

of the
Tuolumne County
Historical Society
Sonora, California

Letter from the President

Greetings from Chuck Holland!

Have you been challenged to find ways to stay busy, or entertained, during the pandemic? Some of our volunteers are reporting creative and useful endeavors, such as raising chickens and building LEGO models. That's not to say our Museum has been ignored, however, as a small group of volunteers has been working on putting together new displays, and one dedicated volunteer even took on the task of catching the rats who moved into the Museum to play while the people were away.



Before goats



After goats

Pandemic restrictions have also led some of us into closer scrutiny of our homes and yards. For instance, my wife Susan and I had a whole hillside full of poison oak, blackberries, and brush that we didn't want to have to cut down, so I decided to try an "organic solution" and reserved a herd of goats for the month of June. (Most of the goat herds in this area are completely booked out for months).

Taking care of a herd of goats is like taking care of grandchildren. We got to enjoy the kids while the owners had to take care of the herd, which is no small amount of work. First of all, they had to cut out a pathway and surround our hillside with a portable electric fence. Then they had to provide an adequate source of water for the herd. After that, the 21 goats were moved inside the enclosure. The bigger ones walked, but the smaller ones had to be carried.

All I had to do was take roll every morning to make sure all 21 goats were still present and accounted for. I would walk down to the fence with a bucket of grain and, as soon as they saw me, the entire herd would run over in anticipation of the handfuls of grain I tossed over the fence. My only challenge was to make sure I could actually see all 21 goats in their mad scramble for the treat of the day.

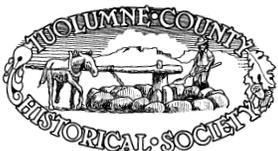
Eventually the day came when only 20 goats showed up to be counted. One goat had managed to escape. He didn't go very far, though, and my son helped me round him up and put him back inside the pen. About an hour later the goat was out again, which resulted in more parenting work for the owner, as he had to come over and walk the entire fence line to figure out how this one goat kept getting out. The problem is that, if not stopped, this *baaaaad* goat would soon teach the others how to escape. As it turned out, this escape artist had to be removed from the herd and placed in "timeout," presumably in the owner's backyard.

It took this herd about three weeks for them to eat up most of the foliage on our hillside. They finished before we could get very attached to them. We mostly enjoyed throwing greens over the fence and watching the herd dynamics. Now that they have all been rounded up and taken to their next patch of brush, it is quiet around here again.

As restrictions ease, many of us are happily anticipating getting out a little more and volunteering again. Fortunately for our organization, many of our volunteers from both the Historical and Genealogical Societies have indicated they will return to their previous positions. We look forward to contacting you in the coming weeks to work out schedules and to see you once again at our Museum and History Research Center.

Welcome New
Member:

Thad Waterbury



Leo, the MGM Lion Visits Sonora

By Pat Perry

Leo, the MGM lion, was a Nubian lion, born around 1915. He was captured when a year old and brought to the United States, then acquired by MGM Studios. At first used in silent movies, he soon became the MGM mascot and living trademark.

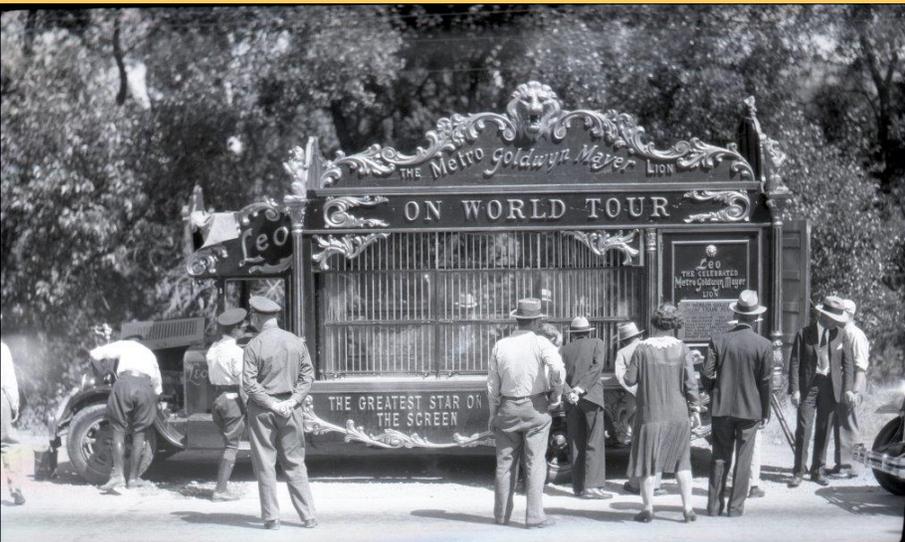
In 1928, Leo began a world tour that was to last five years. By today's standards, this promotional event would be considered animal cruelty, but then it was seen as a thrilling way for people to see the lion up close. Very few seemed to consider the needs or comfort of Leo, or what was best for him. He was an honorary life member of the Lions Club of Los Angeles, and Lions Clubs throughout the United States sponsored his appearances.

