March 4th Meeting and Presentation:
The Wright Brothers and How They Developed the Model B Aircraft

Our first presentation of the year will be on Saturday, March 4, 2023. Swend Miller will give a presentation about "The Wright Brothers and How They Developed the Model B Aircraft." The Wright Model B was an early biplane designed by the Wright Brothers in 1910.

Saturday, March 4, 2023, 7 p.m.

Colfax Passenger Depot
99 Railroad Street, Colfax, California

There is no charge to attend

Everyone is welcome

He will also talk about Robert G. Fowler, the early aviator who crashed his Model B plane in Alta, California, during the first leg of his attempt to fly across the United States in September 1911. Fowler had his plane rebuilt in Colfax, California, under the supervision of two mechanics from the Wright Biplane Factory.

Fowler was attempting to fly across the United States to win the $50,000 prize that William Randolph Hearst had offered a year earlier to the first aviator to complete the transcontinental flight within 30 days of beginning the trip – the deadline was October 11, 1911.

One month before the deadline, Robert Fowler took off from San Francisco in a 30-horsepower biplane that belonged to the Wright brothers.

Swend Miller is a retired engineer, with a passion for aviation. He is a past president of the Colfax Area Historical Society and currently is its Archives Director. Please join us for an evening of aviation stories and socializing. Refreshments will be provided.

Robert Fowler, early aviation pioneer, who attempted to fly from San Francisco to Florida in 1911, in a Model B biplane built by the Wright Brothers.

After crashing northeast of Colfax, his plane was brought to Colfax for repairs.

The Story of the Colfax Hotels

The following two articles were written by Nancy Hagman in 2013 and published in the Colfax Record.

By Nancy Hagman, *Colfax Record* Correspondent
January 24, 2013

Hunting for History

For centuries country inns and town hotels have been a place of respite for travelers. So, it became when gold seekers came to these foothills.

Enos Mendenhall built the first lodging in Illinoistown, readied by the winter of 1949. This was soon followed by Barzilla Brickell's hotel and Robert Egbert's establishment. Early pioneer M. D. Fairchild recalled, in the *History of Placer County*, around 50 men claimed the place as their home that winter, with every building serving as a dormitory. Miners paid the proprietor a dollar to spread their own blankets on the floor and "men of all conditions would be stowed thickly, side by side. The buildings were located along the supply road that led to Auburn from the base at the south end of the valley to the crest of the hill where the trails to the mine fields began.

The town developed as a wayfarer's stop and supply station for the next 15 years.

At that time the Central Pacific Railroad company laid out the plat for the town of Colfax a mile north. An exodus of businesses took place to get trackside locations near the depot. Mendenhall was the first among them. He constructed the Pioneer House on Grass Valley Street.

Another, that shows up in early photos of Front Street – now Main Street – is a three-story structure named the Hotel Flesor. Its year of completion is uncertain. It stood at the corner of Main and Depot streets.

During these early years, and especially after the Nevada County Narrow Gauge came to town, Colfax became a hub of activity. The actual years of construction have yet to be discovered, however, there was an obvious need for housing for travelers. The original Colfax Hotel, which later became known as the May Hotel, was located on Depot Street at the corner of the alley leading to the Colfax Laundry. The site is now occupied by the house next to the CalTrans building. The 1898 Sanborn maps show the Central Hotel across the narrow-gauge track from the first depot.

The Union was located right next to the main track at the south end of Main Street.

Fire devastated Colfax on many occasions. The first destroyed the Pioneer House in 1874. In 1879 a fire began in the Chinese quarter and spread down Pleasant Street, taking down the Exchange Hotel. The fire of 1887 started in the May and burned much of the north end of town.

The Marvin was built by Fred Marvin after he lost his business in the passenger depot to fire in 1905. It too, in 1939, was lost to a blaze in a matter of minutes.

