An Arcata Pioneer Family

Melvin Parker Roberts (Known as Mel, or MP) was born April 21, 1842 in St. Albans, Somerset county, Maine. As a young man, Melvin decided to go to California to try his luck in the gold fields. He settled his parents in Fort Fairfield, Maine, sold his assets for two gold pieces, and then traveled to New York City, where he caught a ship headed to California.

Melvin soon grew discouraged with gold mining, and took up agricultural work in the fields near Chico, California. During this time, he heard about the plentiful land and timber in Humboldt County, California. He decided to travel to Humboldt County to see if it would be a place of opportunity for him. Melvin returned to San Francisco, where he caught a ship to Humboldt County. In 1860, at the age of 19, Melvin "crossed the bar" (the sand bar) outside the Eureka harbor to land in Humboldt County. He sailed in the old steamer Columbia, a side wheel passenger steamer.

In Humboldt County, Mel engaged in the lumber and stock business. In 1882 he founded the first commercial diary in in Humboldt County. In 1887 he married May Lavis Nelson, the daughter of another well-known pioneer family. They went on to have three children, Frederica Atlant, Mel Jr, and Hazel. Between 1901-1909 he represented the Second Assembly District in the California State Legislature, and afterward became involved in local politics. It wasn’t until 1880 that Melvin turned his attention to farming and raising sheep and stock on his ranch on the Mad River at Three Cabins. At one time he had 9,000 sheep in his corral. Melvin also bought and sold timber land and real estate.

In 1882, Melvin purchased the 80-acre Wiley farm on Daniel’s Slough near Arcata and started a dairy. He was one of the first people to see the potential of dairying in this area, and was the first man to operate a dairy in the Arcata area. He delivered milk from house to house in three-gallon cans. His milk delivery efforts meant that each family didn’t have to have its own cow and didn’t have to fence their yard to keep out the cows (cows used to graze on the Arcata Plaza). In the process of dairying, Melvin also demonstrated that he could successfully grow red clover in the Arcata bottoms area.

Mel owned property near the Arcata Methodist Church on 11th Street, where in 1882 he had continued on page 5
President’s Message

A very big thank you to all of the members who helped with the Fiber Faire and the Collectibles Sale. We successfully raised funds to keep the Phillips House operating for another year.

That means HSSA has enough money to pay the utilities, monthly cleaning of the museum, painting one side of the museum, and miscellaneous expenses. I am so fortunate that we have a dedicated core of volunteers who operate the museum with the terrific support of our members. We all are able to make it work and I am thankful.

Madison Hazen, an HSU intern who returned from a year in Ireland as an exchange student, helped us with social media and the Collectibles Sale. When we said you can help people select clothing, she jumped with joy. I remember those days of being able to leap in the air, what a joy to see her do it.

Youth has its wonders. Madison connected arcatahistory Instagram to arcatahistory Facebook. Tamara manages our Facebook page and I have Instagram on my iPhone. Now the photos I take will go to Facebook in one stroke.

What a wonderful surprise for all of us to receive a check from Deborah L. Cooper for $2000.00. When Karole called her to thank her, Deborah told her she lives up Fickle Hill Road, sees the museum each time she comes into town and noticed we are only open on Sunday for short hours. She thought we could use some additional funds. With great excitement, we added the donation to our Humboldt Area Foundation fund to bring it back up to $10,000. Thank you, Deborah for making this happen.

Glenn Hoyle, son of True and Burt Hoyle, will be returning to Arcata for his father’s 100th birthday during the Thanksgiving holidays. He will be bringing his children and grandchildren. Dan Hauser was our docent when Glenn recently visited the museum and will be the docent on December 1 when Glenn returns. Glenn provided us with his family history. Part of it is in this newsletter and the remainder may be read on the HSSA website.