Leo toured in a magnificent gilded red cage mounted on a Reo truck. His traveling home was twenty-four-feet long overall. The interior was divided into three compartments. The cage was fifteen-feet long by six-feet wide and six-feet-three inches high. It was reported that every sanitary precaution for the conveyance of Leo was provided. To further protect Leo from the elements, heavy indestructible plate glass, two thirds the height of the cage, extended from the floor. In order to make the riding qualities of the truck as comfortable as possible, it was fitted with pneumatic shock absorbers, pneumatic tires, and special springs, so that even over rough roads Leo would experience no discomforts. Each compartment of the truck was electrically lighted in order to give the thousands of evening visitors a perfect view of his royal majesty.

Though it may seem odd to readers unfamiliar with Tuolumne County's movie-making history, Leo was scheduled to be in Sonora at 3 o'clock on Wednesday, June 25, 1930. His "palace car" would be located in front of the Star Theatre on Washington Street.

At their luncheon meeting earlier that day, the Sonora Lions Club unanimously elected Leo an honorary life member of the club. It appears that all of the Lions Clubs on the tour did the same thing. After their meeting, the Sonora Lions Club members formed an automobile caravan and escorted Leo from the city limits to the Star Theatre, where the street was jammed with people. The crowd filled the street so completely that traffic had to be diverted around the block. At the theatre, Leo was introduced to the crowd. His trainer, Volney Phifer, then put Leo through some of his stunts. Members of the Lions Club had their pictures taken in front of Leo's cage.

After his short stop in Sonora, Leo headed towards San Francisco, where he was scheduled for several appearances on Friday and Saturday.



This is the truck that conveyed Leo, the MGM lion, on his United States tour in 1930. It was stopped between Jamestown and Sonora. Those looking in the cage are probably members of the Sonora Lions Club who sponsored his visit to Sonora. P39454



Although it must have been exciting to see the beautiful animal, the *Iola (Kansas) Register* of October 27, 1930, probably had it right when it wrote after Leo's visit: *But Leo, for all his high and mightiness, is a pathetic figure. He has no business living in a cage. And when he roars one wonders if Leo realizes that his call cannot be answered. In his simple beast's mind, he probably doesn't, for he keeps staring through the crowd at something in the far distance which is not there. He waits awhile and roars again, uselessly.*

Leo died from heart disease on February 25, 1935, in his cage at the Philadelphia Zoo. Apparently, he was still owned by MGM who paid for his care at the zoo. Newspapers throughout the United States covered Leo's tour. The majority of information for this article is from the *Union Democrat*, dated June 21, 1930.

Museum Corner

By Sherry Blake

Farewell Billie Lyons

In June, Billie Lyons resigned her position with the History Research Center and Museum. She had been with the Center and Museum for seven years.

When she was hired, she brought with her a passion for, and a vast knowledge of, Tuolumne County history and a desire to share that history with the citizens of this county to assist them in connecting with their past. Billie has loved connecting with people. Many in the community have shared bits and pieces of family history with her, and Billie has felt it was a great honor to be entrusted with those stories. She loved the stories that were shared and often endeavored to find photos and/or additional information that complemented family stories. In one instance, family members had been estranged for years. Billie discovered a family photo no one in the family knew about, and it became the catalyst for a family reunion and family fence-mending. She says this was a very satisfying part of her work and she will miss it.

