

Cadre of volunteers keeps Lake Tahoe history alive

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Museums are more relevant today in this high-tech world because they offer people something tangible, concrete and tactile.

At least that's how curators and volunteers think.

"Nothing has changed, and yet everything has," is how Diane Johnson, who runs the Lake Tahoe Historical Society, describes life at the lake.



Lake Tahoe
Museum is open
Wednesday -
Monday from
11am - 3pm.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

It seems a bit prophetic Johnson would one day run the 43-year-old historical society. After all, when she first moved to the South Shore she and her husband lived into one of the oldest brick buildings in town.

Their 550-square-foot cottage in the Al Tahoe area was part of the Globin compound.

Johnson learned about the history of their house at the time (they are in a larger place now) from Betty Mitchell at the Lake Tahoe Museum. Mitchell, who is the woman to call for all things historical as they relate to South Lake Tahoe, introduced Johnson as the keynote speaker at last week's Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe meeting at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

Johnson read a letter from Snowshoe Thompson dated March 7, 1872, to his wife – which he addressed “Dear Wife.”

“The first time I realized who wrote it, it brought chills to me,” Johnson said.

It's those kinds of artifacts that are housed in the South Tahoe museum – letters like this from a man who for years delivered the mail on skis between Placerville and Tahoe and barely received payment for it.

The Thompsons are buried in Genoa. Many towns in the region share in the Snowshoe Thompson lore.

Outside the Lake Tahoe Museum is the oldest structure left standing in the basin – the 150-plus-year-old Osgood's Toll House. Yes, Tahoe used to have toll roads.



Osgood's Toll House

A log cabin from the 1930s is also on the museum site.

“We hope the cabin plays more of a role in school visits,” Johnson said of groups of local third-graders who visit the

museum as part of their lesson on California history.

The inside of the museum was completely overhauled two years ago, with much of the credit going to members of the local carpenters union. Volunteers is what keeps the museum and historical society running.

While what the historical society deals with is all things old, the work is never done. Two volunteers recently spent hours photographing every article of clothing the museum has so there is a record of it.

“What we do today and how we do it will preserve these artifacts,” Johnson said.

Old photographs are for sale and what isn't out on display may be special ordered.

A long-term goal is to have the archives available to the public.

Something the society plans to continue is the Chautauqua-style performances at the Camp Richardson Lodge.

The museum and society are funded by donations, store sales and grants. The annual summer garden tour is the main fundraiser.

Things to know:

- Lake Tahoe Museum is at 3058 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.
- Phone number: (530) 541.5458.
- The 2011 Garden Tour is July 31 from 10am-4pm. Tickets are \$20 and may be purchased after July 1 at the museum, Aspen Hollow, Nel's Garden Center, Sun Basin and Tahoe Outdoor Living.