FALL-WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER

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Friends of the Eastern California Museum

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CURATOR'S CORNER

"WE WERE ALL DOWN TO RR DAY ...the wind was blowing something terrible!"

by Jennifer Duncan

In my ongoing search for the historical evidence of an 1860's pioneer community, seven (7) miles south of the town of Independence, known as Thebe (formerly George's Creek) I acquired a November 7, 1910 original postcard. This postcard had the Thebe postmark and was sent by a young girl by the name of Sophie Albers. My prior search of the Eastern California Museum (ECM) extensive family history files provided the early pioneer family names and information. The Albers family lived in Thebe along with several other notable families, such as McGovern, Glade, Strohmeyer, and Kispert. Beginning in 2016, with the help of the ECM staff and with over 100 hours of research, including the Oral Histories and photos, I was able to get historical proof of the community of Thebe.

(continued on page 2)

FROM:
SOPHIE ALBERS
(THEBE, CA)

ADDRESSED TO:
ANGIE MCGOVERN
PIG [SIC] PINE,
INYO COUNTY, CAL.

SCRIPT: "DEAR ANGIE, I RECEIVED YOUR MOST WELCOMED LETTER ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO HOW ARE YOU HOW DO YOU LIKE TO GO TO PIG PINE SCHOOL DO YOU SEE MARY VERY OFTEN I EXCEPT YOU ARE PROUD OF YOUR LITTLE BROTHER WE WERE ALL DOWN RR DAY AND HAD A BEAUTIFUL TIME THE WIND WAS BLOWING SOMETHING TERRIBLE WHEN YOU COME HOME DON'T FORGET TO COME OVER WE ARE GOING OVER TO SEE YOUR MOTHER AS SOON AS WE CAN
[SIGNED] SOPHIE ALBERS."

RR Day, continued from cover

Back to this story, "What is RR Day"? Considering the best way to present the information I set forth the November 7, 1910 Thebe postcard information and will follow with the answer to the primary question.

First, the author of the Postcard, Sophie Albers, was the eldest daughter of Frederick and Anna (nee: Strohmeyer) Albers. Sophie was born in Thebe, CA in May, 1892 and thus was 18 years of age when she sent this missive. The Albers ranch was north of the McGovern ranch.

Second: the recipient was Angeline ("Angie") McGovern, who at that time living in Big Pine, CA. Angie was the third child out of 10 children belonging to Augustus and Anna (nee: Kispert) McGovern. Angie was born in 1894 at Thebe, CA and would have been about 16 years of age at the time of receiving the Postcard. Please note: Angie McGovern would later marry A.A. Brierly.

Focusing on the "RR DAY" reference, ECM Curator, Heather Todd, and I were able to narrow the period of time of the "Event" towards the end of October 1910. (two weeks prior to the date of the postcard). Utilizing the California Newspapers research tool she was able to pull up the Newspaper Article entitled, "Railroad Day A Great Success- The Completion of A Transcontinental Railroad Into Inyo County Fittingly Celebrated By The People of Owens Valley at Lone Pine—Driving of Silver Spike Marks Greatest Event In History of Valley". (Inyo Independent, Volume XLII, Number 21, 21 October 1910). The article went on to state "Railroad Day," the day (October 18, 1910) the people of Owens Valley looked forward to for years; the day the last spike would be driven connecting this Valley to the South by railroad, the day that means more to the Valley than any other day in its history, was fittingly celebrated in Lone Pine. This railroad action at the Owenyo Station, East of Lone Pine, connected the Narrow-Gauge train from the North to the Broad Gauge to the South which was a huge feat. For those like me who knew little about "gauges and trains" it turns out it was so important to the Valley's ability to transport goods, such as apples from Manzanar, to the southern markets! From sunrise that 18th day, in October, of 1910, to sunset there were peoples from around the state who attended as the Silver Spike being driven into the rails.

Dignitaries from Inyo Good Road Club, the General Superintendent of the Southern Pacific Railroad, H.V. Platt, along with the Inyo County District Attorney, Frank C. Scherrer who delivered the address of welcome. School children and the Angelenos and Valley residents started with a sunrise Flag raising, music by the Third Regiment Band of Los Angeles throughout the day and the dance that evening.

So, now you know that 114 years ago there was a "RR DAY" in the Owens Valley on October 18, 1910.

Jennifer Duncan has been an Independence resident since 1975. She is a former business owner and retired legal advocate who serves on the Friends of the Eastern California Museum Board of Trustees and has enjoyed being an amateur historian these past few years. This work was supported by several "old-timers" to Independence and the Valley as well as the professional and supportive services of the staff of the Eastern California Museum.

