

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

“The 19th Century Lemmons”

A Brief History of Botanists, J.G. and Sarah Plummer Lemmon

by Corri Jimenez

American naturalist and nature essayist John Burroughs believed that “without the name, any flower is still more or less a stranger to you. The name betrays its family, its relationship to other flowers, and gives the mind something tangible to grasp.” Renowned Nineteenth Century Sierra Valley botanist J.G. Lemmon spent the second half of his lifetime immersed in the study of flowers so that they could become known to us. This scientific pursuit came only after a youth affected by the travails of the Civil War.

John Gill (J.G.) Lemmon was born on January 2, 1832 in Lima Center, Michigan. On August 8, 1862 at the age of 30, he enlisted in the Union Army’s 4th Michigan Cavalry, Company E, and fought with the Army of the Cumberland in the Western Theater from August 28, 1862. He saw over 30 battles, raids, and skirmishes in his first two years, including the Battle of Stones River, the Battle of Chickamauga, and the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain.

During the Battle of Utoy Creek near Sandtown, Georgia J.G. was captured by the Confederate Army and became a prisoner of war on August 29, 1864. He was sent to the Florence Stockade in South Carolina and then later to Andersonville Prison in Georgia. On May 9, 1865, the war finally ended, and a month later Lemmon was discharged at Camp Chase, Ohio. It is hard to imagine the

state of his spirit and his health, after being a Confederate prisoner of war for over a year. After witnessing the horror of war and experiencing the misery in prison camps, Lemmon sought comfort and serenity in Sierra County, California where much of his family lived. It was as early as 1866 when he settled near his mother Amelia Hudson Lemmon and his siblings, William Cromwell (W.C), Cynthia Rebecca, Benjamin Franklin (B.F.), and Charles Henry (C.H.) Lemmon who had all lived in the valley since the 1850s. J.G. Lemmon lived in the Sierra Valley from 1866 to 1876, and during that decade collected 670 plants from all over the county. He honored his friends D.G. Webber and E.L. Case by naming plant discoveries after them, thus species are recorded for all time as *webberi*, *casei*, and *lemmoni*.

Lemmon’s wife Sarah had a remarkable life in her own right. Born Sarah Allen Plummer on September 3, 1836 in New Gloucester, Maine, she attended the Female College of Worcester in Massachusetts, and taught art classes in New York City prior to enlisting in the Union Army as a Red Cross nurse. While in the military, she contracted pneumonia, and her medical remedy was to relocate to a drier climate. Plummer moved to Santa Barbara in 1869 where she established the town’s first lending library. She became particularly interested in botanical illustrations because of her

The 19th Century Lemmons - (Cont. on Page 3) —

— THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY —



The Sierra County Historical Society is an organization of people interested in preserving and promoting an appreciation of Sierra County's rich history. The Society operates a museum at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City, holds an annual meeting, publishes a newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free-of-charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!



Officers and Executive Board of The Sierra County Historical Society

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Mary Nourse, President | James Connolly, Director |
| Bill Copren, Treasurer | Suzi Schoensee, Director |
| Don Yegge, Membership | Joe Madigan, Director |
| Susan Hopkins, Director | Judy Lawrence, Director |
| Corri Jimenez, Director | Ernie Teague,
Alternate Director |
| Judy Lawrence,
Virginia Lutes,
Co-Editors of The Sierran | Gerry Gates, Webmaster |
| | Chris Stockdale,
Music at the Mine |

Melissa Brewer,
Museum Curator

If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact any board member or email at info@sierracountyhistory.org

Become a Member!

Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

- INDIVIDUAL \$20.00
- FAMILY & INSTITUTION..... \$25.00
- BUSINESS & SUPPORTING..... \$35.00
- SUSTAINING..... \$50.00
- LIFE (per person/couple) \$300.00

In addition, Museum Renovation Project donations are gratefully accepted.

Please send dues and donations to:
S.C.H.S.
c/o Don Yegge, Membership Chair
PO Box 336, Loyalton, CA 96118



