



Annual Report 2019-2020







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COVER:

Museum founders Norma and Howard Harter at the museum prior to opening in 1975. Third person is believed to be Jean Gustin.

LEFT: Sutter Buttes, from the SCM collection

BACK COVER: The Sutter County Museum, 2019

Our Team

Staff

Jessica Hougen, Museum Director/Curator
Sharyl Simmons, Assistant Curator
Kelly Gash, Museum Aide

The mission of the Sutter County Museum is to share local stories to strengthen community bonds, to inspire celebration of our diverse cultural heritage, and to demonstrate how understanding the past prepares us for the future.

We, the Sutter County Museum, acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the Nisenan people. They have been stewards of this land for all their history and did not leave it willingly. We acknowledge the land theft, enslavement, and genocide that forced them away. We honor and respect the Indigenous people who are still connected to this land. We invite our visitors to consider the legacy of colonialism and to support Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

Letter from the President

Fiscal year 2019-20 was a trying time for our local/regional museum. Due to the COVID pandemic we were open just over half of the year. FY 20-21 will also be challenging, but we are resilient and look forward to returning to more normal operations before the year is complete.

And we do have much to look forward to. We are pleased to have the guidance and advice of a professional museum design consultant, Brent Johnson Design, as we contemplate how to best present our community's history. While the planning is still in the early stages, we are considering modern and diverse ways to tell our story. Some ideas include interactive and digital exhibits, large overhead visual panels of our unique landscapes, and galleries that adhere to themes and sub-themes to communicate our history in a coherent way.

Our museum is assisted by the non-profit Community Memorial Museum Association, which provides support by supplying funds and labor for events, programs and physical plant upgrades. Our association has 13 members who volunteer their time to help museum staff achieve their mission of telling the story of our community, both past and present. Many of our association members have provided support for many years, while others are bringing their energy only recently. Most also support many other community organizations as volunteers and members.

While our museum is freely open to all who are curious about our local history, our members are special to us. Their dues provide substantial financial support to the museum. Their interest inspires us to strive to improve the museum experience. Their friendships connect us to the wider community. We encourage everyone to become a member and help sustain our museum and its commitment to the Yuba-Sutter area.



Phyllis Smith
President
Community Memorial Museum Association

Association Members

Carol Bordeaux
Manny Cardoza
Babs Cotter
Eric Gruenthal
Scott Hankins
Tony Kurlan
Randy Lavender
Amber Milner
Coleen Morris
Mike Morris
Debbie Reid
Margit Sands
Sukh Sidhu
Chuck Smith

Letter from the Director



Jessica Hougen, Museum Director/Curator

Fiscal year 2019–20 began on a high note and ended in very challenging times. But before we get to that, some context is necessary since this is the first institutional annual report since the late 1970s.

In 2015 Julie Stark retired after twenty-nine years with the museum, nineteen of those as director/curator. I was hired as her successor. The change in leadership at the museum came at a fortuitous time—county leadership was becoming more supportive of the museum, and there was change in the makeup of the Community Memorial Museum Association (CMMA) that allowed for more forward thinking and for less attachment to the past and the way things had been done previously. Shortly thereafter the association received the largest financial gift in their history. All these factors together meant that for the first time we could take a step back from day-to-day operations and consider not just what we were doing for our community, but how and why we were operating the way we were.

This process started with strategic planning, coupled with undergoing two institutional assessments: the Museum Assessment Program run by the American Alliance of Museums, and the Collections Assessment for Preservation program, a joint effort between the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation. The recommendations from these assessments were considered while writing our five-year strategic plan. Following this, we began to implement changes to our temporary exhibit program, broadening what we offer to appeal to a wider range of visitors. We also began a full physical inventory of our artifacts.

As collections care was prioritized in our strategic plan, a grant was applied for and awarded by the California Natural Resources Agency to install high-density mobile shelving. This grant project became the catalyst for a six-month interior renovation during which we accomplished the following: a new monument sign installed out front, improvements to the building façade, a completely reorganized museum store with a new front desk, new interior way-finding signage, new flooring throughout the building, new paint throughout most of the building, cleanup of permanent exhibits, upgrades to our security system, reorganization of our office spaces and research library, complete reorganization of our artifact storage areas (including removal of asbestos flooring, installation of high-density mobile shelving along with flat files, and storage space for exhibit plinths and crates), and an HVAC system installed in our secondary storage building.