"RAILROAD DAY" A GREAT SUCCESS

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
A NEWSPAPER CLIPPING PROCLAIMS THE SUCCESS OF RAILROAD DAYS;
A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SILVER SPIKE; AND
THE SILVER SPIKE IS DRIVEN INTO THE RAILS

If I Am Not on The Job, You Can Find Me at the Aqueduct: The Alabama Gates Occupation (Part I)

by Mike Sherk

November 2024 marked the 100th anniversary of the occupation at the Alabama Gates, a symbolic protest where Owens Valley residents diverted water from the Los Angeles Aqueduct for four days.

The LA Aqueduct opened in 1913, and by 1924 it had forever changed many aspects of Inyo County. Frustrations of Owens Valley residents had come to a head following years of "continued delays and broken promises" from LA during protracted negotiations regarding water and land rights, making property ownership, farming, and ranching in the area increasingly difficult. LA had little incentive to compromise, as both federal and state governments opted not to intervene.

At 8am on the morning of Sunday, November 16, 1924, a caravan of over 60 men in Model T cars began the 50-mile drive south from Bishop to the Alabama Gates, located along the LA Aqueduct a few miles north of Lone Pine. The identities of most participants remain unknown, although businessmen, farmers, and WW1 veterans were present. Those cited in newspaper reports as the occupation's de facto leaders included Karl Keough ("president of the Owens Valley Ditch Company,"); local newspaper publisher Harry Glasscock; and Mark Watterson, co-owner of the Inyo County Bank. Mark's brother and business partner Wilfred Watterson acted as a representative for valley residents in negotiations with LA.

The group arrived at the Alabama Gates about 10am and were soon met by the facility's longtime caretaker Frank Lasky. Lasky was born at Bishop in 1882 and had worked for Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) since 1909. The occupiers ignored Lasky's opposition, and no force was used against him as they took control of the structure. The group then raised an American flag above the gatehouse and posed for a photograph next to the full aqueduct.

Once inside the gatehouse, occupiers turned the large wheels which opened the floodgates, diverting water from the aqueduct, spilling it onto the valley floor, and stopping the flow to Los Angeles. A former DWP employee was recruited to open the gates and removed "the assorted handles and levers with which normal operation could be restored."

CARS PARKED NEAR THE ALABAMA GATES DURING THE OCCUPATION, NOVEMBER 1924.

Barbed wire was strewn around the structure, indicating preparation for a long siege. Lasky called DWP supervisors Ed Leahy and Claude Van Norman for backup, but their appearance did not deter protesters. When Leahey approached the gatehouse, he was cordially offered a cup of coffee, but occupiers told him: "You can tell [DWP attorney William B.] Mathews and [DWP head William] Mulholland that we're going to stay here till they settle with us." The protestors stated they would relinquish control only if provided with immediate concessions from Los Angeles, or if at least "50 state militiamen in uniform" were brought in.

Inyo County Sheriff Charles Collins saw the Bishop party pass through Independence on their way south. He soon appeared at the gates, but his weak attempt to disperse the occupiers was "cheerfully ignored." When Collins began writing down the identities of those present, "they gathered around the lawman, shouting out their names and making sure he spelled them right," with one calling: "Don't forget to put me down, Charley." The sheriff later returned with a stack of John Doe warrants, and the men gleefully grabbed for them. Collins cabled Governor Friend Richardson to send in state troopers, but the request was denied.