Presidents Message

Remember the good old days when your assignment on the first day of school was an essay entitled "What I Did on My Summer Vacation? Well, today's kids would have plenty to say if they were lucky enough to visit Sierra City this summer. They would be able to talk about assisting with the Gold Rush themed magic show at Kentucky Mine's season opener, seeing Townsend big-eared bats in the stamp mill, and participating in a scavenger hunt for artifacts at the museum. There was plenty of summer fun for adults as well. Music at the Mine producer Chris Stockdale knocked it out of the park with his concert line-up, preceded by scrumptious BBQs. And the fun goes on...On Sunday, August 4, at 9 AM at Sierraville School a plaque was unveiled by the Native Sons of the Golden West commemorating that building's enrollment in the National Register of Historic Places. Laura Thomas signed her book "Gold Miner's Daughter" at the Mountain Creek Restaurant Garden in Sierra City on Sunday, August 11 from 11 AM until noon. This was followed by a walking tour of historic downtown Sierra City led by history aficionado Dee Wallace. Our annual picnic will be held in Forest City this year (See invitation elsewhere in this bulletin.) and the season winds up with a bang for SCHS with our participation in the Art + Ag Trail on September 28. During the off-season we will work on conducting oral history interviews and on planning a living history day for area students for spring of 2020. If you would like to help with either of these projects, please contact me at 530-862-1123 or mnourse46@gmail.com. Thanks for helping keep history alive and fun!

Mary Nourse



The 19th Century Lemmons - (Cont. from Page 1) —

background as an art teacher. This fascination with the beauty of plants foreshadowed her eventual marriage to J. G. Lemmon. They met at a conference in Santa Barbara in 1876 and courted for four years before they married on Thanksgiving, 1880. Their union led them on a path of botanical study that immersed them in a 30-year journey in nature. Lemmon recalled their honeymoon:

“My wife, being as enthusiastic and as devoted to botany as I, was the first to propose that, instead of the usual stupid and expensive visit to a watering-place, idling our time in useless saunterings, and listening to silly gossip, we should wait a few weeks, devoting the time to study; then, at the right time, make a grand botanical raid into Arizona, and try to touch the heart of Santa Catalina.”



Their honeymoon adventures paid off, and through the years, countless botanical expeditions ensued for the couple. The plant species, *plummerae*, found in the Santa Barbara area, is named after Sarah, as is Mount Lemmon, a 9,171-foot-high peak in the Santa Catalina Mountains near Tucson. In Arizona, the Lemmons discovered, described, and named 110 plant species, comprising 3% of the state’s vascular plants.

In 1888-1892, Lemmon became state botanist with the California State Board of Forestry. In 1903

Sarah, as state artist, authored a bill to designate the California Golden Poppy as the state flower. The bill was signed into law by Governor George Pardee.



While living at 5985 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland, the couple created the “Lemmon Herbarium,” currently known as the Jepson Herbaria, housed at the University of California, Berkeley. Lemmon died on November 24, 1908 and his loss devastated Sarah who died on January 15, 1923. The couple is buried at Oakland’s Mountain View Cemetery with an epitaph that reads, “PARTNERS IN BOTANY.”



“If Only Their Paths Had Crossed”

A Fanciful Conversation with Sierra County Botanists The Lemmons and the Harnachs

Written by Corri Jimenez

With Bill and Nancy Harnach, Bill Copren, and Mary Nourse

Bill Harnach reclines in his gray comfy chair with his leather moccasins propped up on an ottoman. From her Eastlake chair across from him his lovely wife Nancy smiles from ear to ear. She is a small, blond-haired woman who loves to laugh and banter questions with her adoring husband. As botanical sleuths, the Harnachs are big fans of John Gill (J.G.) and Sarah Plummer Lemmon. During an oral history interview with them on May 7, 2019 in Calpine, I asked the Harnachs, “So, if you two were to meet J.G. Lemmon and his wife Sarah... what questions would you ask them?” This inquiry piqued the couple’s interest, and they invited me back on June 11 for a longer conversation in their living room. Bill Copren joined us, and as a group we came up with the whimsical meeting of two couples passionate about botany: the 19th Century Lemmons and the contemporary Harnachs. The fictional history went something like this:

After dinner at the Lemmons’ home at 5985 Telegraph Avenue in Oakland, the couples adjourned to the library. The Lemmons drink tea in rose-colored cups while the Harnachs sip 18-year-old Scotch in iced tumblers. J.G. Lemmon is 5’11” tall with piercing blue eyes and long sideburns whereas Bill Harnach, 5 inches taller than Lemmon, has a full gray beard. Their wives, Sarah and Nancy, sit together on a love seat; both are petite women with sweet eyes. Bill Harnach begins the interview:

“What did you look for when you were identifying plants in this area?”

J.G.’s record-keeping admittedly left something to be desired. Bill’s research shows that some plants were mismarked with inaccurate locations, such as an *astragalus casei* at Pyramid Lake, named after

his good friend E.L. Case. His observation of J.G. is, “He had a good eye, but was a crappy record-keeper.” Nancy, however, defended J.G. since his record-keeping improved after his marriage in 1880 to Sarah Plummer who had been a librarian.

