best, the Indian Valley people will get out of the mountains by coming down to the junction of Spanish and Indian Creeks, then down the river to Oroville. If the Middle Fork is best, they will have to go to Quincy and Nelson Point and then down the river, though the two points that the road must connect are Oroville and Beckwourth Pass.*

In his report of March 1867, Keddie advised for the first route, condemning the Middle Fork as impassible. In his choice of the North Fork route, Keddie believed he had found a course with grades too easy to waste on a wagon road and felt sure he had discovered what would prove to be the best route for a transcontinental railroad. Thrilled at the prospect of having a part in this dream, Keddie devoted the rest of his life to the fulfillment of this project.

The young surveyor managed to interest several important men in his idea, including Asbury Harpending of diamond hoax fame, eminent lawyer, and later State Senator



***Western Pacific's last spike at Spanish Creek bridge, November 1, 1909.***

Creed Haymond, and Civil War General William S. Rosecrans. Companies were formed, and one, the Oroville and Virginia City Railroad Company – formed in 1867 – actually started construction near Oroville in 1869. However, the builders of the Central Pacific Railroad were adept at applying pressure, and they put plenty of pressure on Harpending to abandon the venture. Collis P. Huntington, one of the Big Four promoting the Central Pacific, laughed Keddie out of his office with the remark, “No man will ever be fool enough to build a railroad through that canyon.”

Through the 1870s and 1880s, the idea of a rail line through the Feather River Canyon simply fell by the

wayside, but during the 1890s, the idea was revived when, through a series of actions and events, George Gould (the eldest son of railroad magnate and financier Jay Gould) who owned the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, sought to build a new line connecting Salt Lake City and San Francisco. Once again, Keddie's early surveys of the Feather River Canyon came into play when the route was brought to George Gould's attention.

On March 3, 1903, the Western Pacific Railway Company was incorporated, and Gould sent his new Chief Engineer, Virgil Bogue, to choose the best route for the new rail line to run up the North Fork of the Feather River and cross the Sierra

Mountains via Beckwourth Pass. One night, as he went over Keddie's early surveys, Bogue noted that between Oroville and Beckwourth Pass there was only a difference in elevation of 50 feet per mile. This suggested to him the idea of a uniform 1% grade. Investigation proved this feasible and that the job could be done without climbing too high above the river.

With a \$50,000,000.00 bond guaranteed by Gould if the rail line stayed within the 1% grade and didn't exceed 10 degrees on its curves, construction on the Western Pacific got underway in the fall of 1905 with the first rail laying and first spike driven in at Third and Union Streets in Oakland on January 2, 1906. Two

years and 10 months later at milepost 280.15, the east and westbound track gangs met on the steel Spanish Creek bridge near Keddie, on November 1, 1909, and without any fanfare, ceremony, or audience save his workmen, two women and two little girls, foreman Leonard Tomasso drove the final spike completing the Western Pacific Railway.

Informal operation of the railroad began almost immediately, but formal operation of the line only commenced when the first through passenger train, a press special from Salt Lake City, arrived to a great welcome in Oakland on August 22, 1910.

This train saw one amazing welcome after another all

along its route. Wherever it went along the line, large crowds turned out, towns were decorated, salutes were fired, brass bands played, and parades were staged. Children decked out in their Sunday best waved flags and tossed flower garlands, while their elders pressed local gifts of grapes or watermelons on the astounded passengers.

In Quincy, 68-year old Arthur Keddie, almost wept as he spoke in welcome from the courthouse steps in the realization that his nearly lifelong dream of a railroad through the Feather River Canyon was finally fulfilled, while in Oakland, the immense, exuberant crowd celebrated with a four mile long parade of welcome that

escorted the passengers and railroad officials to a banquet at the Claremont Country Club.

## A PROPER CELEBRATION

In 1909 the occasion of the driving of the last spike in the Western Pacific Railroad had little meaning other than that of a job well done. Although Oroville photographer J. H. Hogan had haunted the construction camps for weeks resolved not to let the last spike go unrecorded and did, in the end, manage to get the workmen to pose for a photo at the event, nothing much more occurred, save perhaps a round of handshakes or a simple "Congratulations," or "Hurrah!"

Years later, the Western



*Arthur Keddie giving welcome speech on courthouse steps, August 1910.*



*Leonard Tomasso reenacts his driving of the last spike, November 1, 1949.*

Pacific Railroad realized that that auspicious moment deserved to be properly celebrated, so for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, under the motto of “Life begins at forty,” the company sent a five car Ruby Jubilee Special, attached to the regular Royal Gorge run, back to Plumas County. Filling those cars were distinguished guests, including Senator William F. Knowland, representatives of the press, railroad top brass, and 70-year old Leonard Tomasso.

