

The Wagon Tongue

Newsletter of the California Trail Heritage Alliance



Summer 2022

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Talented and dedicated board members have been key to our success as an organization over the two decades that the Alliance has been in existence. (Formerly, it was referred to by its legal name – The National Historic California Emigrant Trails Center Founda-

tion.) Three individuals have recently resigned from the board to pursue other interests or take on new responsibilities. We are grateful for the service of Duane Jones, Chuck Briggs, and Leah Brady. Duane was a charter member of the Foundation and has served in recent years as a very able grant writer, advisor and Vice-President. This past year, he co-chaired the Oregon-California Trails Association convention in Elko. Many of our marketing successes and the OCTA convention would not have happened without Duane's involvement and commitment. Chuck Briggs, a retired history teacher, and a man of wonderful perspective and insight was invaluable as a tour guide during the OCTA convention but has also provided wonderful insights into activities of the Alliance during his term. Leah Brady, who has left to take on a position with the Elko Band of Western Shoshone tribal council, has been an amazing board member and often-lauded editor of the *Wagon Tongue* for the last several years. She was also a major factor for the success of the OCTA Convention. All of these folks will be missed.

We are fortunate that other capable and talented people have stepped forward to serve on our board. We welcome David Sexton, who has taken on the grant writing responsibilities for us, Steve Hrdlicka, who volunteered to assume the newsletter editor responsibilities, and Kathryn Ataman and Gene Romansky. Gene is an archaeologist who works for Far Western, and Kathy is a retired archaeologist from the BLM. Dave and Steve are professors in the criminal justice and humanities fields, respectively, at Great Basin College. Gene and Kathy bring expertise to our trail mapping efforts as well as trail history in general. We are looking forward to working with these talented and wonderful professionals.

For the first time in three years, the California Trail Interpretive Center hosted Trail Days in mid-June. I participated as a presenter and talked about cooking on the trail, as well as assisted in the Shoshone camp talking about the life of the Western Shoshone at the time the emigrants arrived in this area. Steve Hrdlicka had the opportunity to meet Trail Center staff and to investigate the many volunteers talking about various aspects of pioneer history. Attendance at the event was good and it was once again time well spent in the education of ourselves and the public who attended.

The long-awaited installation of the interpretive panels at the Elko Hot Hole as well as the placement of the ox Yoke-Nevada pole at the site is cause for celebration. See the article in this edition for more details. We appreciate all of the effort put into this pro-



ject by Jordan Thomas, Kevin Lee, and Duane Jones.

Several years ago, Blaine Benedict, CTHA Board member, and then Executive Director of the Southern Nevada Conservancy, received a grant from the Union Pacific Foundation for \$10,000 for educational trunks. Those trunks are now in three locations – Carson City, Winnemucca, and Elko. Staff from the Nevada Outdoor School who work closely with the CA Trail Center recently advised me that the trunks are being put to great use in classroom presentations!



Our plans to identify locations for interpretive panels about local and trail history as well as directional signs to the Hot Hole and the California Trail Center were deferred for more than two years as a result of the pandemic. With a recent field trip to the Elko Corridor (Railroad and Commercial Streets downtown), we have identified potential sign locations. Walt Goddard will visit with city, county and state officials to evaluate which locations we can potentially use.

MET Mapping – Kevin Lee, our lead for Mapping Emigrant Trails (MET) projects may schedule one more mapping trip in Ruby Valley this summer or fall. I am currently working on the ARPA permit from the BLM and Kevin has identified potential future mapping areas in eastern Elko County along the Hastings Cutoff.

Concepts shared more than seven years ago during the initial permitting process for the Long Canyon

Mine, seem to be transforming into realities. Commitments made by Newmont Gold Mining Company and adopted by Nevada Gold Mines are moving forward in the form of a Conservation Easement for Gravelly Ford and a virtual tour of the same area. Nevada Land Trust who will hold the conservation easement is in the final stages of drafting the easement language. This includes some preamble language provided by John Winner.

In addition, John Winner, Dave Fullerton (OCTA member and trail mapper from Sacramento), and I are developing a draft script for the virtual tour of Gravelly Ford. Once a rough script is completed, it will become the basis for videography of the Gravelly Ford area in the fall and for the narration of one or more videos about the Gravelly Ford and the emigrants' perspectives as they passed through this area.

I look forward to our work on additional interpretive and directional signage, trail mapping, support for the California Trail Center and finalization of the Gravelly Ford Conservation Easement and videos.