Hard to believe fall is in the air after our delightfully warm summer days. The annual Holiday Tea at the Phillips House will be Sunday, December 8 from 2-4 p.m. Wear your favorite holiday apron if you have one. Once again you will be able to enjoy the old fashioned Christmas tree that we set up each year in the living room with small candles on its boughs. The tree was donated by founding member Edith Stokes, and we have been using it for the past 20 plus years.

Look forward to seeing you for tea on December 8.

Alex
For the Spring 2019 newsletter, I had the pleasure of interviewing two Arcata sisters, Mary Biehn (née Dolf) and Barbara Cole. Mary had mentioned that she was elected Homecoming Queen while attending Humboldt State University in 1948. I recently became a docent at the Humboldt Room of the Eureka Library, and I found the HSU yearbook from Mary’s year. What a fun surprise to see a lovely photo of Mary in her homecoming attire!

The photos show Mary in 1945 and Mary in 2019.

By Tamara Wolsky

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**A Day at the Museum**

by Dan Hauser

I had the most interesting day ever at the Phillips House this afternoon. There was an elderly couple from Roseburg, Oregon waiting for me who were making their first ever trip to Humboldt and taking in all the sights. They had been overwhelmed by the North Country Fair and looking for something quieter.

They had no more than left when a young couple arrived who stayed about 45 minutes - interested in everything. While they were there a lady arrived, who is working on a student project at HSU on museum stuff and stayed until 4:00 asking questions and making notes of everything. Glenn Hoyle came in wanting to make sure we would be open the Sunday before Thanksgiving. He stated that his grandmother, May Roberts, was born in the Phillips House. Glenn had flown in from Alabama to visit his 100-year-old father who lives at Timber Ridge. On the Sunday before Thanksgiving he wants to bring his father to the Phillips House along with his own children and grandchildren. I assured him that we would be open, and I would like to volunteer to docent that date unless you already have someone else. He says he also has a lot of historical information on his mother and grandmother that he would be willing to share. He can be reached at glenn@glennhoyle.com and his web page is www.hoyle.com.

Finally, as I was talking to the HSU museum student Katala Prince, the door opened, a lady handed me a check, I quickly thanked her as she was already closing the door behind her. I was even more flustered when I looked at the check! It was made out to the Phillips House Museum and is from a Deborah L. Cooper. for $2000.00.

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**Docent Observations from Madison Hazen**

Ann McClary is a long-time docent and could give tours of the historic Phillips House blindfolded.

Dan Hauser is a train fanatic and knows the history of all the railroads in Arcata.

John Barstow knows the architectural history of Arcata’s homes and especially of this house.

Madison Hazen is a student of Anthropology and Religious Studies at HSU. Ask her about the time she found a sword in the Phillips House back room.

Sherry Eaten knows the ins and outs of the Phillips House and is especially keen to tell exactly how the ironer in the kitchen got to be called ‘the mangler’.
Lasting Effects of the 1893 World’s Fair on Arcata

by Tamara Wolski, HSSA board member

In many ways, a world’s fair is a microcosm of American cities. Similar to any large city, a fair must be built to accommodate a deluge of visitors, have working sanitation systems, running water and electricity, and scores of buildings to present to the public. In addition to the efficiency of a world’s fair, it must also be aesthetically pleasing. The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition was both functional and beautiful, and it encouraged Americans to desire that their own cities resemble Chicago’s fair, including the citizens of Arcata. The planning and success of the fair inspired the City Beautiful Movement, which forever changed the face of cities across the country.

In the late 19th century, the city of Chicago was described as “cluttered,” “raucous,” and “smoke-filled” (Burg 1976, 44-45), and the world’s fair needed to be the antithesis to this polluted chaos. What better way to impress its visitors than with pristine, white buildings of monumental proportion and sprawling green spaces? The resulting “White City” inspired Americans to incorporate classical architecture, public parks, and running water into their cities.