The special train was cut

out at Keddie and the party awakened the next morning by a 6:30 call. Local guests invited to attend the unusual ceremony arrived and joined the visitors in boarding the coach drawn by old “94,” – the original locomotive that had pulled the first passenger train across these same tracks and now restored to her original appearance for this special occasion – while Mr. Tomasso quietly remained in his bedroom aboard the train putting a last minute polish on one of his most prized possessions - the silver spike

maul which had been recently presented to him on Western Pacific Day at the Chicago Railroad Fair.

Crowds gathered at various locations around the bridge (now known as the Keddie Wye) particularly on the overlooking highway which had been roped off by the Highway Patrol to serve as a grandstand. In the canyon directly below stood the massed bands of Quincy, Portola, and Greenville High Schools, smartly decked out in white uniforms, brilliant capes, and huge plumed

helmets. At Keddie Station old "94" belched forth a huge cloud of white smoke and steam and began to back her coachload of passengers onto the bridge. On the north leg of the bridge the wood burner "Jupiter" just back from the meeting of the rails scene at the Chicago Railroad Fair, awaited with steam up for the arrival of the California Zephyr which was the cue for the program to begin. In time to the second, No. 17 poked her silver and orange nose around the bend, giving a blast of her air horn. She braked smoothly and stopped just clear of the abutment and even with the "Jupiter."

As the bands played the National Anthem, Ann Donnenwirth – Miss Plumas County and the daughter of Western Pacific engineer A.C. Donnenwirth – slowly raised the Stars and Stripes above the guests. Suddenly a large red flare shot into the sky, burst, and slowly fell. It was the moment all had been waiting for. The three engines, each the pride of its era, slowly converged toward the speaker's platform, their bells ringing loudly, until they stood almost pilot to pilot.

Master of Ceremonies, Merle Snider made brief introductions as did Stan Bailey, President of the Plumas County Chamber of Commerce, Senator Knowland, and Frederic B. Whitman, President of the Western Pacific Railroad. Then it was time for the crowning moment of the day – the driving of the Ruby Spike. Leonard

Tomasso was introduced and while President Whitman kneeled and carefully placed the spike in position, Tomasso brandished his silver maul and the announcer moved forward with his microphone to capture the sound. Tomasso swung, and the sound, amplified by the huge loudspeakers, carried far and wide, and was followed by long blasts from the engine whistles. Bells tolled loudly, the assembled crowd cheered, and the bands played. The Ruby Spike was driven!

The fulfillment of Arthur Keddie's dream of a railroad

through the Feather River Canyon had finally been properly celebrated, and as the banquets, speeches, and celebrations continued at a special breakfast in Quincy, Mrs. M. J. Hogan and her daughter Ida E. Hogan, Plumas County Recorder, dressed in finery of almost a half-century ago, renewed their acquaintance with Leonard Tomasso whom they had witnessed drive the original "final" spike atop the Spanish Creek bridge back in November 1909.



*Western Pacific Ruby Spike ceremony on Keddie Wye, November 1, 1949.*



## Grave Occasion Visits Vinton

Held at the historic Vinton Cemetery in Sierra Valley on the evening of September 21, this year's annual *Grave Occasion Cemetery Tour & Dinner* marked the 10th anniversary of this popular event. Over 150 guests gathered at the small cemetery just off Hwy 70 between Vinton and Chilcoot to enjoy wine and a cemetery tour featuring a cast of characters drawn from the many Swiss and Italian families that settled this area as early as the 1870s. While family descendants who attended the event added their own stories and reminiscences, kudos go to Wayne Bauer and Tina Terrazas for portraying rancher and modernization booster Rudolph Ramelli and wife Nellie, Bryan & Danielle Plocki with Emily Choate for depicting rancher, farmer, and dairyman Luigi Maddalena, wife Colombina,

and daughter Delia, John Walker for presenting hotel operator Vincent Ponzi, Terry Gallagher for portraying pioneer Josephine Roberti, and John Sheehan for reenacting Irishman Joseph Flaherty.

After the entertaining dramatizations at the cemetery, guests adjourned to the Sierra Valley Grange Hall where they enjoyed a traditional Swiss-Italian dinner and desserts (including assorted Swiss and Italian cookies made from pioneer Sierra Valley family recipes), prepared and served by Laural Colberg and members of the Sierra Valley Grange. Here too, guests participated in bidding on silent auction items and were treated to displays of artifacts and information highlighting the history and people of Sierra Valley.