Helen Hankins





FROM THE EDITOR



Hello! My name is Steven Hrdlicka, and I am the new editor of the “Wagon Tongue.” I’ve met a number of people over the past few weeks and just about everyone has been quick to remark upon Leah’s fine work as editor of the newsletter in past years. Seeing

as how I have some big shoes to fill, all I can say is that I shall do my best.

My wife Kim and I moved to Elko in January for a position I received to teach Humanities and English at Great Basin College. We grew up out in Spring Creek, and though we both attended schools in the area, we never really heard of the California Trail in school. This fact is especially ironic as I sit down to reflect upon how important the California Trail is in Nevada history (as well as for students to learn about). This will be addressed much more in future issues.

Let me back up. To my embarrassment, I just assumed the California Trail Interpretive Center to be a glorified rest area stop for folks travelling the I-80. This couldn’t be further from the truth.

Making our first visit to the Trail Center back in May, we were both happily surprised by the quality of the facility, the historical details (and accuracy) of the exhibits, and the knowledge of the staff.

Prior to making this first visit, I had spent hours on the Internet researching the California Trail, hoping to gain some quick knowledge on the subject so I could do a good job putting together this newsletter. However, literally within ten minutes of actually *going down to the Trail Center*, I learned tons more than I did online. The personal touch is powerful, and though technology is a wonderful thing, nothing can replace a living person who loves what they do and communicates it well. The Trail Center provides lots of opportunities for encountering people who love what they do and are eager to share living history.

One conversation I had was with Steve Owens.

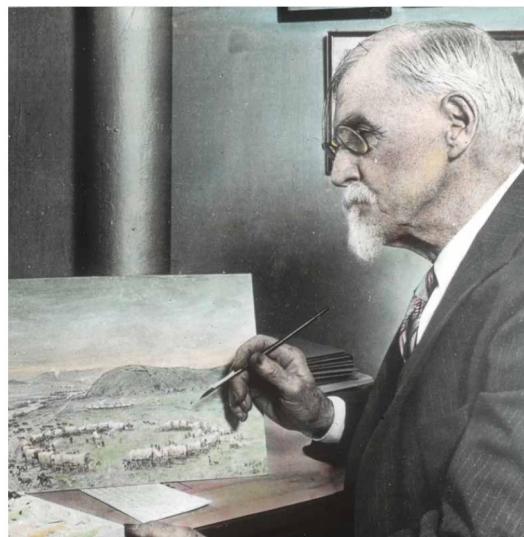
Steve informed us of several resources available through OCTA (Oregon-California Trails Association) like the “Genealogy & Paper-Trail” service. Paper Trail is a database which contains information on notable journeys, along with specific names and places which are mentioned in diaries, newspapers, and other archival materials. Paper Trail also provides a survey of the text of interest so you can easily decide whether a source might be worth tracking down or not. Either way, tracking down diaries, newspapers, and the like is easy because the database includes a list of libraries where the original historic documents may be found. Members of OCTA receive access to Paper Trail as well as many other resources. Another database Steve told me about is called “OCTA Journals.” The OCTA Journals resource allows access to *hundreds* of original 19th century trail diaries. It is straightforward to use (just type into the search bar like Google).

Lastly, we talked about the *Overland Journal*, the “flagship” publication of OCTA. Access to this journal is provided for members. The *Overland*

QUARTERLY OF THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

OVERLAND JOURNAL

VOLUME 39 • NUMBER 3 • FALL 2021





Journal is a scholarly publication that features articles written upon a broad number of subjects relevant to the Overland Trail. In the future, I will consider highlighting especially interesting articles from the *Overland Journal* by providing summaries and questions for readers to consider.

Steve then brought me up to speed on technological tools which he developed to enhance the California Trail Interpretive Center experience. One is the Trail Center App. If you have not taken some time to explore the Trail Center App, it is a powerful immersive tool and certainly worth checking out. In a nutshell, there are two ways to use the app; you can use it on your desktop at home or access it on your mobile device. If you download the app to your mobile device, you can use it while physically visiting the Interpretive Center. This will allow you to gain access to numerous relevant diary entries written by the emigrants, which certainly provides for a more immersive historical experience. On the other hand, the app could be used at home as a way to access the exhibits remotely, or as a way to perform research.

