

City of Fortuna Depot Museum Newsletter

3 Park Street, Fortuna ~ 725-7645

Edition 6 -Winter 2008

Email: fortunamuseum@ci.fortuna.ca.us

What's New At The Museum

After 22 years as our curator, Caroline Weed has taken a well deserved retirement. The City is undergoing a search to seek her replacement. In the meantime volunteers and other city staff are filling in the position.



For example, Christina Boone from the Parks and Recreation Office

created an exhibit for Veteran's Day using the museum's extensive collection of military uniforms donated by Fortuna residents over the years.



The museum is also getting set to display Christmas ornaments from the past. In addition the Historical Commissioners will be selling wreaths at the Fortuna Music Show to help support its' scholarship program. Please stop by and see what is new today!



Historic Photos Available For Purchase

Rudy Gillard will print copies of existing photos in the Museum collection. Some photos will be available for immediate purchase, others will be available to order and will be delivered within a month. Come add a piece of local history to your collection!

Support Your Local Museum!

Donations to the Museum help support ongoing archival work as well as new exhibits.

City of Fortuna web address: www.friendlyfortuna.com

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Museum Hours

Thursday—Sunday
Noon—4:30pm

Historical Commissioners

Chair Person
& News Editor
Susan O'Hara
Commissioners

Roberta Page
Ellen Emmons
Dale Stockton
Erin Dunn

City Council Rep

Doug Strehl

Parks & Rec Director

John Crotty

We need your help!

The Museum is in need of your help. If you would like to volunteer to work at the Museum, please contact the Curator. Volunteers are needed to help extend the hours during the summer as well as to maintain the collections.

From The Director..... An Update On Our Caboose!

City staff recently installed an ADA accessible ramp on the North end of the museum, careful consideration was given to the project as we wanted to insure a minimal impact to the esthetics of the Depot building. We also purchased a door which will be mounted inside the existing sliding door to be used as an entry for ADA accessibility and as an emergency exit. With assistance from the City Planning Department staff designed the “door in the door” concept and once again consideration was given to preserving the historical look of the depot.



City staff also moved the curator desk and gift shop from the third room to the front of the museum. The change will insure visitors are greeted by the curator as they enter the museum.



With the first substantial rain's of the season, we began work on the interior of the caboose; staff removed two layers of sub-flooring with attached linoleum, gutted the main room and removed rotten wood as necessary. When our rainy season resumes in full force we will be able to spend more time inside Caboose #11 completing the interior restoration.



Refrigeration.



The Cupola area.

Our search for a curator continues with the acceptance of applications ending on December 12th, we will be scheduling interviews soon and hope to have a curator in place by the middle of January.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Patti Smith for her help over the past few months; Patti is volunteering her time four days a week to insure the museum is open as advertised while we search to fill the Curator position.

If you are interested in volunteering in the Museum, have any information on Caboose #11 or Eel River Sawmills, would like to participate in the restoration or would just like a tour of the Fortuna Depot Museum, contact the Depot Museum at (707) 725-7645 or the Park Office at (707) 725-7620.

Additions to the Collections

The Museum has been the recipient of several additions to the collection over the past few months. We appreciate all these donations as they add to our ongoing mission of preserving and sharing the rich and varied history of the Eel River Valley.



Check out our "Reference Room". We have what you may need to find friends from your past or to search for history from your hometown!



Did You Know.....



Rohnerville Race Track 1913, remained there for 33 years. Photo on display in Depot Museum, donated by the Chamber of Commerce.

Fortuna once had a horse racing track. According to the Sunny Fortuna Website, The community's enthusiasm for fast horses involved more than just the usual frontier-type sport of farmers and boys racing their utility horses down the main road on a Saturday afternoon. Rohnerville horsemen - men who knew bloodlines and bred with an eye for matching the right pedigrees for the fastest colts - brought into Humboldt County the descendants of some of America's greatest Morgan and Standard bred sires and dams. Research for this story brought to light, once again, the uniqueness of Rohnerville's past.

Theodore Dwight Felt, physician and surgeon from Massachusetts, came to California during the gold rush to seek his fortune, but like many others, he soon realized there was little possibility of a real bonanza. News of Humboldt County brought him to the rolling hills bordering the redwood forest at a place Gook Lake Prairie (Hydesville). Here he took a claim, built a residence, and established Felt's Springs (located in the Headwaters Reserve), a sanatorium for the weak and infirm about 1851. As the only practicing physician in the county outside Eureka, his services were much in demand, but unlike the fly-by-night "doctors" who often followed the frontier, Dr. Felt was an able physician. His passion for horseflesh - blooded, fast horses - dominated his interests and activities throughout his life.

Continued on next page.....

Did You Know.....(continued)

As early as 1856, when Hydenville was nothing more than an isolated scattering of settlers, Dr. Felt had a race track on his farm where the locals, no doubt, spent some exciting afternoons matching their fastest “nags”.

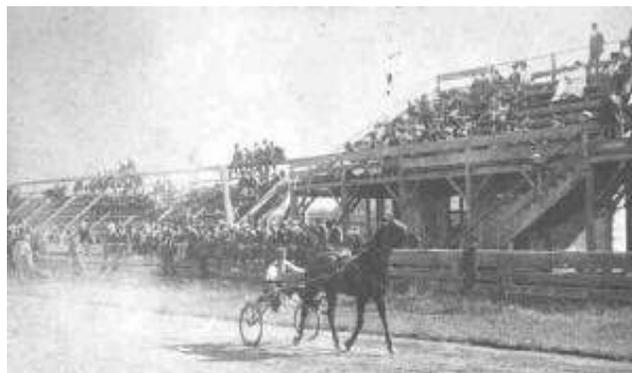


Aerial View of Rohnerville, 1975. Even in 1975 it was still mostly a country setting - today this area is covered with subdivisions. The dark ellipse in the top half of the photo roughly approximates where the mile-long race track was located.

In the spring of 1866, the Eel River Jockey Club, under the enthusiastic leadership of Dr. Felt and other ardent horsemen, bought a piece of land from B. F. Jameson and laid out a mile-long race track. Located along the north side of A. P. Campton's Lane (now Kenmar Road) and just west of the main county road through Rohnerville, this track became the meeting place of some of California's finest horses.

Harness race, also know as sulky race, Rohner-ville 1890's. A sulky is on display in the Fortuna Depot Museum.

Photo courtesy of Andrew Genzoli.



The track's first use may have been on May 18, 1866, when J. Leurance's Boston mare and Lindley's Warnock filly were raced before a crowd of 700 (Humboldt Time, May 12 and May 26, 1866), but the first officially-announced races for running, trotting and pacing horses where held in June 1867 for purses of \$75 and \$100 (Humboldt Times, April 13, 1867). The first fair at the Jockey Club's grounds was sponsored by the Humboldt County Agricultural Society in September 1867.

Horse Lei won at Rohnerville Race Track in sulkey race by William Chism. Donated by Don Chism, grandson to William Chism.



Stop by the Depot Museum to see the actual wreath on display.