Despite minor inconveniences of road

blocks, backed up traffic, and ongoing paving and roadwork around Vinton (alleviated at one point by Cal Trans providing a special pilot car for us), this year's event was a success, and we would like to thank the Plumas County Museum Association Board of Trustees, along with many other volunteers, who donated their time and expertise to make this event happen. A big THANK YOU goes out to all those who in some way, shape, or form, helped make this event a success. Most of all, we would like to thank those who supported this year's event by buying tickets and attending this history-filled evening.

If you missed this year's event, we would love to see you attend in 2020 when we showcase a cemetery in the Chester/Lake Almanor area.

# News Around The Museum

Although the major tourist season is winding down, things have been busy here at the Museum over the past several months. The end of May saw three days of intensive Pioneer Living History activities at the Museum as 4th graders from across Plumas County enjoyed a trip back in time making candles, learning to pan for gold, and recreating the lives of their pioneer ancestors. Thanks go out to Lindsay Vert and the many volunteers who made this annual event a success.

This past summer saw numerous school tours from kindergarteners to college students as well as a number of adult tour groups from high school and elementary teachers, to RVers, and even the Ancient and Honorable Order of E. Clampus Vitus.

Also this past summer, major work to the outside landscaping took place as the County removed juniper and other overgrown plants, re-rocked and topped off the garden beds, reseeded the west lawn, and gave an all-around sprucing up to the visual appearance of the Museum's entryway.

Recently, a new coat of paint for the Museum also improved the look and long-lasting durability of the building and with the addition of new plantings in the newly refurbished planting beds, the Museum is set to look attractive and welcoming for years to come.

Finally, the Museum Association Board of Trustees welcomed Steve Fleming of Lake Almanor to their ranks. Steve has a life-long interest in history and a career that has taken him all around the world. We are pleased that he has chosen Plumas County as his home and welcome his insight, knowledge, and support.

## Out of Town Callers

**Out of State:** Representatives of thirty-six states, plus the District of Columbia, stopped by to enjoy the Museum over the past six months. They hailed from Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Washington D.C., and Wisconsin.

**International:** Visitors from around the world visited the Museum over the past six months, coming from Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Scotland, Slovenia, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

## New Members Since May 2019

*We would like to sincerely thank all of our renewing members and warmly greet our newest members and those who have upgraded their memberships!*

**Individual:** Vicki Chegwin, Graeagle; Elizabeth Sheppard, Quincy; Herb Tanimoto, Cool.

**Family:** Jeff & Gina Achilles, Quincy; Steve & Maggie Fleming, Lake Almanor; Grant & Cheri Mayfield, Blairsden; Cal Patterson & Leslie Chrysler, Portola; David & Christine Peters, Quincy; Tim West, Quincy; Sam & Kim Wilbanks, Beckwourth.

**Patron:** Doug & Sally Clarke, Petaluma; Andrea Ramelli, Reno, NV; Rick & Joanne Sargent, Quincy; Marvin & Norberta Schmidt, Quincy.

## Memorials

*Memorials have been given in memory of the following individuals since our Spring 2019 newsletter:*

**Beverly Donato**, Quincy; **Bob Foley**, Quincy; **Dennis Furry**, Chico; **Burt Haughey**, Wheatland / LaPorte; **Betty McCombs**, Martinez; **Larry Dean Miller**, Yuba City; **James Morris**, LaPorte / Gridley; **Moser family**, Quincy; **Nancy Pierson**, Chico; **Kevin Reilly**, Stockton; **Brian Van Dyke**, Yuba City.

# Artifact Donations



WWII Gas Mask.

**Lee Adams:** Three oil paintings of La Porte area scenes by Patricia Phillips; **Anonymous:** Two Greenville High School *Indian Head* yearbooks, 1939, 1941; **Robert Bailey, Jr.:** One handmade wooden voting ballot box from Twain Lumber Company Mill, "C.I.O. I.W.A. Union #3398," 1920-1950; **Dee Barbea:** One OD campaign hat w/infantry hat cord; **Don Clark:** Two framed checks from the Bank of LaPorte, 1879, 1882; **Janet Crain:** One 80-inch wood timber scale found on the old Miller Ranch (Yeager Ranch) in Meadow Valley; **Bob & Marcia Detrick:** One wood and iron-banded maul/sledge hammer, one two-man log tongs, given to Derald Detrick by George Howell, an old Quincy logger, c. 1890-1910; **Gordon Glain:** One WWII surplus M3-10a1-6 lightweight service mask (gas mask) and