For example, the app's "virtual tour" of The Great Plains Room faithfully reproduces images and text from *all* the interpretive panels and exhibits in The Great Plains room at the California Trail Interpretive Center. This makes for over 40 color photographs, many of which are in hi-resolution and in vivid color. Clicking on "Great Plains Story," from the menu of options available in the app, will take you to a page full of quotations of diary entries written by Edwin Pettit, William Kelly, Eleazer Stillman Ingall,

Eliza Ann McAuley, Sarah Davis, and Luzena Wilson. As if these quotations from diaries were not enough, the app features links to each of these writers' *entire diary* so that you can easily find and read more from each one. Full text versions of just about all of these diaries are available online for free; one link I clicked on took me to the Library of Congress website, and another one to Yale Library's website. Visitors will also find videos linked in the app. A



Another hi-res photo of an exhibit at the Great Plains Room in the "Plains Virtual Tour."

link for a concise video on Abigail Dunaway can be found underneath the above image in the app).

Hopefully everyone who reads this summer newsletter will have a chance to visit the OCTA website and explore the resources presented here. Personally, I have barely scratched the surface. Updates on these and other resources will be provided in future issues. Please contact me directly or talk with Steve Owens down at the Trail Center if you have any questions about accessing any of the electronic resources presented here.

Lastly, I would encourage anyone who is interested to consider submitting a story, news item, or update for the newsletter to Steven.Hrdlicka@gbcnv.edu. Submissions will be considered on a rolling basis so send one in at any time. Or just write to say hello!

Steven Hrdlicka



Photo of an exhibit at The Great Plains Room, from "Plains Virtual Tour," in the California Trail Center App.



NEW SIGNS INSTALLED AT ELKO HOT HOLE



New signs at the Elko Hot Hole off of Bullion Road. Photos: Kim Hrdlicka

The Elko Hot Hole has been a part of Elko history since the time the emigrants traveled through this area 180 years ago. Before that it was likely used by the Native Americans. Information about the history and geology of the hot hole is addressed in the interpretive signs now in place at the Hot Hole.

More than three years ago, the California Trail Heritage Alliance, a local non-profit that supports projects related to the California historic trail and other local historic trails, undertook an effort to establish a way-side at the Hot Hole for the local public and visitors to enjoy. There are nearly 20 waysides throughout northern NV that interpret the history of the California Trail in this area.

Initially, the CTHA worked with the City of Elko to fence and gravel the area near the Hot Hole. Later, with the continued involvement of the City, and the support of the National Park Service and Travel Nevada, the interpretive phase of the project began to take shape. The CTHA researched and worked with staff from the National Park Service to tell the story of the history and geology of the Elko Hot Hole. An infrastructure grant from Travel Nevada and some funds from the CTHA and the National Park Service made this project possible.

Local contractors, General Fence in Elko, installed the Fence and the Signs, and the Nevada/California Trail Sign was made by Wicked Ridge in Spring Creek. Both General Fence and Wicked Ridge were key to the successful completion of this project. *Hel-en Hankins and Kevin Lee*





CALIFORNIA TRAIL DAYS EVENT

JUNE 18 & 19, 2022

The California Trail Days event was a huge success this year. The first time since the event has been held since 2019, on Saturday, June 18 over 400 people came out to attend Trail Days (excluding volunteers and participants). On Sunday, June 19, the weather was a little overcast but it was another good day for folks to come out and see what the California Trail was like. My favorite part of the event was to see how families stuck together and enjoyed the interpretive experience as a unit. One family, a mother and three children, arrived at the same time as me—around 10AM. Within minutes they found the Jr. Ranger Badge tent and the kids were quickly enlisted to earn their Jr. Ranger Badges. I saw this family at two of the stations—the knife

throwing station and the washing station tent. To be completely honest, I have never seen such big smiles as I saw at this washing tent—and these kids were all doing some hard work! The first task was to bring water up from the river to put into a tub for washing. For this, a yoke was employed, so that the boy of about 7 or 8 had two pails of water balanced precariously upon his shoulders. After bringing the



Interpreters lead a family through some martial drills at the Mormon Battalion Tent at California Trail Days, 2022.

buckets to the tub, the clothes were soaked and a “standard family size” washboard was used. The interpretive volunteer instructed the kids to scrub the clothes out very well so that no dirt or other stains remained. The boy’s two sisters came over to help out with this involved washboard process, and also with the wringing out of the clothes, and then with stringing them up on a clothesline. The other six stations children needed to visit in order to earn their Jr. Ranger Badge were the Toys tent, the Mormon Encampment Battalion, the Shoshone Village, and then two stations inside the Trail Center, one on loading and packing a wagon and a sewing station. I don’t believe that Dr.

