

Alpine History Mystery for September 2013 – Solved!

Our History Mystery story for September involved two very strong and determined women, Caroline and Sophronia. Both born in Massachusetts, they took very different courses in life but ended up in Alpine, where they served unique and fundamental roles in the growth and development of our town. Their lives seemed so very different but there was something that connected them in a way that would ultimately bring them together in this little pioneer village. What did Caroline and Sophronia have in common? They were sisters!



The Foss Family, 1890, at Tule Springs
with friend Mrs. R. G. Pennoyer (top right)

Caroline Athearn was born in 1845 and in 1870 she married Edward Foss. The Foss family moved to Alpine in 1875 to establish a beekeeping operation. They soon learned that food was too expensive for a young family so they raised their own fruits & vegetables, keeping turkeys, cows and goats as well. They called their ranch Tule Springs and here they raised their six children. Members of the Athearn family in Massachusetts were devout Christians and held a strong commitment to education. These family values no doubt influenced Carrie, for when she moved to Alpine, she established the first school in the community – a lean-to shed attached to their home. Here she also organized church services for her family and neighbors, and later

was instrumental in organizing the Alpine Community Church.



Sophonria Athearn Nichols, 1894

Sophonria, born 10 years earlier, married Joel Nichols in 1866 and they had 5 children but only 2 survived early childhood. She was the author of the “sister’s letter” to Carrie, quoted in our mystery, offering her unsolicited advice on happy families and a woman’s place in home and society. Educated as a teacher, she decided to become a physician so she could understand why 3 of her children died. After graduating from Boston University Medical School, she set up practice in Corry, Pennsylvania where she confessed to her brother that she had only a few patients. In 1875 at the urging of her brothers in San Francisco, she moved to California where she became the 26th licensed doctor in the state. She actively served many communities in Washington, Oregon and California, eventually moving to Alpine in 1894. She established Alpine’s first medical practice at her home on Tavern Road – now the home of the Alpine History Museum.

Thank you for reading and solving our Alpine History Mystery for September. You can find the complete mystery story at: www.alpinehistory.org/alpine_history_mysteries.html . At this same site, you can also enjoy mysteries from prior months. We welcome your comments and questions so please send us a note to mystery@alpinehistory.org or to Alpine Historical Society, P.O. Box 382, Alpine, CA 91903-0382.