Throughout planning and renovating we prioritized marketing and building partnerships. These efforts were successful, as shown in increases to our visitation, revenue, and program participation. We reopened on June 15, 2019, with our biggest day ever: approximately 640 visitors came to celebrate with us.

Momentum continued to build through summer and fall of 2019. We began the process of creating a master plan to guide the redevelopment of our permanent exhibits, working with Brent Johnson Design. We held our fortieth annual Trees and Traditions Gala, attended by Loadel Piner, daughter of the founders of the museum; she was thrilled with the transformation of the space. We launched a new membership program in January 2020 to offer more benefits

and to give you, our supporters and champions, reason to support at higher levels. Ettl Hall, which museum staff began to manage July 1, 2019, was going to break even for the first time.

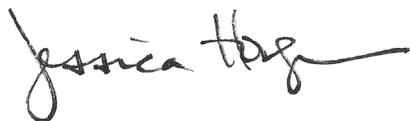
Then the pandemic hit. On March 19, 2020, Governor Newsom enacted a stay-at-home order directing all nonessential businesses to close and residents to stay at home except for essential activities. The museum was closed for the rest of the fiscal year, except for three short weeks in July and another three in October.

The CMMA lost money in gift shop sales and donations. All Ettl Hall reservations were canceled for the foreseeable future. The county had massive financial impacts resulting in budget cuts for fiscal year 2020–21, preparation of which was well underway in March 2020.

There were moments of good news too. The CMMA had already been planning to start a certified farmers market in spring 2020 with the museum director as market manager. We moved ahead with this, opening in May. It was very well received by our community. Not only were we offering a fairly safe venue to buy local produce, we were supporting local farmers who had been hit hard by the effects of the pandemic. The market will be an annual program of the CMMA, running April or May through October on Wednesday afternoons.

In late July, the county administrative officer asked me to take on additional duties related to the pandemic. I was asked to lead the Sutter COVID Outreach Resiliency Effort (SCORE) team. The team is educational in nature, organized to support our local businesses in understanding and complying with state COVID regulations, and to help them operate as safely as possible. We also handle all complaints from members of the public regarding how businesses are operating related to COVID. As you can imagine, this work has taken up quite a bit of my time, which is why you are reading this report in early 2021 not fall 2020. I was asked to take on this role due to my existing relationships in our business community, my experience in dealing with the public, and my desire to support this community. After all, the museum exists for this community and in response to it. I am still carrying out these extra duties on top of running the museum and will continue to do so as long as it is needed.

I want to assure you that the museum will survive this time of crisis. Although both the county and the CMMA have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, we are somewhat protected by the fact that we have two sources of financial support. We are also fortunate to have wonderful support from all of you, and from the community at large. Not only will we survive this, we will come back stronger than we were before. There are big things coming for the Sutter County Museum, and although the pandemic may have slowed us down, it will not stop us from achieving our goals.



Jessica Hougen
Museum Director/Curator



ABOVE and RIGHT:
Artifact storage prior to 2019 renovation:
overcrowded and dangerous for the artifacts



Artifact storage after 2019 renovation

Collections and Exhibits

Our collection is the heart of the museum. We exist to safeguard these artifacts and to share the stories they embody. Our collection tells the story of the Yuba-Sutter region from pre-European contact to the present. It includes agricultural implements, textiles, county record books, decorative arts, technology, ephemera, photographs, and more. We are still actively collecting.

Our collection contains approximately 20,000 artifacts and 7,000 photographs. Prior to our renovations in 2019, our collection storage facilities had an inadequate amount of shelving and were completely full to overflowing. New items donated were often added to existing exhibits as there was no space in storage.

In 2016 we began a full physical inventory of our collection. This project is still ongoing; we estimate that approximately 25 percent of artifacts have been inventoried. This inventory is necessary for many reasons. First and foremost is the safety of our artifacts. As our storage areas are filled past capacity, items are being damaged due to not being stored appropriately. We also need to make sure that we know what we have and where it is. Although we have used a collections management software program for years, we do not have accurate locations for many of our artifacts and when we began the inventory we had a significant backlog of new artifacts to accession. I'm pleased to share that we are nearly caught up with this work.

