



Pioneer Press

WEST SIDE PIONEER ASSOCIATION AND TRACY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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February 2026

President's Message

Happy Groundhog Day!! I sincerely hope everyone received the first email version of the Newsletter last month. If you know someone who didn't, let me know. Also, if someone has email that we didn't have please email the Museum and let us know—whether you wish to receive the news that way or not. Thanks!

We've had a couple classes through the Museum this past month. We have new volunteers to help with the classes and are happy to see such energy come our way. Thanks to all those who are a part of our program!!

Lammersville Historic Schoolhouse has begun its 2026 schedule. Thanks to all those who make it a great learning experience for our students. It's great, too, that we seem to be a beacon beyond our own area. Other schools in the area have asked to either visit or 'borrow' our program. Judy would be proud!

Anyone who would like to join our fearless warriors in our missions is welcome to contact us. The more the merrier!!

John McVey

209-820-5784

(new phone & #)

The Tracy Hotel

{more correctly, Charles Slack's Arlington }

~ a reprint from Sam Matthews, 2/3/2013 TP ~

In looking back at Tracy at the turn of the 20th century, I realized that Charles Slack was a resilient major figure of that era. But until recently, I didn't know just how resilient.

Slack, who came to Tracy in 1883 as a construction supervisor for the Central Pacific (later Southern Pacific) Railroad, established roots in Tracy when he married one of the three daughters of Ed Wachsmuth, who had moved his two-story Ellis Hotel to Tracy in 1878 and rechristened it the Tracy Hotel. It was located at the northeast corner of Front (Sixth) Street and Central Avenue.

Slack was operating the hotel for his father-in-law in June 1898 when it burned to the ground in the fire of 1898, a fire that leveled nearly every wooden building on Front Street and destroyed the new Odd Fellow Hall.

After the fire, Slack cleared the rubble and quickly built a new Tracy Hotel, a majestic three-story wood-frame structure that was considered Tracy's finest, complete with well-appointed rooms, a restaurant, a barber shop and stores.

Then, fire struck again. In August 1911, that building also went up in flames after a fire started and an exhaust flume leading from the hotel's kitchen to the roof. This time, the Odd Fellows Hall (now the Moose Lodge) withstood the flames.

Slack constructed the single-story brick building that still stands today and houses the El Castillo restaurant (2026-The Station).

Several months before in 1911, Slack had opened the Arlington Opera House on Front Street on the west side of Central Avenue. Next to the Fabian-Grunauer Company store— operated by his brother-in-law Abe Grunauer, Tracy's first mayor—the Arlington was a handsome three-story building with a main hall featuring a stage for all kinds of entertainment. Opera chairs on the floor could be removed and stored in the basement for dances.

When the Arlington Opera House (as the name on the front proclaimed) staged its grand opening on January 18, 1911, it included the first showing of a motion picture in Tracy. The Switchman's Union planned a grand ball late that month, and the Arlington quickly became the center of social activity and entertainment in Tracy.

What I didn't realize until recently, though, was that this building, too, burned down only two years later—in 1913.

Ellen Opie, the indefatigable historical researcher at the Tracy Historical Museum, pointed that out at her carefully documented, illustrated talk before the West Side Pioneer Association about what Tracy businesses were in operation a century ago.

I checked the Press files and sure enough, the original Arlington burned during the night of July 9, 1913. The fire, which was believed to have started in a livery stable, took the Arlington and several other small structures. I can only imagine Charles Slack standing in the rubble of the gutted Arlington Opera House, thinking that after the fires of 1898 and 1911, it was déjà vu all over again.

But again, Slack was resilient. Within a week after the fire, he told Tracy Press publisher Henry Hull that he would rebuild the Arlington in the same architectural style as the original. Slack told Hull that the development of irrigation in the Tracy area—the Naglee-Burk district was formed in 1912, a campaign to establish what became the West Side Irrigation District was being organized—would mean Tracy would grow and the demand for a hall and theater would increase. Slack noted that the acoustics in the new Arlington would be greatly improved.

