

# THE FAMILY SNOOP

MERCED COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

**VOLUME 34, No. 09**

**OCTOBER 2016**

## October 2016 Meeting



**Robert  
Givens:**

**New England  
Research  
An Overview**

**Learn more  
about the  
NEHGS**

**1:00 p.m. Saturday**

**October 15, 2016**

**Gracey Room, Merced County Library**

## Speaker for September Meeting: Sheila Ruiz Harrell



Ms. Harrell topic was "Some Early Settlers of the San Joaquin Valley." She spoke to us about the early history of Hispanic settlers in Merced and Fresno counties, specifically in the years between 1870

and 1900.

Here is what Sheila has to say about herself: "I am Sheila Ruiz Harrell, a practicing genealogist for fifty plus years and professional for the past twelve. As a 7th generation *Californio* I am also a direct descendant of 29 of those who arrived in California by 1781. Documenting my own family has given me a wide range of experience in genealogical and historical records research, in addition to following the descendants of those first settlers throughout California...and those who were already living here."

Sheila shared with us a short history of the Spaniards who first came to Alta California, specifically the San Joaquin Valley. They came across the original inhabitants, the Yokuts. Native Americans were very numerous in Alta California at time, their density rate per square mile perhaps greater than any other area in the North American continent. There were 600 Yokut tribes between Antioch and Bakersfield alone. However, like many Native American tribes, the California natives were decimated first, by diseases introduced by invading Europeans, and second, by crime and acts of violence committed against them by Spaniards, Mexicans and Americans.

Many of the Yokuts people were removed from their land and taken to the missions to work. There was a lot of inter-marriage between the native people and those of Spanish descent. When the missions were secularized by Mexico in 1833, the original intent of the Mexican government was to give the land to the Indians who had been working it. However, the land ended up being sold to the highest bidders, who were those *Californios* of Spanish descent.

The speaker's ancestors originally settled in what is today the Watsonville area, a very crime-ridden city once the news of the California Gold Rush of 1848

brought hoards of Americans to California. Several families eventually moved to Las Juntas. Banditos often visited as they had done in Watsonville, because of family members in this community.

From Wikipedia: Pueblo de las Juntas (also La Juntas and Fresno) is a former settlement in Fresno County, California situated at the confluence of the San Joaquin River and Fresno Slough, 2 miles (3.2 km) north of Mendota.

Pueblo de las Juntas was one of the first places settled by Spaniards in San Joaquin Valley in 1810. The name *las Juntas* (Spanish: *the junctions*), a reference to the location at the confluence of two streams. The name *fresno* (Spanish: *ash tree*) commemorates two large ash trees growing on the riverbank at the site. It was connected to the coast settlements via a route west along Panoche Creek to Panoche Pass in the Diablo Range, to Tres Pinos and northwest to Mission San Juan Bautista and west to Monterey. It was also on the eastern route of El Camino Viejo. [end]

The land became part of the Miller and Lux holdings. With the introduction of new fencing laws Henry Miller insisted the people of Las Juntas move off of his land. A grocer, Jacob Meyer, not wanting to lose money he was owed or the business of the people, offered to have the people move to Firebaugh where he also owned land.

A two volume book, *Fresno County Pioneer Years*, tells some of the history, although it focuses on the outlaws, not the good people of this community.

Firebaugh had no cemetery until 1920. Residents took their deceased back to the cemetery in Las Juntas for burial. In 1940, as many graves as could be located were exhumed and the deceased reburied in Firebaugh, which, with its population of about 7,000 people in spite of those who have moved to Madera, Merced and Atwater, still has families descended from these early California pioneers.



## September Meeting Attendance Membership:

Attendance Final Count: 18 Members + 8 Guests for a total of 26. Welcome to new member, Mary Kaplan. Total Members: 85 active.

## Arch Leonard, Yosemite Park Ranger

By Robyn Echols

To honor the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Parks System, this article today features one of the first park rangers in Yosemite National Park, Archibald Campbell Leonard. This information is shared with the permission of two of his descendants, Lucille Davenport and Joyce Hammer.