J.G. recognized differences between plants because he had a “keen eye” when collecting and mounting his specimens. The Harnachs, however, took the tactic of looking at the overall picture, such as the plant’s surroundings and its environs, and what caused the plant to grow in *that specific location*. Their analysis included weather patterns, soil and geology types, as well as water influences. The disparity between the two approaches might reflect how science has evolved in the one-hundred plus years of plant identification.

“What were the weather patterns in Sierra Valley?”

Bill asked about the weather in the valley, such as rain and snowfall, thundershowers, and temperature ranges. In J.G.’s publications, not much detail is revealed about these trends, however it is known that he got permission from Dr. D.G. Webber to stay at the Webber Lake Hotel during the winter. The hotel was empty then, and the over ten feet of snowfall allowed him to hunker down where he did extensive writing and where he had room to lay out all his herbarium sheets and plant specimens. Bill shared his jealousy to be able to spread out this research and have the benefit of no interruptions.

“As a sleuth botanist, how did you record your plants?”

J.G.’s methodology as a botanist in Sierra Valley from 1866-1876 was to collect and press hundreds

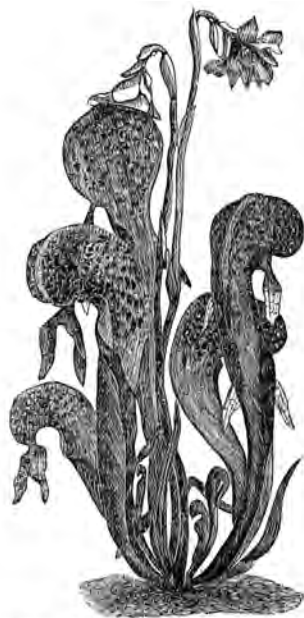
If Only Their Paths Had Crossed - (Cont. on Page 5) —

of plant specimens from across the West. He sent the herbarium sheets to Dr. Asa Gray at Harvard University who would officially approve the sheets with the species' names and descriptions.

Nancy described J.G.'s reputation for being systematic as "erroneous," because his discovery of new plant species was serendipitous. She continued, "J.G. was able to find so many plants that they had never seen back East." Having Harvard as an approval was the equivalent of the "Stamp of God," and fast-tracked J.G. as a celebrity in the botany world during the Victorian Era.

"What drew you together as a couple?"

J.G. was invited to give a talk in Santa Barbara in 1876. In his speech he reflected upon his adventures on Webber Peak and Mount Lola in Sierra County. His studies had been widely published in state newspapers, and Sarah, already an accomplished plant artist, saw his article in the *Pacific Free Press* on October 21 1871. It dealt with *Darlingtonia californica*, a carnivorous pitcher plant in the Sierra Valley, published in the *Pacific Free Press* on October 21 1871. The illustration was well-done, and she followed J.G.'s writings throughout the 1870s. Besides sharing a passion for botany, both the Lemmons were Union veterans of the American Civil War who found delight and solace in nature.



DARLINGTONIA CALIFORNICA: OR. CALIFORNIA PITCHER PLANT.

"What is your theory on the Sand Lily's propagation?"

Sand lily or Star lily *Leucocrinum montanum* is a bisexual plant with all its reproductive parts, such as its stamen and styles are located underground. The question exists as to how the plant propagates. The discussion of this plant's propagation revolves around theories based on water under the sandy soil transporting its seeds to birds or possibly insects and being spread by them. J.G. said in the *Botanical Gazette* in 1875:

"I found how oddly the pericarpal remained down in the ground though the large creamy white flowers were exerted 2 to 3 inches above it, but not until too late to save the seed at the close of the second season did I discover the shiny black seeds were spirited away."

He continued and hypothesized that the seeds were transported up to the surface as the leaves died out. Bill, on the other hand, tested Lemmon's hypothesis in the field and literally spent 24 hours monitoring a star lily. What he saw was a an "ant crawling out with a little black seed." He shared this assessment with the Lemmons who laughed, jealous that they did not think of this because it was so rudimentary.

"Last, did you actually ever live in the log cabin one mile south of Sierraville?"

The question refers to a small log cabin that was located on the Jamison property. Today, in the 21st Century, it no longer exists. It is believed to have been built by Ezra Culver who lived in Sierra Valley in 1852. J.G.'s brothers, B.F and W.C. Lemmon, owned it in the 1860s. However, by the time J.G. moved to Sierra County in 1866, his brothers had built more respectable houses for their wives and families. So, J.G.'s reply would have been "No" to living in that cabin. He stayed with his brothers, and mother Amelia who lived in Etta, near Sierraville.

After the fire had diminished to embers and the glasses were dry, the couples concluded their evening in the library, and the Harnachs left

If Only Their Paths Had Crossed - (Cont. from Page 5) —

relieved by getting answers to some of their itching questions. Hopefully you enjoyed sharing this hypothetical evening with these classic botanists all of whom found perennial delight in nature.

