

Monday, April 25th, 2011 | Posted by [Mike Roberts](#)

Giddy-up: Clarksville Day brings the Old West back to life

El Dorado Hills history comes to life on Saturday, May 7, at the fifth annual Clarksville Day celebration, brought to you by the hard-working volunteers of The Clarksville Region Historical Society and their generous sponsors.

They've make the old ghost town safe for the hundreds participants and thousands of anticipated attendees. The lineup of local history groups and reenactors is bigger, better and more historical than ever.

The event began in the 1970s as a reunion picnic for the families of the pioneer descendants of the area, organized by Mimi Tong and Madeleine Petersen Moseley.

The next generation of organizers, led by Betty January and her Clarksville Region Historical Society, have maintained that tradition. The pioneer family descendants, including Mosely, will once again gather in a canopied picnic area to reconnect, recall their favorite Clarksville characters and share stories of the idyllic ranch community center that predates El Dorado Hills by more than 100 years.

Old Clarksville was adjacent to the Tong Ranch, named for the pioneering family that settled in the picturesque valley still visible south of Highway 50 in the 1850s and maintained a ranch operation there until 2008.

The old ranch shacks that once housed Clarksville's founding families, names like Kyburz, Fitch and Griggs, still stand as a testament to El Dorado Hills very own ghost town. Once a year, visitors can explore the dilapidated houses through broken windows. The barn, which stands like a movie set from an old western, will be wide open, waiting for the young at heart to explore its stalls, many with artifacts of ranch life still festooned on the walls.

The property is now owned by Ken Wilkinson and Jim Brunello, who purchased the ranch in 2006 and soon thereafter offered to host the annual event.

The nation's first coast to coast road, The Lincoln Highway, ran right through the middle of Clarksville. Much of the original, narrow, concrete roadway is still visible.

To kickoff the Clarksville Day festivities the old road will host a classic car parade at 10:30 a.m.



GOLD MINER Russ Kurz will teach prospectors how to find the glittery gold in the muck during Clarksville Day. Village Life photo by Mike Roberts

Arrive early. No visitor parking is allowed in the old town site. Three horse-drawn wagons, including a “Concord” Stage coach and four Percheron horses that recently appeared in a Hallmark movie, will provide a “shuttle” from the parking area to the festivities. Handicapped parking will be available.

As you stroll down the old Lincoln Highway into the ghost town snap a picture of the stone ruins on the right, the remains of an 1850 dwelling that spent time as both a saloon and a store and, up until 1868 when the railroad bypassed Clarksville for Latrobe, contained a Wells Fargo station.

The house on the left is occupied by the Lester family. Please respect their privacy on Clarksville Day and the rest of the year as well.

Old time music will be provided by Allen Fuller, who plays various gold rush era instruments, and performs songs of a bygone era.

Chat with the Lincoln Highway historians, who will have a booth selling history books and dispensing interesting facts about the nation’s first coast to coast highway, built between 1914 and 1919. The derelict shacks on the south side of the Lincoln Highway are the picturesque Griggs and Kyburz houses, built in 1868. Both are in a state of advanced decay, and are unsafe for touring, but check out the pictures from their better days.

On the opposite side of the road the Clarksville descendants will once again gather for their annual reunion. Many spent time in those derelict shacks, and knew the surprisingly large families that lived there. Stop by and greet them, and don’t be shy! Ask where their family lived, what it was like and the hardships they endured. What you’ll hear is living history. These families are the pioneers of Clarksville and the surrounding ranches. Many bring scrap books and family photos that depict the ranch lifestyle.

The old flag pole and a “swing pole” near the descendants’ pavilion mark the spot where the old school house stood. Tucked in beneath some scrub trees you can still see pieces of the foundation, but keep an eye out for rattlesnakes.

When the school closed in the early 1950’s the Tong family purchased it and dragged it down the road a piece, where it became the center section of the recognizable “Tong” barn.

Pass through the gate and enter what was, until a few years ago, the Tong Ranch.

Near the old houses the cranky “Blue Canyon Gang” will conduct their unique brand of “theater with side arms” throughout the day. The resulting shootouts are loud, and attract a crowd. Check their schedule and arrive a few minutes early to get the kids a good spot.

The Mormon Battalion returns to Clarksville in 2011 and will also be making noise. They’ll once again regale visitors with tales of their grueling 2,000-mile march during the Mexican American war in 1846 and 1847 as the only religious based military unit in U.S. history.

The reenactors bring an entire encampment, replete with pioneer artifacts and a replica the Howitzer the battalion received from John Sutter. They’ll fire it at regular intervals. You’ll know it when you hear it.

The Rescue Fire Department will have an old engine on display. It’s a great photo opportunity, and if you ask nice they might let you sit on it.

Gold miner, reenactor and kid-magnet Russ Kurz returns with his old-time flume, pans and geezer

persona. He'll once again offer free gold panning instruction. Kurz is a real miner and looks the part, with a long white beard, authentic miner garb and crusty humor. He "seeds" his flume with gold flakes he pulled from the American River, and lets junior miners keep the golden results of their panning efforts.

New to Clarksville this year, Coloma reenactors will set up a working blacksmith shop, demonstrate their black powder musket skills and provide a hatchet throwing demonstration. Keep your head down.

In and around the large red "Tong" barn you'll find interesting exhibits by the Rescue Historical Society, El Dorado County Museum and Historical Society, The El Dorado Hills Genealogy Society and the Clarksville Region Historical Society.

Clarksville was a Pony Express station between 1860 and 1861. Reenactors will conduct remount demonstrations throughout the day. In years past they've put well-behaved children atop their steeds for pictures.

Clarksville also contains two historic cemeteries that are open to visitors for the day. The Tong family cemetery is located a couple hundred feet north of the barn, near Highway 50. The larger Clarksville Cemetery, visible beneath the palm tree on the hill behind the movie theater, is located on private property at the end of Joergers Cutoff, west of the ghost town site.

Clarksville Day is a free family event made possible by sponsors: Parker Development Company, The EDH Firefighters Association, the EDH Rotary, the Thompson Foundation, Wilkinson Portables, Brunello Law, Capitol Valley Realty and Doug Veerkamp Construction.

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