*Arch C. Leonard with other First Rangers of Yosemite.  
Archibald Leonard far right.*

Arch was born in West Virginia in 1846. He came across the Plains during the latter part of the gold rush period. He worked around Jamestown, California, as a miner for a few years after reaching the Mother Lode Country. In the 1880's he came to Yosemite and worked a while for the Washburn's in Wawona as a ranch foreman.

On June 25, 1898, he was one of the local men appointed as Assistant Special Forest Agent, and assigned to patrol the southern part of the Park. Archie was one of the two men who made up the first civilian protection force for the Yosemite National Park. Archie lived at that time in Wawona. When the U. S. Troops came in to take over the protection of the Park, he was assigned as scout and guide for the Troops during the summer months. He reported to the Commanding Officer at Camp A. E. Wood, and was given instructions to handle the sheep men in a tough manner. Orders were to scatter the sheep, take off the bells and bring in the herders and sheep men to headquarters. There was a great deal of trouble over the trespass of grazing in the Park.

During the winter months when the U. S. Troops were out of the Park, Archie and Charles Leidig took over the responsibilities of patrolling and keeping law and order until the troops returned the next summer.

Allan Sproul, a seasonal ranger assigned to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees in the year 1914, says this about Archie. "Archie was not very communicative but he was always pleasant, and I should say tolerant of the college boy rangers. He knew the Park from years of travel over the trails. His hair was gray and rather long and his mustache drooped, his uniform consisted of a dirty slouch hat, a grayish colored shirt, which wouldn't show the dirt of a season, and overalls worn low on the belt. He spoke in a soft voice and had a pleasant smile."



*Arch D. Leonard riding as a guard with President Theodore Roosevelt in Yosemite*

Archie was one of the guides for President Theodore Roosevelt when he visited the Yosemite Park in May 1903. To read more about President Theodore Roosevelt's visit to Yosemite, read the blog post of August 8, 2016-08-08 titled ***President Teddy Roosevelt visits Yosemite National Park*** (written under my pen name) on the Sweet Americana Sweethearts blog at:

**<http://sweetamericanasweethearts.blogspot.com>**

In 1917, changes took place on the ranger force. Due to his advancing age, Arch could no longer handle full time ranger duties. In September he was changed from a permanent park ranger to a temporary first class ranger. Two months later he was furloughed. He was not recalled to service in the Park in 1918, and was discontinued without prejudice from the Yosemite Ranger Force.

He died in Stockton, California in 1921 at the age of 75.

More about Archibald C. Leonard and his family genealogy will be published in the November, 2016 issue of *The Family Snoop*.



The winged skull was popular, especially in the 17th and 18th century. It symbolized the swiftness of passing time and soaring into the afterlife.



The hourglass symbolizes the swiftness of time passing.



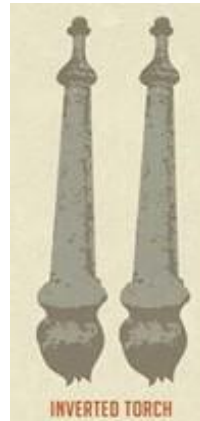
Hands are common on graves, whether pointing up towards heaven or down as a divine message to those below. Often two hands are clasped in a final farewell, especially on the tombs of a married couple where one is leaving and one left behind.



Usually found on the graves of women who died young. A dove represents peace and purity. Sometimes it is shown ascending into heaven or lying dead if a person perished suddenly. Tree stump tombs often memorialize a life cut off short and suddenly.



A torch burning upside down shows that the soul is still burning in the afterlife.



Wheat, along with other symbols like oak leaves, symbolizes a long life that was harvested by the reaper when it was time.

The bloom of the rose symbolizes the age of a lady when she died, whether as a rosebud or in full bloom. The thorny stem snapped signifies she died too soon.



Representing the book of life, a person's love of literature or a reference to a Bible, the open book symbolizes a human heart open to God as well as the deeds of a person's life being recorded.