While we inventory, we are not only documenting; we are rehousing artifacts to ensure they are stored in the proper materials, and we are evaluating each artifact to ensure that it is appropriate for our collection. Like many small history museums, in our early days we tended to accept anything that was offered for our collection. This means we are expending resources on artifacts that are not related to the history of the Yuba-Sutter community. As our collections policy clearly states that all artifacts in our collection should help us to meet our mission, any items that do not should not be kept in the collection.

The process for removing items is clearly defined in our collections management policy and was written according to industry standards and best practices.



Agriculture Gallery

Temporary Exhibits

As with all museums, our temporary exhibit schedule was disrupted by the pandemic. Prior to our closure, we hosted five temporary exhibits in the museum and one at Yuba-Sutter Arts. An opening reception is held for each of our temporary exhibits, except for Scholastic, which instead has a closing reception following the award ceremony.

On average we host four to six temporary exhibits per fiscal year. Exhibits are chosen to appeal to a wide variety of visitors and must have some connection to local or state history. In past years we have created many exhibits from our collection. While we work through our collection inventory, we made the decision to rent more exhibits instead, freeing up time to work on the inventory and backlog of accessioning. This will allow us to create even better collections-based exhibits in the future.



Frida Kahlo's Garden

Frida Kahlo's Garden

June 15–August 11, 2019

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) is considered one of the most significant artists of the twentieth century. Her body of work, consisting of some 250 paintings and drawings, is at once intensely personal and universal in scope, and relies heavily on the natural world. The exhibition *Frida Kahlo's Garden* transports visitors to Kahlo's garden to experience her world as she did.



Visitors enjoying the temporary exhibit *Frida Kahlo's Garden* at our Grand Reopening Celebration June 15, 2019



In the Fields of the North/En los Campos del Norte

2020 Sutter Buttes Calendar Photographs

August 17–September 22, 2019

The Sutter Buttes Calendar is an annual publication and fundraiser of the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust. This exhibit celebrates and shares the work of photographers chosen for inclusion in the 2020 Sutter Buttes Calendar.

Simple Objects: An Excavation

September 28–December 1, 2019

This exhibit was a collaboration between Sacramento artist Stephanie Taylor, who was born in Butte County, and writer Christy Heron-Clark, who was born and raised in Paradise, CA. Together, the pair visited Christy’s two adjacent family homes in Paradise after the Camp Fire to find objects that might have survived. While Christy responds to these simple objects with recollections of her treasured childhood, Stephanie ponders each as it exists now, altered and transformed.

In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte

January 18–March 15, 2020

Traveling with migrant workers as the fruit and harvest season moves from the Mexican border north to Washington state, *In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte* reveals the stories of contemporary migrant farm workers on the West Coast. The exhibition attempts to shed light on some basic questions: How much do we know about the lives of the people who feed us? Where do they live? How does it feel to do some of the hardest repetitive labor imaginable? And what answers do farm workers themselves have to end their poverty and endless migration?

The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

February 5–22, 2020 (at Yuba Sutter Arts)

Since 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards have recognized talented youth from around the country. The Sutter County Museum is proud to be hosting the Scholastic Art Awards for seven counties in Northern California. Students who earn the top level of award in the regional competition move on to the national competition.

Black and White in Black and White: Images of Dignity, Hope, and Diversity in America

March 15–July 19, 2020

(we were able to extend past the original schedule in hopes of being open)

The beginning of the twentieth century was a time of great promise and hope for race relations in America. This optimistic era was fueled by what was known at the time as the “New Negro Movement,” a period which set the stage for the Harlem Renaissance. No one better captured the essence of this time of advancement than African American photographer John Johnson.



Rendering of an idea for our entry gallery, created during our master plan project with Brent Johnson Design



Permanent Exhibits

In late 2019 the CMMA contracted with the exhibit design firm Brent Johnson Design to create a master plan to guide the redevelopment of our permanent exhibits. As with many small museums, our permanent exhibits have grown organically through the years as the building was expanded. This has led to a rather disjointed experience, with no introductory gallery and no overarching themes tying the exhibits together. Rather than attempt to solve this problem piecemeal, we are working on this master plan with input from stakeholders and community members. This plan is not simply redesigning our current exhibits, it is examining the history of our community and determining what stories we should tell and how they support interpretive themes that were identified early on in the process. We are also taking a close look at how we use our spaces. When the plan is complete we will begin a fundraising campaign to support the redevelopment.