To see the Spring 2019 *Sierran* article on Bill and Nancy Harnach written by SCHS President Mary Nourse, visit <https://www.sierracountyhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Sierran-Spring-2019.pdf>.

For information on the Star lily, see https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/leucocrinum_montanum.shtml and Lemmon's article on the pitcher plant, see <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=PRP18711021.2.22&srpos=1&e=-----en-20-PRP1-txt-txIN-DARLINGTONIA+CALIFORNIA-ARTICLE-----1>.

“Sierraville School Dedication”

On Sunday August 4, the Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW), Downieville Parlor No. 92 recognized the historic Sierraville School in recognition of its placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The dedication ceremony featured the unveiling of a beautiful bronze plaque donated by the NSGW and Sierra County Historical Society, which was placed on a large boulder. This monument sits near the entrance of the Art Deco-style school building which was designed by Chico Architect Chester Cole. It was built in 1931 to replace the previous wooden schoolhouse that had been destroyed by fire in 1929.

A ceremony was led by NSGW Grand President James King and an entourage of NSGW from all over California's District 13, and a brief history of the building was given by Architectural Historian Corri Jimenez who wrote the National Register nomination. A resolution from Sierra County was then presented by District 3 Supervisor, Paul Roen. Downieville Native Son, Jack Marshall, was

presented with a resolution from Congressman La Malfa acknowledging Downieville Parlor No. 92's involvement in the weekend quad dedication. Refreshments were served, but the real treat was the sharing of Sierraville School memories by Russel Turner, Virginia Lutes, Arlene Amodei, and Bill Copren. Over 40 local history buffs and dignitaries were in attendance, and apologies have been sent to the Sierra-Plumas Joint Unified School Board Members who unfortunately didn't get the email invitation that was sent through their website.

Sunday Morning's event at Sierraville School was the kick-off for the “District 13 Sextuple Dedication Weekend”

which included a whirlwind of ceremonies. Also dedicated were the Marysville Municipal Ball Park, the Hayes Garage (the first Studebaker dealer building in Oroville), the over one-hundred-year-old Meier Orchard in Wyandott, the Eureka-Idaho-Maryland Vein which at one point employed more than one thousand miners, and the historic Willo Steakhouse on California Highway 49.



COME ON UP FOR LUNCH!



**SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S
ANNUAL PICNIC
Forest City, California
Sunday, September 8, 2019 at 1:00 PM**

**JOIN US FOR A
COMPLIMENTARY
CORNISH PASTY LUNCH**

**To reserve your
Beef, Chicken, or Broccoli/Cheese Pasty
Contact Mary Nourse by September 1**

**mnourse46@gmail.com
530-862-1123**

Members and Visitors Welcome

The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

P.O. Box 260

Sierra City, California 96125

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Season Finale @ the Mine

On Sunday afternoon, September 1st at 3:00 PM, legendary “ World Fusion” pioneers, Ancient Future, will return to the Kentucky Mine Amphitheater and perform the final concert of the 2019 Summer Concert Series. Celebrating 40 years of being an ever-evolving musical ensemble, Ancient Future, have performed over a thousand concerts throughout the world and have graced many stages including Carnegie Hall, The Great American Music Hall (San Francisco), the Hult Center for the Performing Arts (Eugene, Ore.), Yoshi’s (Oakland) and the Sangeethan Indian Concert Series (St. Louis). Ancient Future have been in the “music festival scene” for many years and have performed on numerous radio and television productions, as well.

Founded and led by scalloped fretboard guitarist, Matthew Montfort, Ancient Future were at the forefront of the “world fusion” movement that sought to create music that blended exhilarating rhythms and sounds from around the globe with the “western” sensibilities of jazz and rock and Americana. Over the years, Ancient Future, has grown to become a large chamber ensemble of more than 30 members, all of whom are incredibly talented and represent musical offerings from numerous countries and regions of the world.

Ancient Future also is often composed of dozens of smaller combos and will perform at the Mine as a trio. Montfort will be joined on stage by virtuoso keyboardist, Doug McKeehan and Indian tabla phenomenon, Aditya Kalyanpur. Montfort and McKeehan have played hundreds of concerts together with master musicians from many different traditions and Kalyanpur is renowned for his percussive prowess and ability to excite and fire up an audience. The trio’s up-tempo program will be an exhilarating and improvisatory take on Ancient Future’s broad repertoire.

Tickets for the show can be purchased online at www.sierracountyhistory.org. (\$22) or at the gate (\$25). There will not be a pre-concert BBQ for this event but you are welcome to bring you’re your food and beverages to the show. Further information and questions can be directed to Chris Stockdale at (530) 862-1076.