Usually found on the tombs of children, a lamb symbolizes innocence, also Jesus, the Lamb of God.



**Draped Urn**-Common in Victorian cemeteries, the draped urn was a visual separation of the living and the dead, with a protective shroud for the soul, also a classic symbol of death.

**Open Gates**-Doors and open gates are symbols for the passage into

heaven, the leaving the land of the living for the great beyond.

(Courtesy of Atlas Obscura, 2014)





Upcoming Programs for 2016-17	
November 19	
December 17	Annual Christmas Celebration - Members
January 21, 2017	Annual Beginners Class
February 25	Annual Beginners Class



## CARVED IN STONE: ISOLATED TRADITIONS

By Shayna Matthews

*If ever you find yourself strolling through a picturesque Tennessee field, keep an eye on the ground lest you trip over a Comb.*

Every region and culture has a habit or two unique to them, largely unknown by the rest of the world. These secluded habits are often forgotten by the passing of our ancestors. However, all is not always lost. Remnants can still be found...if you know where to look.

To the west of the Cumberland Plateau, spanning several counties, lies a number of eerie remnants of Tennessee culture. My husband, a born and raised White County, Tennessee native, took his mother and I to explore a few of his ancestral cemeteries. I was not quite prepared for what I saw.



*Comb Graves in Tennessee Graveyard*

A cedar grove towered over the little cemetery, 100+ year old trees shielding those long-ago laid to rest below. Sunlight filtered through the foliage, casting rays of golden dust upon the graves. And yet, the feeling I had while picking my way around the graves was anything but tranquil. The graves, some of them so old the inscriptions are no longer there, (or perhaps not inscribed at all) look like pup tent shaped vaults. Sandstone slabs at least as long as the grave lean against each other, like an inverted "V". Sometimes they have head-markers, often the identity of the deceased is erased by the passing of time. The old trees seem to remember, for they embrace the strange graves, their trunks growing around the stones, ever so slowly swallowing the tombs.

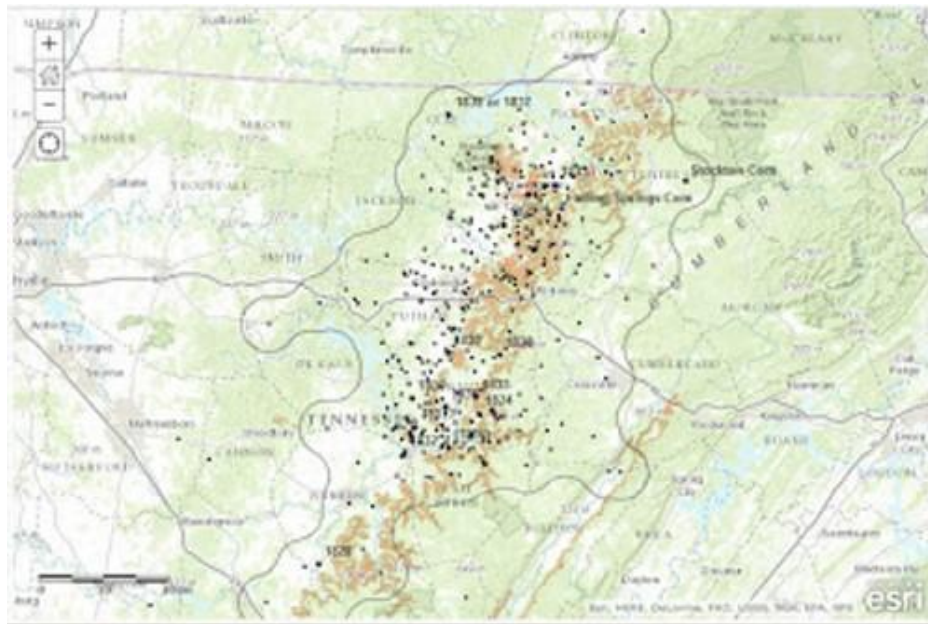


The design of these sandstone crypts were so foreign, so strange, and yet my husband could not comprehend my intrigue. "They're everywhere," he told me. "Aren't they?" No. Most assuredly, no.

