



Pioneer Press

WEST SIDE PIONEER ASSOCIATION AND TRACY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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VOI 37-5

May 2026

President's Message

Welcome to another Spring month. We get May Day (does anyone remember taking May baskets to friends?), Mother's Day (whether here or a memory), and Memorial Day (though it's rarely on the 'actual' end of May!

We will see the last 3rd grade tours of this school year, and the windup for the Historic Lammersville Schoolhouse by the end of the month. A **huge thank** you to all our volunteers and members who have made both programs so successful for another year!!

We will be looking to changing some displays in early June, so if anyone has a few hours or days to join us in our attempt to keep the Museum current and interesting, please contact anyone on the Board or leave a voice mail or email. I'll have a better sense of timing by the end of May. Thanks!!

Anyone who would like to join our fearless warriors in any of our missions is welcome to contact us. The more the merrier!! And as always, I welcome any ideas for display or historical facts for the newsletter.

John McVey

209-820-5784

{new phone & #}



***THM/WSPA 2026
Scholarship
Winner***

This year's recipient of our \$500 scholarship is Armando Martin. His submission was *Holly Sugar: A Sweet Run*. Armando includes several facts about the plant we hadn't come across, and his inclusion of family highlights in relation to "the mill" gave his paper a personal touch often not a part of these papers.

Armando will graduate from Merrill F. West High School the end of the month. He plans to continue his education at either UC Santa Barbara or UC San Diego, with plans to pursue an advanced degree in engineering/physics.

We wish him much success in his future educational endeavors!

. (...and yes he is the brother to last year's winner...)



Read his essay on the following pages...

Holly Sugar: A Sweet Run

My Mom: “Here Armando, try this.” My reply: “Is it sweet? I like sweet.” You see as a toddler, I was a very picky eater and would only eat things that were sweet. Although I have no recollection of saying this it has become a family anecdote, a funny story about which my dad and I bond, especially every time we pass by the Holly Sugar Factory Silos. Being reminded of my love of sugary treats as I listen to my father recounting the history of the plant, has offered me an opportunity to learn about the impact of Holly Sugar to both Tracy as a whole and my family in particular. Intrigued, I wanted to learn more.

I discovered that the Holly Sugar Factory was first established in 1917 when East Coast and British investors needed granulated sugar to compensate for the lack of sugar production due to World War I. Originally named the Pacific Sugar Company, the mill changed hands several times, and eventually was purchased by Holly Sugar Corporation. Now the street leading to the mill is named Holly Drive.

The plant was nicknamed the “sugar mill” by the people of Tracy in 1926. It is marked by four concrete silos, with one spelling out “Holly Sugar” and displaying the recognizable logo above it. The silos are iconic in Tracy, towering above 186 feet, they are visible for miles and are a familiar and welcome sight from I-205. The silos, part of several incremental improvements made to the plant, took a week to complete, with construction ending on May 2, 1973. Aside from costing a million dollars, another impressive fact about the silos is that they were built from a continuous pouring of 3,156 yards of concrete. Three 45-man shifts were required by the contractor, as well as five iron workers on two shifts.

For decades the mill employed as many as 300 workers annually during the peak of the season and then dropped down to 100-150 workers full time for the remainder of the year. At its peak, Holly Sugar was one of the major industrial employers in the area.

The mill was also known for the bad smell that washed over Tracy when winds blew the right way. The smell came from processing sugar beets, not the sugar itself. The primary source of the smell came from beet pulp, a byproduct of the refining process which emitted hydrogen sulfide and VOC's as it decomposed

Unfortunately, the “sugar mill” stopped refining sugar in 2000 and continued operating as a packaging and shipping facility until all operation ceased in 2009. Key reasons for this included a declining sugar beet industry in the late 1900’s leading to reduced sugar beet acreage, especially in California. Consolidation and mergers left one company owning all the beet processing plants in California. After these mergers, the company didn’t need as many plants. Tracy being less competitive compared to other facilities was targeted for closer.

Although the mill still stands, the property is undergoing redevelopment as of late and will host many different uses. Tracy Renewable Energy has set up operations. They are working on several programs for clean –energy development, including a 5-megawatt power plant which turns walnut shells into electricity. On top of this, they are constructing a desalination plant for city wastewater. Another notable development on the old Holly Sugar property is the company: Heirloom Carbon Technologies which built the first commercial direct air capture (DAC) facility in the U.S. which opened in November 2023. Total redevelopment of the property is unlikely to occur soon due to Environmental concerns arising from the plant’s past operations and the cost of demolishing the silos.

Holly Sugar holds many memories for my family and me. My Grandfather Martin supported his family farming sugar beets for the Mill in the 70’s. My dad and grandmother are owner so Martin Farms, and at Holly Sugar’s peak, they grew 1500 acres of sugar beets for them. In fact, my dad delivered the final truck load of sugar beets to them, marking the end of an era for “The Mill”, Tracy, and my family.

One thing I pray will stand the test of time are the ‘skyscrapers,’ or silos, on the old Holly Sugar Mill property. The Tracy silos are still used as informal visual checkpoints by pilots, and the red light above serves as an obstacle warning for aircraft at night. They are daily reminders of time I spend with my dad and serve as beacons while driving at night to tell me I’m close to home.

West Side Pioneer Association Board of Directors
for 2025 ~ 2026

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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

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Coming Events

Sat. May 2	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2pm
Mon. May 4	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—1 pm
Sat. May 9	Tracy Museum Open	10 am —2 pm
Sun. May 10	2nd Sunday @ TAGS	1 — 5 pm
Mon. May 11	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—1 pm
* Mon. May 11	*** Board of directors Meeting ***	1 pm *
Sat. May 16	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2 pm
Mon. May 18	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—2 pm
Sat. May 23	Tracy Museum Open	10 am—2 pm
Mon. May 30	Tracy Museum Open	11:30 am—2 pm

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