A two-story stone structure was rebuilt on the corner of Main and Depot streets. It became the Mountain View. This was damaged so badly by fire that it had to be torn down in 1983, after the last major fire in town. The lot remains empty to this day.

Another structure, the Fowler, is a great mystery. Its built date and fate are unknown. Located between Auburn and Railroad avenues and just south of Oak Street, it was a majestic three-story building. It may have been taken out to make room for the expansion of the fruit exchange.

The Union and the Central were removed for railroad expansions.

The only remaining – albeit empty – hotel was built in 1903, by Daniel C. Gillen. It has also been known as the Marvin and finally the Colfax Hotel. It saw the last of its active days in 1971; at that time passenger service had ceased at the neighboring station. The structure has stood unused since that time.

1912, the Gillen was complete with the pavilion, its own water tower and Gillen's generated electric plant. The pavilion (shown to the left of the hotel) had a sprung hardwood dance floor and it provided the first electrified motion pictures to the community. Courtesy of the Stella Cortipassi Collection, Colfax Heritage Museum.

The Colfax Hotel – the Early Years

By Nancy Hagman, *Colfax Record* Correspondent
February 14, 2013

Dan Gillen had been a conductor out of Sacramento for the Southern Pacific Railroad Company. He knew the need for a good hotel at the junction of the Nevada County Narrow Gauge and the main transcontinental line in Colfax was ripe.

Gillen purchased a plot of land from Dan A. Russell, located near both tracks at the corner of Grass Valley and Auburn streets. In the spring of 1903, he opened the doors to the newly constructed Gillen Hotel. Two years later, the old passenger depot on Depot Street burnt to the ground. A new passenger depot facility was constructed, at its present location, just a short distance south of the hotel.

It was at this time that "Diamond" Siems and his family resided in the Gillen Hotel in Colfax for six months. Siems developed Chicago Park and many other areas around Colfax in ensuing years.

Gillen added a pavilion for dances and other events; he electrified the whole facility and parts of downtown with his own power plant, thus making a grand central destination for travelers and locals alike. The hall was used for various town meetings, like the organizing group for the 4th of July and the grammar school graduation exercises.

Gillen was a genial host and a responsible public citizen. During the summer, he would organize excursion rides on the NCNG to Olympia Park – a swimming pool between Grass Valley and Nevada City. An accomplished swimmer himself, he was

dedicated to seeing that all the children learned to swim.

On April 14, 1910, a special meeting was called to order of the board of trustees of the newly incorporated City of Colfax. Present were J. M. Newman (mayor), H. Thomas, W. J. McCleary, and N. T. Collins. Applications and bonds for saloon licenses following were approved and granted. Among the seven licensees was D. C. Gillen.

The hostelry had been incorporated from the beginning as the Colfax Hotel Company, which adds confusion to the story. C. E. and Margaret Skidmore bought the property in an after-tax sale in 1919.

It was perhaps at this time that Fred Marvin leased the building and renamed it the Marvin Hotel and called his own hotel, located across Grass Valley Street the Marvin Annex.

Marvin hadcome to Colfax in 1892 and ran the restaurant in the original depot. When that burned out in 1905, he built a hotel and restaurant opposite the Gillen on Grass Valley Street.

After Fred Marvin's death in 1923, his wife, Mary Belle, sold the lease to Fred C. Dill and A. A. McKee. After some renovations, they opened it as the Colfax Hotel. Mary Belle retained the Marvin name on her hotel – she called it the Marvin Inn - until it burned down in 1939.

In 1925, the Colfax Hotel Company sold the property to George E. West – purportedly for $10, according to West's great-grandson and Colfax native, Mike Maynard. Upon West's death in 1933, ownership was retained by his wife Frances E. (Emma) West and his son Francis West.

The hotel continued in successful operation until the advent of the Interstate and the shut-down of passenger service at the train depot in the early 1970s.

Web Site and Facebook Page

Our web site is at **colfaxhistory.org**. It has information about the Historical Society and the Museum, including resources for historical and genealogical research.