M6 carrier bag; **Rob Gott:** One collection of ninety-plus various ledgers, receipt, cash, account, and time books, freight bills, and other ephemera from the Gansner Saw Mill and the Quincy Electric Light & Power Company, and Gansner Family, 1882-1955; **Sharon Gravert:** One book, *Bidwell Bar & Beyond: A History of Families from Bidwell Bar to Buckeye 1850-1950*, by Bob Richardson, nine deeds, two release of mortgages, and one agreement, dating from 1899-1936 from such families as the Clinches, Egberts, Galeppis, Lees, and Bergs; **Susan & Scott Griffith:** One Maidu stone arrow/spear point found at Little Grass Valley Reservoir; **Susan Harlan:** One book, *Statutes of California*, 1854, containing Act that formed Plumas County; **Ken Henrici:** One kiel holder for marking lumber,

one timber scale stick, 1940s, from Lassen Lumber & Box Company, Susanville; **Patricia (McKevitt) Johnson:** Six vintage children's dolls; **Barbara Karau:** One 14-piece portable Sterling Silver vanity set with case, c. 1940s; **Richard Knoettgen:** Five copies of report, *Historical Land Ownership near the Intersection of Quincy Junction Road and Chandler Road, Quincy, Plumas County, April 7, 1852-July 14, 1956*, by Rich Knoettgen, Heather & Joe Way, 2019; **Diane Lawson:** One "Buttercup Toffees" tin from the house of Edna Stampfli Fisher; **Scott Lawson:** One "Mrs. Hill's California Insect Powder tin, c. 1870-1890; one "Kellogg's Dunket" tin, 1916; three waxed "Indian Valley Creamery" milk cartons, 1962-1963; **Ron Linebarger:** Collection of letters, photos, account book, report card, graduation cards, and other ephemera from grandparents Cal & Nellie Shewmaker and mother Shirley Shewmaker, 1930s; **Gary Liss:** One mining crucible from Walker Mine, given to donor by George Curnow, 1930s; **Ken Koonter:** One collection of 63 b/w photographs of Koonter family ancestors in Plumas County, including Keddie, Engel Mine, etc., 1907-1917; **Joe Mackler Jr.:** One Plumas County Sheriff's Mounted Posse badge given to donor by former Sheriff Willard Abernathy, c. 1947-1954; **John McMorrow:** One Winchester model 1897 pump action 12-gauge shotgun once owned by Bud Grover of Grover Bros. Pharmacy;

**Milton Gottardi Museum:** One hand-painted tin sign, "Greenville Hotel & Coffee Shop," c. 1940s; **Elaine Small:** One collection of seventeen b/w photographs of Quincy High School students, boxing team, girls basketball team, parade, etc., 1938-1942; **Dennis Stark:** One framed handwritten Voter's List from Elizabethtown, 1855; **Charles Steele:** One brass & copper Matthewman black powder flask found by donor's father near Gibsonville late 1950s, c. 1851-1879; **Mike & Keri Taborski:** One fireplace match holder advertising G.R. Clark Store, Taylorsville, one Great

Wall of China commemorative medallion, one set of souvenir Chinese Excavation coins; **Brandon Thornton:** One small amber octagon-sided medicine bottle found while digging at the Goodwin Law Office in July 2019; **Russell Turner:** One Ramelli Dairy wood and wire milk crate for carrying ½ pint milk bottles; **Diane Uchytel:** One light amethyst colored ink bottle for school desk, one clear screw top medicine bottle, both found at Johnson Mill Site; **Nancy Wann:** Four b/w photographs of the Portola Ball Club, 1945 and the Greenville Fire Department, 1935;

**Yuba Feather Historical Association:** One collection of eleven b/w photographs of the California White Pine Lumber Company in Loyalton.



*Bank of Laporte Notes.*

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# Infinite Universes

The artwork of Levi Mullen is now on exhibit in the Museum's Stella Fay Miller Mezzanine Gallery. Drawing inspiration from the sun and nature and focusing on the universe and its connectedness to everything, Levi explores the transition between the

worldly and the ethereal using a sphere-centric image as the starting point in his exploration. Using gel pens on black paper, Levi creates works that are both spontaneous and powerful. These evocative images also pay homage to Levi's Maidu heritage

while inviting one's own interpretation of the pieces. If you haven't yet seen these one-of-a-kind inspirational artworks, we invite you to visit the Museum and experience them today.