The elegance and uniformity of the neoclassical and renaissance architecture, referred to as Beaux-Arts after the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) in Paris, were imitated by cities across the country in the decades after the Columbian Exposition. The Beaux-Arts White City gave Americans the notion that they could plan and beautify entire cities. In Arcata, crisp, white buildings were constructed around the Plaza, many of which embodied the Beaux-Arts ideals. The neoclassical influence is featured heavily on the Bank of Arcata’s façade, for example.

Bank of Arcata, Arcata Plaza (Ericson Photos, Humboldt State University, undated)

The fair awakened an appreciation for public green spaces as well. The Plaza, at one point a cow pasture, became a visually pleasing and functional downtown. Daniel Burnham, the architect of the Columbian Exposition, argued that the aesthetic reform of cities would attract tourists and revenue, and that residents would not feel the need to travel as frequently if they had attractive parks within their reach. Arcatans seemed to agree with this sentiment, as they invested in beautifying their city center. In the years following the World’s Fair, Arcata witnessed the deliberate planting of palm trees and cypress on the Plaza, along with the installation of public paths and a statue. The McKinley statue was a focal point of the Plaza for over a century, like the Statue of the Republic, a massive gilded bronze sculpture on a marble pedestal, was a focal point of the fair.

Arcata Plaza (HCC Photos, Humboldt State University, undated)
Schorlig House, 1050-12th Street

The Schorlig House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 as significant example of Arcata’s Italianate architecture. Rehabilitation of the house, which suffered from neglect and intrusive alterations, including asbestos siding, restored its architectural integrity.

Built in 1885 for German-born Louis Schorlig, the house exhibits typical Italianate characteristics: low, hipped roofline; stacked square bays with colonnettes and dainty barracks, grouped, round-headed windows, bracketed cornice, and a tastefully decorated entrance stoop. The house once enjoyed the space of an entire block, where Mr. Schorlig, Arcata’s “most scientific florist”, practiced his vocation.

An ad from the Arcata Union 7/30/1892 reads “L.E. Schorlig, Dealer in Vegetables, Fruits, Nuts, Candy, etc. “H” Street next to Harpst and Spring Store. Received fresh supplies from San Francisco each steamer. Keeps constantly on hand fresh vegetables of the best quality raised in my own garden. In the fruit season here I have every variety of fruit grown in my own grounds and always ready to fill orders at satisfactory rates. Give Me A Call. (Arcata Union, July 30, 1892. Touring Arcata’s Architecture by Susie Van Kirk, Touring Central Arcata item 37. Page 28.

Pioneer Family (continued) started Arcata’s first commercial dairy. In 1887 Mel brought property at the foot of Fickle Hill Road, eventually moving his dairy there. The hay barn and house had already been built. In the late 1890’s, Melvin added another 30 acres to the farm.

Beginning in the 1890s, Melvin and several other local men, formed the Arcata Land Improvement Company, which undertook construction of the dikes at the edge of Humboldt Bay so that they could create pastureland out of the low-lying wetlands and thus increase their land holdings. The men in the community decided to support Mel in an effort to be elected to the state legislature to change a law so they could file on the land in the “overflow bay land” of Jacoby and Beith creeks. In 1901, Melvin was elected to the State Assembly. He was the Assemblyman for the Second Assembly District in the California Legislature from 1901 until 1909. His voting record indicates he was a staunch conservative Republican. Through their efforts, the dikes were built and hundreds of acres of wetlands were “reclaimed.” The dikes are now located under Highway 101 and south of 11th street on the south side of Arcata.

By the time he retired, Melvin was an established figure in the community. He enjoyed people and until the time of his death was often seen sitting on a box on the north end of the Plaza greeting everyone as they went by. G street, where he lived, was also the main road through Arcata and up the coast.

He died on January 15, 1926 and is buried in Greenwood cemetery in Arcata alongside his wife, May Lavis Nelson (1867-1933).

This is an excerpt from an article written by Glenn Hoyle, the man mentioned in Dan’s article above. Glenn is the great-grandson of Melvin Parker Roberts. The full article, including references is available at our website.
“To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?”

— Marcus Tullius Cicero

Membership and Renewal Form

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