In the meantime, however, there was one exhibit that just couldn't wait that long. Our exhibit on the Nisenan, the local Native American tribe, was quite old. When I was informed by a workgroup from the United Auburn Indian Community that they considered many of the items on display to be sensitive cultural artifacts, we immediately removed the entire exhibit. Luckily, we had recently had a wonderful intern from Sacramento State University who was very interested in Native American representation in museums. After interning with us she spent a semester interning at the Maidu museum in Roseville. Following this experience, and knowing that our exhibit was inadequate, she asked if she could curate a new exhibit for us for her master's thesis project. I worked closely with her throughout the project, and we worked with members of three area tribes to ensure that we were telling the story in an appropriate and sensitive manner. We included a land acknowledgment and did not shy away from discussing genocide and other difficult topics. We also emphasized that the Nisenan are not an extinct people. Finishing touches were put on our new exhibit in mid-March, and we had planned a celebration for our exhibit on March 28, 2020, which of course was canceled.





Portraits of Veterans collaboration with Yuba Sutter Arts



Salsa Fiesta program in the Artisan Community Garden



Storytelling at our annual children's holiday program



Salsa Fiesta program in the Artisan Community Garden



Blooms & Bubbly program in the Artisan Community Garden



Blooms & Bubbly program in the Artisan Community Garden

Education | Community Impacts | Partners

Each year we put on educational programs for children and adults. These range in subject matter; some are related to temporary exhibits, some to themes in our permanent exhibits. With the addition of the Artisan Community Garden to the museum a few years ago we increased our programs related to food and agriculture.

Adult Programs

- Blooms & Bubbly* 6.29.2019
- Master Gardener Workshops* 7.13.2019, 8.24.2019, 9.14.2019
- Plein Air Painting 7.24.2019, 8.3.2019
- Discussion on Frida Kahlo and Luther Burbank 7.26.2019
- Mini Frida Film Festival 7.27.2019
- Salsa Fiesta* 9.21.2019
- Cascade Fire Anniversary Open House 10.9.2019
- Succulent Swap* 10.26.2019
- Camp Fire Anniversary Open House and Film Screening: *Not If, But When: Wildfire Solutions* 11.8.2019
- Presentation by David Bacon on *In the Fields of the North* 2.23.2020
- Concert by Veridian Symphony Orchestra String Quartet with Harp 3.11.2020

Children's Programs

- Special Needs in the Garden* 6.1.2019, 7.27.2019
- Night at the Museum 8.9.2019, 10.18.2019
- Annual Children's Holiday Program 12.15.2019
- Fun Fridays in the Garden* June–August 2019
- Kids Yoga* multiple dates 2019
- Family Yoga* multiple dates 2019

* Program in the Artisan Community Garden

All programs scheduled for March 19–June 30, 2020 were canceled due to the pandemic.

Collaborative Programs

- Award Ceremony for the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards with Yuba-Sutter Arts 2.22.2020
- Day of Remembrance Commemoration with the Japanese American Citizens League, Marysville Chapter 2.14/15/16.2020

Collaborative Organizations

- Alzheimer's Association (local portion of Northern CA and Northern NV chapter)
- *Appeal-Democrat*
- Mary Aaron Museum
- Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes
- Playzeum
- Punjabi American Heritage Society
- Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust
- Sutter County Activities Committee
- Sutter County Children & Families Commission
- Tri-County Diversity
- United Auburn Indian Community
- Yuba City High School Bus Crash Memorial group
- Yuba Sutter Arts
- Yuba-Sutter Chamber of Commerce
- Yuba-Sutter Economic Development Corporation
- Yuba-Sutter Lodging Association

Presentations about the museum were given to the following organizations:

- Delta Kappa Gamma
- Early Risers Kiwanis Club of Yuba City
- Philanthropic Educational Organization, Loving Sisters chapter
- Sutter County Board of Supervisors
- Yuba City City Council
- Yuba City Sister City Association
- Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau leadership team

Museum Director Jessica Hougen with Loadel Piner, daughter of the founders of the museum, at Trees and Traditions 2019



Events

Just prior to the beginning of fiscal year 2019–20, we completed a six-month interior renovation project of the museum and held two of our most successful events in the history of the museum.