Our Facebook page focuses on news and events about the Historical Society and the Museum. It is at **facebook.com/colfaxmuseum**

Recent Deaths of CAHS Members

Four long-time members of the Colfax Area Historical Society passed recently.

- **Mel Couchman**, October 3, 2022. He was a long-time member. For many years, Mel was the editor of the *Colfax Cobblestones* newsletter.

- **Ken Fletcher**, November 1, 2022. Ken was a charter member of the CAHS and for many years he was a volunteer in the Archives Room.

- **Richard Wayland**, January 28, 2023. Richard was also a charter member of the CAHS, with his wife Helen. The success of the society owes a lot to their decades of volunteer work.

- **Jay MacIntyre**, February 6, 2023. Jay was a member-at-large on the CAHS board, after serving as president of the historical society from 2016-2018.

CAHS Officers

President: Dirk Gifford
Vice President: Nancy Hagman
Treasurer: Barbara Kelly
Recording Secretary: Joann Geist
Membership Chair: Chris Miller
Corresponding Secretary: Not filled at this time
Archives Director: Swend Miller
Museum Director: Irene Allen
Member-At-Large: Roger Staab
Cobblestones **Editor**: Dirk Gifford
Webmaster: Dirk Gifford

Please support the local businesses and organizations that support the CAHS

The Colfax Area Historical Society (CAHS) and the Colfax Heritage Museum (CHM) appreciate the support and services that local businesses provide. The following local businesses and organizations are members of the CAHS, and we appreciate their support. We ask you to support them.

American Legion Colfax Post 192 P.O. Box 311 Colfax, CA 95713	**Colfax Dental Center** 120 Whitcomb Avenue Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6244
Colfax Garden Club P.O. Box 1801 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6215	**Colfax General Store** 6 North Main St. Colfax, CA 95713 rklobner@colfaxnet.com
DACOMM Providing internet service to the Colfax Heritage Museum, Colfax Visitor Center, and businesses and residences throughout the area. DACOMM is "a local company helping the local community and not the corporate giant." (530) 545-9750 or (530) 210-9918 dacomm.net · support@dacomm.net	**Grace Hubley Foundation** 24820 Ben Taylor Colfax, CA 95713 gracehubleyfoundation.org
Kurtis H. Fox, M.D., Inc. 101 Grass Valley St. Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2281	**Sierra Business Services** 520 South Auburn St, #D Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2455 barbkelly@foothill.net
Sierra Vista Community Center 55 School Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8726 svcc@colfaxnet.org	**VFW Auxiliary Post 2003** P.O. Box 1213, Colfax, CA 95713 President: (530) 636-4242

To join the Colfax Area Historical Society, fill out this form and mail it with a check to: **CAHS, PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713** . Your subscription will begin with the next quarterly issue.
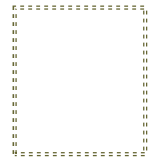
Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Email address _____

☐ **$20   Individual membership** (one person)

☐ **$25   Family membership** (including children)

☐ **$35   Business or Non-Profit Organization membership** (includes an ad in each issue of *Colfax Cobblestones*)

☐ **Go paperless option.** We will send a copy of each newsletter to your email instead of mailing you a copy.

Robert Fowler's biplane, built by the Wright Brothers, 1911. After Fowler crashed northeast of Colfax during his attempt to fly from San Francisco to Jacksonville, Florida in less than 30 days, his plane was repaired in Colfax, with additional work performed in Grass Valley. It utilized a 30-horsepower engine from the Cole Motor Car Company. From the online collection of the California State Library.

The Colfax Area Historical Society

PO Box 185
Colfax CA 95713

Phone: (530) 346-8599

Email: museum.colfax@gmail.com

USPS mail: Mail for both the Colfax Area Heritage Museum and the Colfax Area Historical Society is received at PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713.

Museum location: The Colfax Heritage Museum is physically located at 99 Railroad St, Colfax, California, in the restored Colfax Passenger Depot.