

# Yolo County Historical Society



MARCH 2017

## Prez Says

It is with very mixed feelings that I write this letter regarding what is happening at the Gibson Museum in Woodland. There have been a few articles in the newspaper regarding the County proposal to house the Yolo Arts Council on the Gibson Museum grounds. What that looks like, we do not know. Before I begin the discussion, I want all of you to know that I love what the Yolo County Arts Council is doing in our county. Both John and I love the art walks and love seeing the murals and other art works throughout town. We regularly view the art at the County Fair and purchase an art piece to support the teaching of art in the schools. When I taught elementary school I oftentimes brought art work into the classroom and we would discuss the artists and their techniques and attempt to replicate their work. When I taught history at Woodland High School, I always used art pieces to help explain the different periods of time. I am a supporter of art.

However, I am also an historian who has devoted my life to teach others to have an appreciation of past. I think both groups have a lot to offer the people of Yolo County, and it concerns me that we may be put into a position to have to make a choice!

This entire newsletter is devoted to the Gibson Museum discussion. Please read it thoroughly and if you feel so inclined, please phone, e mail, or write your supervisors. Their addresses and information are in this newsletter. They need to hear our opinions.

Remember, as always...  
History Rules!

Kathy Harryman  
President, Yolo County Historical Society

## The Gibson House Story The Past- A Brief History

William Byas Gibson came to California at the age of 19. He later returned home to Missouri and married Mary Cook. They both came to Yolo County in 1850 and began to farm. In 1857, he bought 320 acres and a small house south of Woodland. With a growing family (2 boys) and increasing prosperity, the Gibson's enlarged their home several times with stately Ionic columns reminiscent of the old South. The Gibson's specialized in growing grain and raising short-horned cattle. In 1869, Gibson gave California Pacific Railroad 100 feet of his land to build a railroad connecting the town to Knights Landing. He received in return one dollar and a lifetime pass on the railroad. On July 7, 1891, after the County of Yolo voted not to support the yearly fair, a group of farmers, including W.B. Gibson, formed a joint stock company to raise money to have a district fair. They purchased property outside of Woodland to hold the events. The fair became a county fair in 1897. He also donated land on College Street to establish Hesperian College, one of Woodland's most prestigious institutions. In 1953, Gibson Elementary School was named for William B. Gibson.

The Yolo County Historical Society ...persuaded the County of Yolo to buy the empty and crumbling William Byas Gibson house on Gibson Road for use as a county historical museum. The county paid \$19,000 for the building and grounds in 1975 (4 ½ acres) and subsequently spent nearly a quarter of a million dollars for major structural repairs. A private non-profit organization, the Yolo County Museum Association, was established to raise money to furnish the building and staff it. Even though it was only partially restored, on Sunday, May 16, 1976, Woodlanders turned out in force to celebrate the nation's Bicentennial. The day long

festival, which had been planned for months by a large committee, was held at the Gibson House....The celebration featured continuous entertainment, tours of the House, craft sales, food booths, exhibits, and speeches. In many respects it resembled Woodland's celebration of the nation's Centennial in 1886.

During the 1980's the Gibson House was developed into a house museum of the period 1870-1920. In 1994 the museum regularly offered educational tours for adults and school children, as well as exhibiting temporary shows of subjects of local historical interest.

The above information was taken from the book, *Woodland, City of Trees, A History* by Shipley Walters

### **The Gibson House Story The Present**

The Gibson House is managed by a Board of Directors. The Board's primary responsibility is to pay the bills. The Yolo County Historical Society has a voting place on the Board. The other Board members come by appointment from the county supervisors. The board prepares a budget and then looks for ways to make the budget become a reality. The Gibson Gala, the Santa Saturday, and the May Festival are just a few of the items that the Board has used to make our budget work. When major items occur, like the 350 year old diseased oak tree, the director works within the community to find resources to solve the problem. Oftentimes, individuals donate money to support certain projects. Sometimes the person/company either donates their services or charges us a reduced fee.

Here is a list of the yearly activities at the Museum and the number of participants:

- a. Third grade students 967-1150
- b. Parents and School personnel 135
- c. Special tours Nursing facilities and Special Ed 170
- d. 23 Weddings 6900
- e. 3 Rotary functions 450
- f. District Lions Clubs Bay Area, UCD, and Sac Valley 250
- g. Celebration of Life 250
- h. Tunes for Trees, graduation and Anniversary parties 1050

- i. May Festival 650-750
- j. Visitor's Tours 325
- k. Christmas Party 88
- l. Plant Sales 190
- m. Book Signing Events
- n. Writing Classes
- o. Cooking Classes
- p. Stan Atkins Senior Program
- q. TV Channel 58, 31, and 40
- r. Paranormal Events 3
- s. Yolo County Historical Society Presentations 50
- t. Receptions for the Mayor, out going Mayor, the Chancellor of Yuba College 150

The Gibson House is a county designated park filled with rare plants and trees. The oak mentioned above is estimated to be over 350 years old. The olive trees in the front yard were planted in 1888 and are believed to be cuttings from the Wolfskill farm in Davis. The parent trees were planted in 1842. The herb garden, reminiscent of the period of time, was done by master gardeners who donated their time, talents and supplies.