- VIP Reopening Celebration 6.14.2019
- Grand Reopening Celebration 6.15.2019
- Closing Reception for Frida Kahlo's Garden 8.10.2019
- Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon 10.21.2019
- Fortieth annual Trees and Traditions Gala 12.7.2019
- Canceled Celebration of new Nisenan exhibit 3.28.2020

Visitation

Prior to fiscal year 2017–18 records on our visitation are not complete but indicate an annual audience of approximately 6,000-6,500, which includes daily visitors as well as attendees at programs and events.

In fiscal year 2017–18 our attendance increased to 8,793. This was due to marketing and use of social media, more programs, and a change in the type of temporary exhibits planned to appeal to a wider audience.

Fiscal year 2018–19 saw total visitation of 8,076- not much of a loss considering the museum was closed January through mid-June 2019 for interior renovations. We continued to hold programs and kept our gift shop open during that time.

Although the museum has been closed since mid-March 2020, our total visitation for fiscal year 2019–20 only dropped

to 7,087. Many of these visitors came for our new farmers market. It is impossible to accurately predict how many visitors we may have had without the effects of the pandemic, but projections based on visitation in the first eight months of the fiscal year show we should have had approximately 8,500 visitors.

Prior to the pandemic we were seeing a dramatic increase in interest from the community following our 2019 renovation, illustrated in our visitation numbers and participation in programs and events. We are hoping to bounce back to these levels once we reopen (anticipated late spring or early summer 2021.)

BELOW: Products sold by our farmers market vendors



Membership

Prior to January 2020, our membership program had been the same for quite a long time. There were five levels of membership and all had the same basic benefits; there was no incentive for members to support at higher levels.

A new membership program was unveiled in January 2020 that offered many new and different incentives at higher levels, including participation in reciprocal membership programs, behind-the-scenes tours, members-only shopping mornings, and free research requests, among others.

In November 2019 we had 301 members in our system. This number is slightly misleading as we made the decision not to purge non-paying members in 2019 to ensure they would receive communications regarding our new program. We did purge the system in late spring 2020.

In May 2020 we had 264 members, many of whom chose a higher level of membership than they had been at

previously. This is evident most dramatically in our revenue. For fiscal year 2019–20 we projected \$6,000 in membership revenue based on revenue in the past few fiscal years. Our actual revenue was \$13,494.

PHOTO from SCM Collection



The Marysville Merchants Baseball Team in front of a Friesley Falcon airliner, August 1921. They were the first team in history to travel by aircraft for a game. From SCM collection.