In September, the local construction firm of Schmidt & von Sosten started work on the new Arlington using the same plans—with several modifications to improve acoustics. By the end of 1913, the Arlington was back in business.

The brick structure, this time with the name “Arlington Theatre” on its façade, served as Tracy’s movie house until the Grand Theatre was constructed on Central Avenue in 1923. The Arlington was still used for dances and meetings but later was abandoned, while a barber shop and other stores remained open on Sixth Street.

On the morning of October 25, 1966, the Arlington building finally met its demise—it was gutted by fire. Transients, who had broken into the vacant portion of the building, were believed to have been the cause.

I was there that morning when Captain John Eagan and other firefighters fought the blaze, but the building was a loss and the remaining brick walls were later torn down—although what had originally been the Fabian-Grunauer building next door was saved. This time Charles Slack was no longer around. His family, along with the Grunauers, had moved to San Francisco in the 1920s, and he had died.

In 1937, though the Slack family made another impact on Tracy when it donated the 10 1/2 acres of land on the south side of Eaton Avenue between Holly Drive and East Street to the city for a park. The city had only to pay back taxes to acquire the property.

What became Lincoln Park probably, in retrospect, should have been named Slack Park, giving due recognition to the contributions of the resilient Charles A. Slack and his family to Tracy.

Thank you to renewing members ~

Dennis Maddix Ron Reynon John Dias
Carla/Marty Woodward Donna/Richard Spence
John McVey

We have recently been gifted with a fire outfit
belonging to Captain/Assistant Chief
Darrold Schwartz.

We hope to have it displayed later this year.

We also just received a tub of photos and
papers from the James French estate.

Teachers, growth plans, and more!

We will be working on getting those into
viewable order.

We still have other donations to archive, too.

West Side Pioneer Association Board of Directors
for 2025 ~ 2026

* President	John McVey
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Immediate Past President ~ ~ OPEN ~

West Side Pioneer Association Membership Application

The West Side Pioneer Association of Tracy, Inc., operates the Tracy Historical Museum and TAGS, working to document and preserve Tracy's history—including such projects as the Historic Lammersville Schoolhouse and Historic Landmarks in and around Tracy. If you would like to join the WSPA and the THM, or make a donation to our historical preservation efforts, please fill out the form below and return it to the address below. Membership also allows members to use the Tracy Area Genealogical Society, a part of WSPA. Members receive our periodic newsletter. We also provide for memorial donations for remembrance of loved ones. Should you have questions or comments, please contact us.

NAME: _____ PHONE # : _____ EMAIL: _____

ADDRESS: _____ CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

**** Please make checks out to West Side Pioneer Association. Return to WSPA, P.O. Box 117, Tracy, CA 95378**

Please circle the type of membership you are selecting. Thank You very much!!

ANNUAL DUES—

ADULT—\$15	COUPLE—\$25	STUDENT—\$5	ORGANIZATION-/COMMERCIAL—\$50	SUPPORTER—\$100
SPONSOR—\$150	LIFETIME MEMBER—\$200 (individual)	PATRON—\$300		
SUSTAINER—\$1000	BENEFACTOR—\$1500			

The Pioneer Press
West Side Pioneer Association
Tracy Historical Museum
P.O. Box 117
Tracy, California 95378
Tracy, CA 95378-0117



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Coming Events

Mon. Feb 2	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2pm
Sat. Feb 7	Tracy Museum Open	11 am—2pm
Sun. Feb 8	2nd Sunday @ TAGS	1– 5 pm
Mon. Feb 9	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—1 pm
* Mon. Feb 9	*** Board of directors Meeting ***	1 pm *
Sat. Feb 14	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2 pm
	Valentine's Day	Luv ya all!
Mon. Feb 16	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—2 pm
Sat. Feb 21	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2 pm
Mon. Feb 23	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—2 pm
Sat. Feb 28	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2 pm

**** Mondays when school is in session ~ 3rd grade tours at the Museum 9-11:30 am* ***