Quackenbush’s tent was on the list, but several kids made it a point to stop by and receive an esoteric examination which included having their skull size measured as well as lying

upon a bed of nails!

At one point during the event, I was introduced to an Old Miner interpreter who told me about how he had been misled (along with a 1,000 other people) by some fellow named Meeks, and also of the story of Sarah Chambers and the “blue bucket gold.” I believed every word of it. And good thing too, because the story, though incredible, I have also found



in miniature of course, all about how the Mormons became a force in St. Louis, moved on to Nauvoo, IL and then made it out west. We learned about the dramatic historical moment President Polk faced (and Brigham Young took advantage of) during the war out in California in 1846.

To sum up, everyone genuinely seemed to enjoy this event. From dancing to panning for gold, from delicious Indian Tacos to horse carriage rides, and from axe throwing and shooting bow-and-arrows to making your own toys, this is truly a unique experience. The value is immense for all of us who live in this increasingly push-button world. *Steven Hrdlicka*



to be largely true.

A fur trapper taught visitors a number of things too. He explained the process of how to make ball ammo, as well as how to load it into a front loader “54.” To me the most interesting bits concerned how to make and set beaver traps, and about how felt hats were made. Fur was in great demand because, apparently, felt hats were very fashionable and in great demand on the east coast back then.

When I finally made my way inside the Trail Center, I spoke with another fur trapper who had come out from Colorado to participate in our California Trail Days event, specifically to interpret aspects of the Old Spanish Trail. Having lots of questions about the Mormon Battalion on my mind (which I had never heard of before this Trail Days event) I asked a fellow a question about this. The fellow turned out to be Frank Tortorich, who kindly asked Kim and I to sit down for a while. He then proceeded to share,



UPCOMING EVENTS

- August 11 - Board Meeting
- Aug. 28- Sept. 2 - OCTA Convention
Casper, WY
- September 8 - Board Meeting
- October 14 - Board Meeting

KEY LINKS

www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463

<http://www.californiatrailcenter.org/>

www.emigranttrailswest.org

www.octa-trails.org

www.appl.org

www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko_field_office/blm_programs/blm_special_areas/

California Trail Interpretative Center Hours (from the website):

“For the summer season, The Trail Center will be open 7 days a week, from 9:00am-5:00pm.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Years Day.

Please call (775) 738-1849 for more information.”

CTHA Board of Directors

Core Members:

- Lisa Dinwiddie
- Marlene Goddard
- Walt Goddard
- Helen Hankins
- Steven Hrdlicka
- Kevin Lee
- Gratton Miller
- Gene Romanski
- David Sexton

At-Large Members

- Kathryn Ataman
- Paul Dinwiddie
- Jacqueline Lucero
- Brad McMullen

Newsletter

Editor:

Steven Hrdlicka

Contributors:

Helen Hankins

Kevin Lee

Kim Hrdlicka

- Larry Schmidt
- Jordan Thomas
- Frank Tortorich
- John Winner



SO...WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE CRICKETS?

Those visiting the California Trail Interpretive Center lately have likely encountered crickets of a large size. Commonly referred to as “Mormon Crickets,” these large insects range between one and three inches in length. Mormon Crickets lately appear especially plentiful on the 1 Interpretive Way exit off of I-80. I met my first Mormon Cricket the day I made that first visit to the Trail Center back in mid-May. I had to pull over to see why the road was, uh, “moving.” This is fitting because, as I investigated into Mormon Crickets a little bit, the emigrants also encountered and wrote about these transitory migrants long ago. The following excerpt comes from Joel Palmer’s diary written in 1848, a diary also notable for other reasons, especially because it mentions many landmarks on the trail: the Solitary tower, the Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, the South Pass, the Soda Springs, among others:

August 3. The ground, for a strip of about four miles, was covered with black crickets of a large size. I saw some that were about three inches in length, and measuring about three-fourths of an inch in diameter; but the common size were two inches in length and one-half or five-eighths of an inch in diameter; their legs were large in proportion to the size of their bodies. Some were singing on stalks of wild sage; others crawling in every direction. Our teams made great havoc among them; so numerous were they that we crushed them at every step. As soon as one was killed, others of them would alight upon it and devour it. (Palmer 79)