*máscokò*



*máscokòna sýtti*



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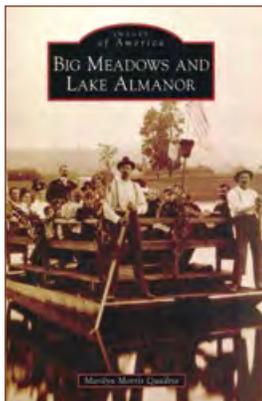
*máscokòna sápy*

# Shop the Museum Store This Holiday Season!

Although it's only fall, the holidays are rapidly approaching, and we invite you to stop by the Museum to start your holiday gift buying now. Whatever your gift giving style, be it "stuffers" or full-on presents, we have something for everyone at the Plumas County Museum.

Our bookstore offers hundreds of new books geared for the nature lover, hiking enthusiast, history buff, or armchair adventurer in your family, most of them dealing in some way with the local area and Plumas County and many of them written by local authors. We also carry a wide assortment of used, out-of-print, and hard-to-find books, as well as a fascinating array of one-of-a-kind collectible items for sale in our Museum Store.

For those looking for the latest in trending styles, we offer wearables such as



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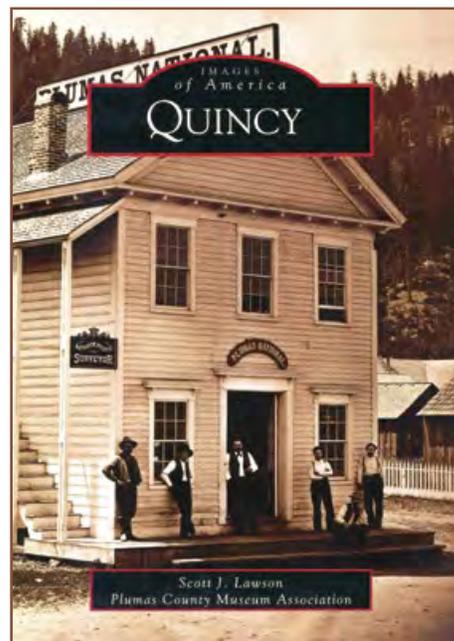
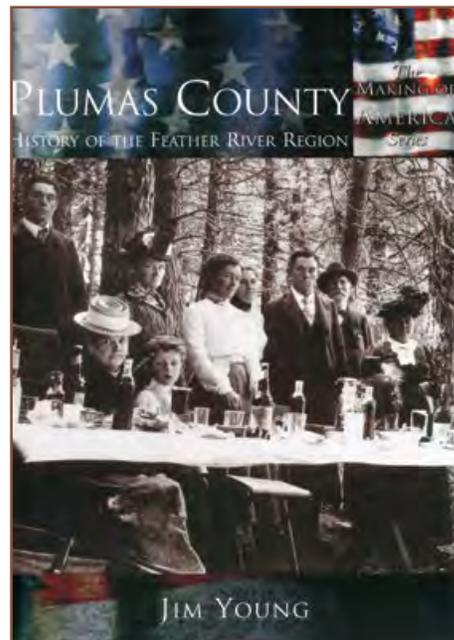
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# Volunteer Activities

Our 1878 Variel Home was open this past season thanks to docent Denise Russell, who also helped out with our school and adult tours of the Museum with Ray Nichol also providing a tour or two of the venerable home, as did Rich Knoettgen.

Pete Dryer, Eldora Duniphin, Ray Nichol, Helen Roberti, and Denise Russell kept the Peppard Cabin at this year's Plumas-Sierra County Fair open for visitors, while Rich Knoettgen, Sally Nichol, John Walker, and Ken Green have all contributed their time and expertise in numerous outdoor projects at the Museum – everything from refurbishing exhibit yard areas, to trimming overgrown plants, to raking leaves, to helping landscape the front planting beds with new shrubbery.

Lisa Hopman continues her project of processing the Museum's collection of inquests and coroner's reports, and Linda Wallace faithfully enters and keeps track of all our donations, memberships, and the acknowledgement letters that go with them.

Docent Ken Green once again volunteered his time to pass out candy to the many ghouls, goblins, superheroes, and princesses who visited the Museum during this year's Downtown Safe Trick or Treat, while Rich Knoettgen and Gabriel Hydrick are helping out QHS Senior Sam Lawson in a project to repave the Museum's exhibit yard walkway.

Thank you to all our wonderfully dedicated volunteers!



*Volunteer Jedi, Kenneth Green.*

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