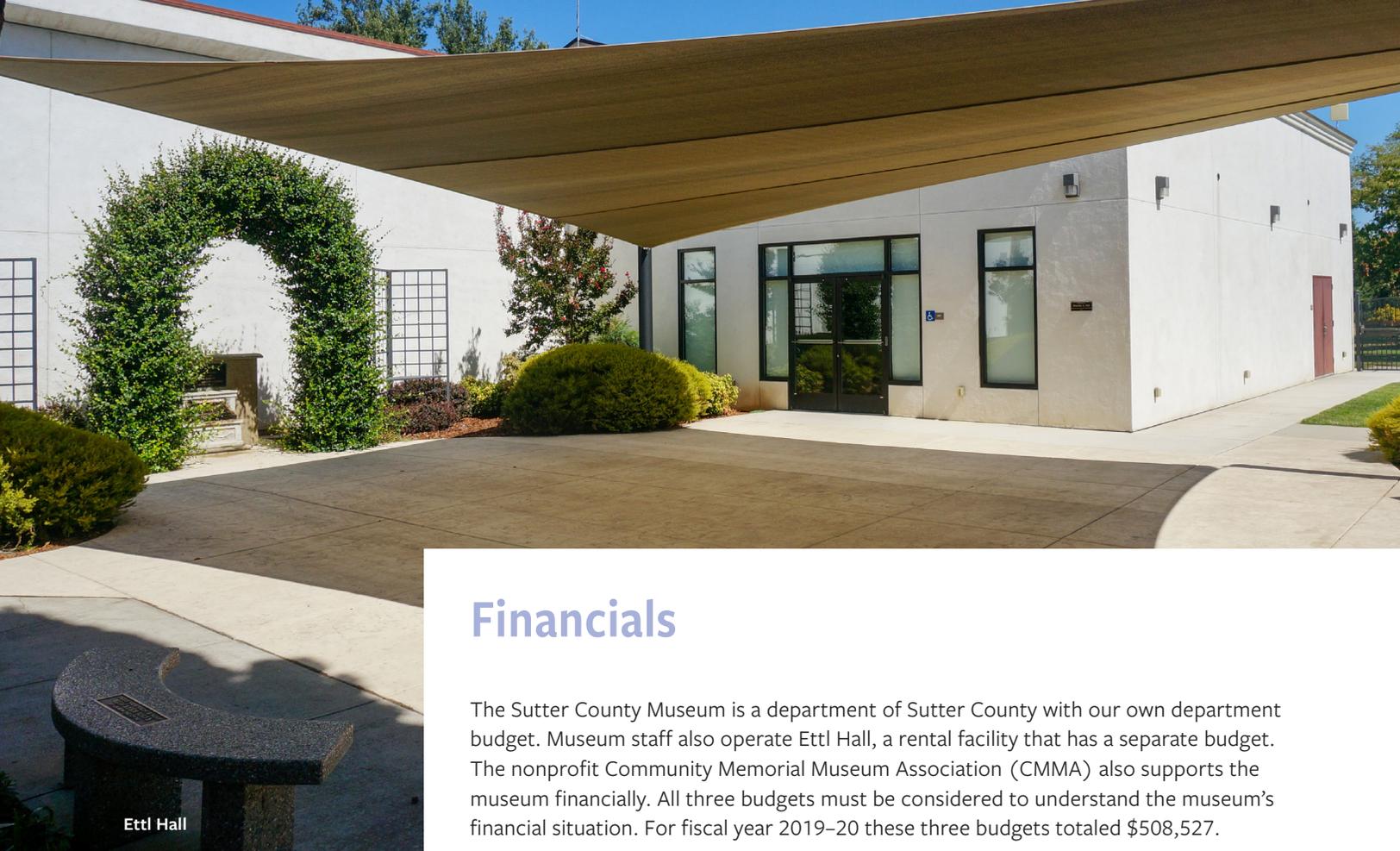
Volunteers

Our volunteer program is vital to the success of the museum. We rely on volunteers to staff our front desk, answer the phone, make sales in the gift shop, and orient and answer basic questions from visitors. They also work on a variety of special projects, including helping with exhibit development, indexing historic records in our collection, research, and special building projects.

Over the last four years we have been extraordinarily fortunate in having interns from the MA public history program at Sacramento State University and from the BA anthropology program at California State University, Chico. Interns are given hands-on experience in every aspect of museum work, with a focus on collections work. Our interns have been instrumental in the progress we have made on our collections inventory project.



Museum volunteers, 2017



Ettl Hall

Financials

The Sutter County Museum is a department of Sutter County with our own department budget. Museum staff also operate Ettl Hall, a rental facility that has a separate budget. The nonprofit Community Memorial Museum Association (CMMA) also supports the museum financially. All three budgets must be considered to understand the museum’s financial situation. For fiscal year 2019–20 these three budgets totaled \$508,527.

The museum’s budget with Sutter County was \$303,979. This included salaries and benefits for two full-time employees and wages for one part-time employee. It also covered basic expenses such as internet and phone services and office supplies.

The budget for Ettl Hall was \$46,336 and included equipment maintenance, utilities, labor for building maintenance, and other small incidental costs.

The budget of the CMMA covers everything that makes us a museum. That includes all costs for temporary and permanent exhibits, education programs and events, marketing, merchandise in our gift shop, our Artisan Community Garden, and our certified farmers market, among other things. For fiscal year 2019–20, this budget was \$158,212.

The CMMA relies on the following income streams:

- Fundraising events and programs
- Membership dues
- Store sales
- Exhibit income (donations to support specific exhibits and the sale of art displayed in some exhibits)
- Artisan Community Garden programs and garden box rentals
- Certified farmers market stall fees
- Donations (targeted and general)

The museum does not charge for admission and there is no fee for group tours or field trips.

As has been mentioned, both the county and the CMMA have seen financial impacts due to the pandemic. More of these impacts will be shown in the fiscal year 2020–21 budgets, as we were open as normal for the first eight and a half months of FY19/20.



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Sutter County Museum



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