The insects get their name from a “miracle” that happened in the Salt Lake Valley in 1848 called the “Miracle of the Gulls.” In this year, the insects flooded the Salt Lake Valley and attacked the crops pioneers had planted when, miraculously, seagulls came to the rescue and began to devour the crickets. This prevented what would have been certain disaster for the pioneers. The emigrants and pioneers, of course, were not the only people to have had experiences with these crickets; a story on the Utah Humanities website tells of how Native Americans such as the Paiute, Goshute, and Shoshone, have “valued insects as a primary food source.” Southern Paiutes, for example, were able to capture the crickets by “driving them into trenches lined with dried grass and brush, and then lit the trenches on fire.” Once the crickets were harvested, they were ground up into cricket meal for baking. What is perceived to be a miracle to one can be perceived as disaster to another, and the Utah Humanities website makes the further point that Native Americans looked at cricket outbreaks in a much more positive light. *Steven Hrdlicka*



Mormon Cricket at the California Trail Days Event, 2022. Photo: Kim Hrdlicka

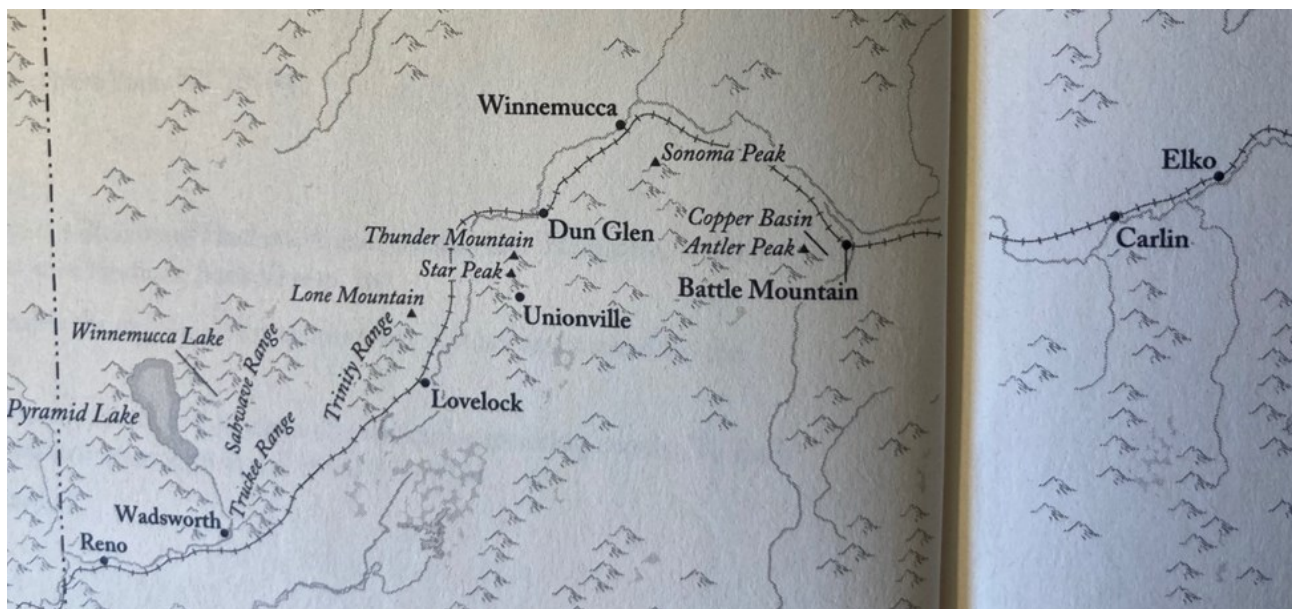
Sources:

Andersen, Rebecca, 2011. “Stories from the Beehive” *UtahHumanities.org*. <https://www.utahhumanities.org/stories/items/show/223>

Palmer, Joel. *Palmer’s Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains, 1845-1946*. (<https://archive.org/details/palmersjournalof00palmrich>)



GREAT BASIN COLLEGE AND THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL

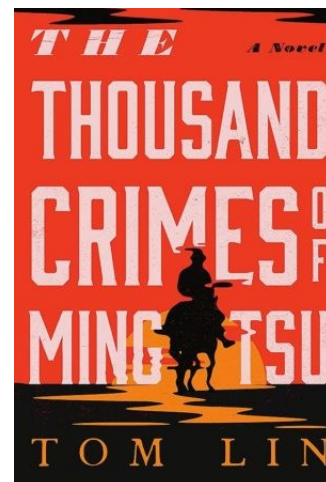
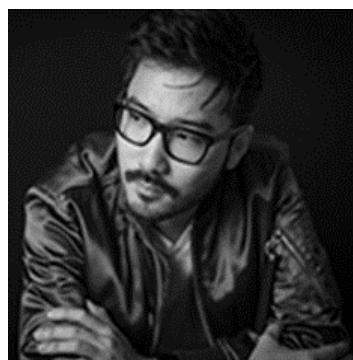