### **The Gibson House Story The Future**

Now we are at the present....On February 16, the Gibson Board was called to a special meeting at the Gibson Mansion. Matt Rexroad and Patrick Blacklock were there representing the county. As we were gathered, we learned that the county was exploring the possibility of housing the Yolo County Arts Council on the Gibson property. Apparently, there is \$250,000 dollars sitting in an account waiting to be used. Frank Sieferman, a former county supervisor, had placed it there for housing for the Arts Council. They are currently housed in a facility that has deteriorated.

Needless to say, all of us were shocked! This was unexpected. I expressed concern about the items that were donated to the museum from the people of the county. Where would they go? Both county employees listened. Joanne Larkey expressed concern about the grounds, Linda Santoni expressed concern about the third grade program. We were then told that this is just a suggestion and not a done

deal. But, Matt was going to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, Feb. 21 to alert the supervisors. Because it was a long weekend, it was difficult to get people to come to the meeting on such short notice. However, 4 of us were able to go. After Matt's presentation, and the county's very professional digital presentation, it soon became apparent that it was a 'done deal'. The supervisors, especially Jim Provenza and Don Saylor, were very concerned that both groups work together to see how it could work. Matt assured them that this would happen.

As of right now, March 22, there have been no meetings with the two groups. However, we, the Gibson board, have asked the Art council to attend our next meeting in April so we can begin the discussion. In the meantime, county personnel have been to the Museum twice with Alison Flory, the Art director. We were not invited to accompany them either time.

We, the board at the Yolo County Historical Society, are all very concerned with the future of the museum and of the items that have been so generously donated by the people of this county. We are also concerned that the Museum board, who have been caring and working for the museum, were not even approached with the plan. The discussions seemed to be held behind closed doors and in secret. A few selected individuals were invited to the county offices before the Feb. 16 general board meeting. But again, why weren't we all told the same information at the same time? There are many rumors floating around the museum. One such rumor has the bottom floor going to the Art Council with the walls stripped, painted white, and a rotating picture gallery in place. Another rumor has the Art Council taking over one of the barns and making that into another place to display their art. Rumors will always exist if discussions are held behind closed doors.

**So what can you do?** You can write a letter, e mail, or call your supervisor and express your concerns for the takeover of the Gibson House. Don't we who live in Yolo County deserve a county museum? We, at the Yolo County Historical Society, think that we do deserve a museum. What do you think?

Here are the names and addresses of all the supervisors. If you are in doubt about what district you are in, call the County at 530 666-8195.

All receive mail at 625 Court St. Rm 204  
Woodland, Ca 95695

District 1 Oscar Villegas  
E mail – [oscar.villegas@yolocounty.org](mailto:oscar.villegas@yolocounty.org)  
Phone 916 375-6443

District 2 Don Saylor  
E mail – [don.saylor@yolocounty.org](mailto:don.saylor@yolocounty.org)  
Phone 530 666-8622 and 530 757-5557

District 3 Matt Rexroad  
E mail – [matt@rexroad.com](mailto:matt@rexroad.com)  
Phone 530 666-8621 or cell 916 539-0455

District 4 Jim Provenza  
E mail – [jim.provenza@yolocounty.org](mailto:jim.provenza@yolocounty.org)  
Phone – 530 666-8235 (Sandra Rodriguez)  
Location 600 A Street Suite C Davis,  
Calif 95616

District 5 Duane Chamberlain  
E mail – [julie.dachtler@yolocounty.org](mailto:julie.dachtler@yolocounty.org)

**Keep the Fight ---- Stay Strong -  
----Remember, as  
Always.....History Rules!!**



**The Yolo County Historical Museum  
Remembered**

Anyone who has visited the Yolo County Historical Museum at 512 Gibson Road knows what a special place this is for the public to visit. Countless volunteers have worked for years for a place to display artifacts that tell the unique story of how Yolo County has developed since it was one of the original 27 counties of the new State of California in 1850.