These "tent-graves" are actually called combs, probably named for the peak of a gable-house roof. Digging a bit deeper into the realm of the Comb graves, I discovered that the Combs are indeed isolated to a strip of counties which seem to follow the extreme western borders of the Cumberland Plateau. This, of course, leads to the obvious question--why? Why are Combs scattered throughout this one region, and why the strange tent-shaped slabs? One theory is to protect grazing livestock from sinking into the soft-grave earth. Naturally, no one wants their cattle bogged down in a tomb. The Combs do not seem to follow patterns of religious beliefs, as families buried in the same cemetery may have a normal marker vs. a stone tent. The style of Combs also differ throughout the region. While most are sandstone, others may be based on a wooden frame, with stone or metal sheeting. Some "newer" graves from the early 1900s are even erected from metal roofing.

*Left: Side view of a comb grave*

A smattering of Combs can also be found in Kentucky, Alabama, and Arkansas. Interestingly, the rarest Comb recorded, made of marble, sits in Texas. The inscription reads NANCY YEATS, Born Feb. 19, 1831 - Died Feb. 19, 1910. Although Nancy Yeats expired in Texas, she rests in one of the most elegant forms of Comb graves in the books. Oh, did I mention, Nancy was a native of Tennessee? Tradition, it seems, sometimes carries on even through death.



*Site Map for Cumberland Comb Graves*

*This article was originally published as a post on the Western Fictioneers blog in June 14, 2016, <http://westernfictioneers.blogspot.com/2016/06/carved-in-stone-isolated-traditions-by.html> and is reprinted with the author's permission.*



**The Family Snoop** is published on the first day of each month except Aug and Dec. It is sent in .pdf to members who receive it by email. Back copies can be emailed to members as attachments. Send items, articles, stories, etc., to robynechols AT gmail DOT net. You can choose to receive the Family Snoop via email in a pdf format – get it sooner and in color. Contact Sharon Darby, our treasurer. **Deadline for the November/December 2016 issue is October 25th.** There is no meeting in August.

Dues are \$20 per year for an Individual or \$30 for a Family living at the same address.

The Doris Cochran Research Room is open 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays,  
**BUT WE NEED SUBSTITUTE VOLUNTEERS TO HELP KEEP IT OPEN!! Please Volunteer!**

**Merced County Genealogical Society**  
**P.O. Box 3061**  
**Merced, CA. 95344**

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Editor, <i>The Family Snoop</i>	Robyn Echols robynechols AT gmail DOT com

### Family History Center

www.familysearch.org  
 1080 E Yosemite Ave Merced. 722-1307  
 Tuesday, Wednesday, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm,  
 Thursday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
 Tuesday evening, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Free access on their computers to Ancestry and other programs. Take along your flash drive to save and download. Volunteers are there to help you and microfilms can now be ordered online.

### Merced County Library

www.co.merced.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=77  
 2100 O Street Merced 209-285-7642  
 Fax: 209-726-7912  
 Monday through Thursday – 10am to 6:00pm  
 Friday & Saturday - 10:00am to 5:00pm

### Merced County Courthouse Museum

www.mercedmuseum.org  
 21<sup>st</sup> and N Streets  
 P. O. Box 3557  
 Merced, CA 95344  
 Wednesday through Sunday - 1:00pm to 4:00pm.  
 Free admission.

### Genealogical Society of Stanislaus County

www.cagenweb.com/lr/stanilaus/gssc.html  
 Click on their newsletter to read online or download.  
 Information about bus trips and programs offered throughout the year that may interest you.

### Monthly Financial Report: August 2016

Income	17.95
Expenses	(0.00)
Checking Balance	\$4,714.48
Savings Account:	3,868.77
CD-9 months; matures on 12/26/16	5,862.46
CD-12 months; matures on 5/18/17	5,686.65
<b>Total in Checking and Savings:</b>	<b>\$20,132.36</b>

**MCGS Website: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~camcgs>**