Detail of the map found in the prefatory material to Tom Lin's book, *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021)

On the last Thursday of May, 2022, the Great Basin College (GBC) Humanities Center hosted a Book Club event which featured Tom Lin's 2021 novel *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu*. The event was recorded so if you happen to be interested in hearing what was discussed, or learning more about the book, you can find the recording on YouTube on the Humanities Center Channel (HC@GBC) or visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqVEGHVT57g>

This book is significant because, as can be seen from the map above, Tom Lin set his story in the trail days of the Old West. Elko is featured prominently in the novel, as are many other places along the California Trail. In the future, other notable novels, poems, songs, and art pieces will be highlighted in the newsletter, along with other news updates from GBC related to the California Trail.

Tom Lin was born in China and immigrated to the United States when he was four. A graduate of Pomona College, he is currently in the PhD program at the University of California, Davis. *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* is his first novel.





THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL AND THE ELKO

4TH OF JULY PARADE

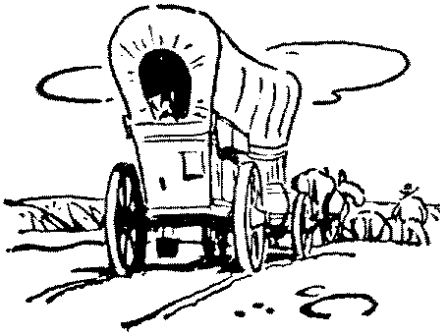
The Elko 4th of July Parade was held on Idaho Street on Saturday, July 2. The California Trail was well represented in the parade. Many in attendance had a chance to meet the Old Miner from the Trail Days event and also to see an emigrant Wagon in motion among the procession (even if pulled by an F-150).





California Trail Heritage Alliance
 P. O. Box 1778
 Elko, NV 89803

Phone: (775) 340-2031
 Email: ctcf1849@gmail.com
 Website: www.ctha-nv.org



Join Today! - Membership Application

Join your friends and neighbors and become a supporter of the California Trail Interpretive Center! Every membership supports the California Trail Interpretive Center and Trail preservation. When you join other enthusiasts to become a member, or renew your membership, you directly support interpretation, education, and special events at the California Trail Interpretive Center, and help preserve the Trail and its history for the benefit of current and future generations.

Annual Memberships: New Renewal

Name: _____ Address: _____

City/ST/Zip: _____

Email: _____

All members receive the informative electronic newsletter, electronic updates about special events and activities and a 10% discount at the California Trail Interpretive Center store. Invitations to one or more special events are extended to the Supporter membership levels & above.

Level	Individual	Family	Supporter	Partner	Lifetime
Special Events)			1	2	3
Cost	\$25	\$50	\$75	\$100	\$200

*Special Events may include presentations, workshops, tours, exhibit previews or other activities. Individuals who choose to make a donation equal to or greater than \$250 will receive recognition, if desired, on the Donor Wall in the California Trail Interpretive Center

PAYMENT: Check Visa MC Amount \$ _____

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Make Check Payable to: **California Trail Heritage Alliance, P.O. Box 1778, Elko NV 89803**

DONOR WALL

IN ADDITION TO BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE, INDIVIDUALS OR BUSINESSES MAY ALSO MAKE A DONATION TO THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE FOR THOSE DONATIONS GREATER THAN \$250.00, THE DONOR CAN CHOOSE TO BE PUBLICLY RECOGNIZED ON THE DONOR WALL AT THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL INTERPRETIVE CENTER. RECOGNITION LEVELS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

CALIFORNIA TRAIL CENTER DONOR WALL RECOGNITION LEVELS

<u>LEVEL NAME</u>	<u>DONATION AMOUNT</u>
Pioneer	\$250.00 to \$499.99
Trail Blazer	\$500.00 to \$2,499.99
Wagon Master	\$2,500.00 to \$4,999.99
Empire Building	\$5,000.00 or Greater

CONTACT US!

CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE P.O. Box 1778, ELKO, NEVADA 89803

775.340.2031 ❖ ctcf1849@gmail.com ❖ www.ctha-nv.org