Representatives of pioneer families, members of the Woodland Camera Forum and members of the Native Daughters of the Golden West Chapter

worked together to start the nucleus of a museum in the late 1940s when an early Yolo County Historical was briefly organized. Volunteers documented historic landmarks, collected the donation of many valuable artifacts and salvaged the 1869 Springlake Schoolhouse by moving it to the Yolo County Fairgrounds where it is still in use.

The effort to create a more comprehensive museum was supported by more than 200 charter members of today's historical society which was formed in 1963 and the work continues. After considering a number of museum sites, Yolo County was offered by the developer of Stanley Davis Homes a 4.5 acre parcel including the 12-room mansion and out buildings of the William B. Gibson Family who had lived there since 1857. In 1975 the reasonable price was \$20,000 and the Yolo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to accept this offer and use it as a site for both a Yolo County park and a Yolo County Museum.

Earl Balch, longtime director of Yolo County Parks, spearheaded development of the museum which was dedicated during the 1976 celebration of the nation's bi-centennial.

Volunteers young and old rolled up their sleeves and went to work to make the buildings and historic grounds safe and available. It took lots of planning, countless volunteer hours of gritty work and many county and state restoration dollars before the public could be admitted, but the results have been gratifying.

Now the Museum Board of Directors and committee chairmen have been confronted by county officials with a surprise decision to possibly share museum space and administration with the highly respected Yolo Arts Council. Negotiations will be ongoing during the coming weeks and months and many questions need to be answered.

I am personally very supportive of the programs offered by the Arts Council and would like to arrive at a mutually advantageous solution for both groups. As a published author of several books on regional history and a supporter of the county museum since 1963, I would very much regret giving up the limited display space in the mansion's ground floor rooms which would adversely impact public tours

and highly successful, on-going programs such as school tours for many generations of third graders.

I urge all those who value the museum to show their support for maintaining educational exhibits that illustrate the rich heritage of the County of Yolo.

Joann Leach Larkey



### **A Letter From the Museum**

In the last couple of weeks, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors approved a new home for the Yolo County Arts Council to hang their paintings on display for the public. Before they were hanging on the walls of the County building on Court Street for people who were seeking information, paying taxes or possibly attending a Supervisors' Board Meeting on the second floor. I am not against local art, but the plans for its new home.

The new art gallery's home within a year or two is to be the downstairs living and dining rooms of the Gibson House Museum on Gibson Road.

This will mean that the long standing and only historical house open to the public as a museum open to visitors since the late 1970's and also not maybe known, has been a must visit for many decades to over a thousand a year of Yolo County third graders who are taught by their teachers local history. It will no longer be a looked for during the school year field trip to enjoy and learn about their local history and early founders of the community.

The individual rooms are completely decorated with furniture of the 1890's in two living rooms, a beautiful dining room with the table set for dinner and a period kitchen, plus upstairs four completely furnished bedrooms and a bathroom with a large white footed tub. No televisions, dishwashers or washing machines or any modern conveniences anywhere in the house.

Besides being the home of William Byas Gibson and his wife there are hanging pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Laugenour and the Beamers and others whose names students recognize as names on local streets

and schools. Sometimes even their own. These individuals were the early merchants, builders and elected officials in the beginnings of the city and county.

Volunteer docents many of whom are retired third grade teachers from Davis and Woodland are dedicated to share with you the details about the history of the house as well as the furniture that has been given or donated by many people in the community from their early Woodland relatives and families some of whom were neighbors and friends of the Gibson's while they lived in the home.

The many docents, volunteers and appointed board members are truly appalled that the County considers the historical museum not to be worthwhile or valuable to the community as it has existed along with the May Festival and other events on the grounds. The museum board is asking those many past third graders now grown, teachers and parents and other members in the County communities to contact the County Supervisors to share your reasons why the Gibson House Museum not be turned into an art gallery with contemporary paintings, rather than a charming, educational and historical museum. We need your protest and support.

Karen E. Lafferty- President, Gibson House Museum Board



### **Business Buddies**

The following businesses in town have financially supported the Yolo County Historical Society. We would like you to

support them and keep your money local. If you know of any to join our support list, contact me. Businesses pay \$50.00 per year for advertising.

**L & S Printers, Main St.**  
**Zamora Hills Ranch**  
**Larry Shapiro**  
**Bernard & Lynn Gough**  
**Dahlin & Essex Inc.**  
**Alderson Convalescent Hospital**

**Thanks to the following** for generously supporting the Society. You too can be a Patron by donating \$100.00 to help us run our projects

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**Yolo County Historical Society**  
**P O Box 1447**  
**Woodland, CA 95776**

**Address Service Requested**

**Dated Material**

**Vision Statement:** *The Yolo County Historical Society strives to preserve, protect and acknowledge the diverse history of Yolo County through education, communication and advocacy*