Many of you also followed her on her Facebook group *Mother Lode Memories*. She had a following of over 7,500 members, who interacted with her daily and were delighted with her postings of historic photos of places and people long gone. Although not TCHS-sponsored, many thought it was, and it brought widespread attention to our Society in our community.

Immediate plans include time with her grandchildren, her fur babies, and her garden. Not to mention that she is quite a gourmet cook. She also enjoys traveling with her husband to investigate out-of-the-way places and paranormal activity sites.

We wish you the very best, Billie, as you move on to the next chapter of your journey!



Billie Lyons as a new staff member in 2014.



Linda Clark,
aka Hardluck Lin

Update on Production of the Virtual Tour of Historic Sonora

I am happy to report great progress has been made and we are on target for distribution in September 2021. Filming is nearly finished and then all the various elements, including narrated portions, live-action portions, historic and current photos, and drone footage will be edited together for the final product.

A complimentary DVD will be provided to each fourth grade classroom, both public and private, in Tuolumne County. In addition, DVDs will be available to purchase for \$20.00.

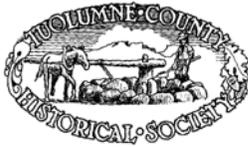
Sadly, our key actress/narrator, Linda Clark, is moving to Apple Valley, CA, to live closer to family. However, we plan on having her return for the premier showing of the DVD at the special Museum Re-Opening planned for October 2.

Mark These Dates!

The Historical Society is once again participating in the *Dardanelle Resort Locals* event on **August 7, 10 am to 2 pm**. We will have a booth at this event and will be selling books and chatting about our Society with visitors.

Take a step back in history! On **Saturday, September 4**, the Society will again be participating in a new Dardanelle event—*History Retold*. The evening will include a presentation of the history of Dardanelle Resort by Cate Culver, a monologue by our own Don DeLuca sharing the story about the historic Walker/Sonora Trail Crossing, acoustical music, campfire, and campfire coffee and peach cobbler cooked in cast iron skillets. Our Society will have a booth with books to sell, and Cate will be having a book signing of her recent publication, *The Untold Story of Sonora Pass and Its People*.

Come join us for one or both of these events!



**TUOLUMNE COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

158 Bradford Street
SONORA, CA 95370-4920

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
U S POSTAGE PAID
Permit #15
Sonora, California

The Mission of the Tuolumne County Historical Society shall be to discover, collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the history of Tuolumne County and the State of California.

SAVE THE DATE
Sat., October 2 at 6:00 pm
Grand Re-Opening of the Museum

The *Historian* is published several times a year by the Tuolumne County Historical Society, 158 Bradford St., Sonora, CA 95370-4920 for the benefit of the membership. There is no charge for the *Historian*. (In compliance with Public Law 103-123, 39 U.S.C. 3656 subsection [j].)

Writers Welcome

The Publication Committee is looking for authors to write *Chispa* articles. Well-researched articles and well-written personal essays pertaining to Tuolumne County history are welcome. To request information about submission procedures, please contact info@tchistory.org.

Change in address or contact
information?

Contact Kathy Boone—

cookie48@mlode.com or (209) 984-3359

**Tuolumne County Museum
History Research Center**

158 Bradford Street, Sonora, CA 95370
Museum: 209-532-1317
History Research Center: 209-532-4227
<http://tchistory.org>, info@tchistory.org

TCHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chuck Holland—President
Sherry Blake—Second Vice President
Cheri Holmes—Treasurer
Betty Sparagna—Recording Secretary
Kathy Boone—Membership Secretary

DIRECTORS

Dan Blake
Linda Crocker
Sandy Fisher
Mike Ghorso
Lisa Mayo
Janet Montano

MUSEUM BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Sherry Blake—Chair
Allan Bryant
Brad Fisher
Winnie LoVine