Curator's Corner

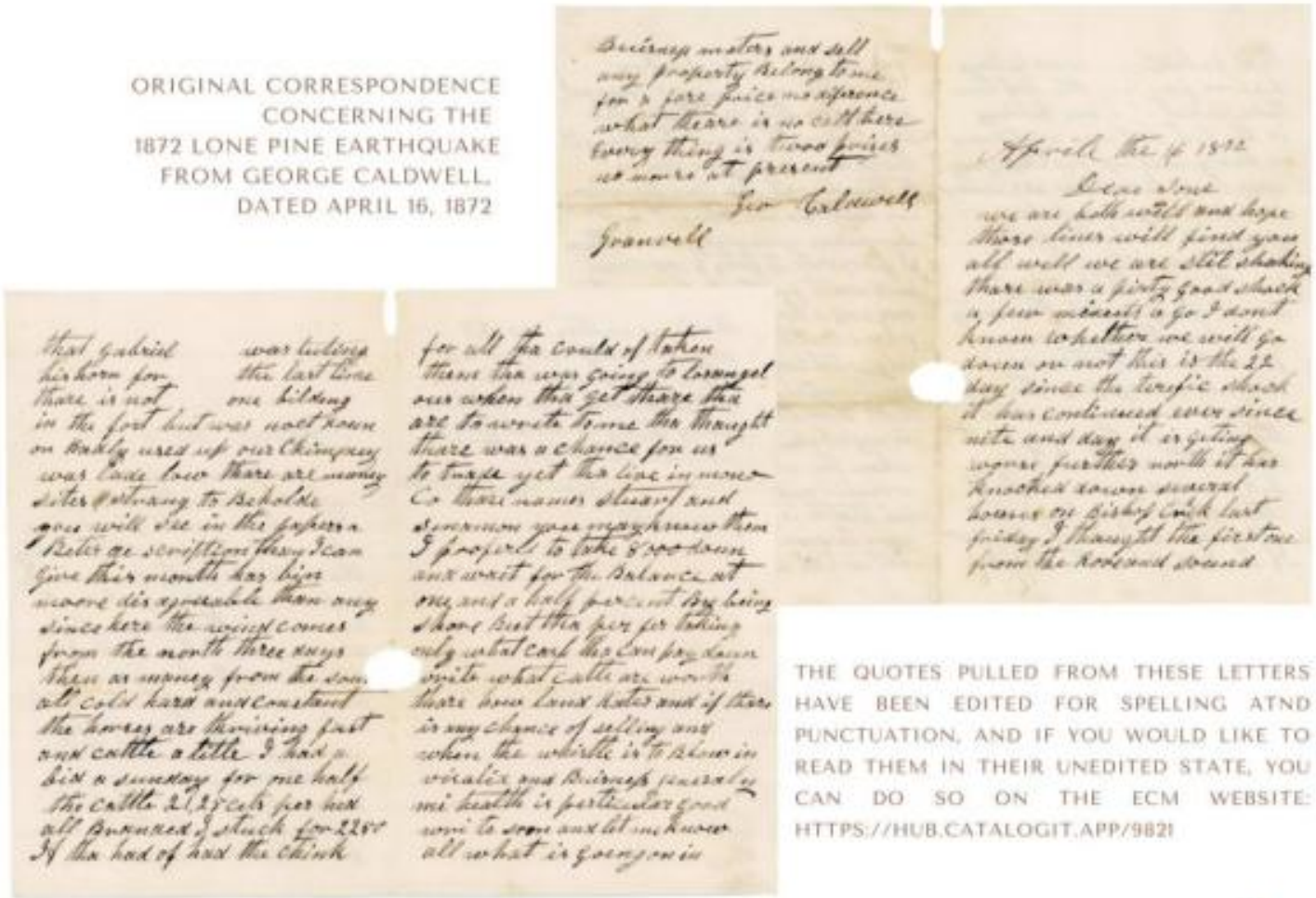
by Heather Todd

One of the highlights of working at the Eastern California Museum is the excitement of receiving new donations. Our most recent donation came to us courtesy of Mr. John Crenshaw, who sent three letters written in the months after the 1872 Owens Valley earthquake. The author of these letters was George Caldwell, a farmer from Visalia, who was in the Owens Valley selling cattle and horses, possibly with his two oldest sons, Granville and Jasper. The letters appear to be addressed to his younger sons, DeHart and George Marion Caldwell.

The first two letters were written in April, and they both open with remarks about the ensuing aftershocks that plagued the region after the initial massive earthquake that occurred at 2:30 AM on March 26, 1872. On April 16, George wrote:

"We are still shaking. There was a pretty good shake a few minutes ago. I don't know whether we will go down or not. This is the 22nd day since the terrific shake. It has continued ever since, night and day. It is getting worse further north. It has knocked down several houses on Bishop Creek last Friday. I thought the first one from the roar and sound that Gabriel was tooting his horn for the last time. There is not one building in the Fort but was knocked down or badly used up. Our chimney was laid low. There are many sites strange to behold. You will see in the papers a better description than I can give."

ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THE 1872 LONE PINE EARTHQUAKE FROM GEORGE CALDWELL, DATED APRIL 16, 1872



THE QUOTES PULLED FROM THESE LETTERS HAVE BEEN EDITED FOR SPELLING ATND PUNCTUATION, AND IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ THEM IN THEIR UNEDITED STATE, YOU CAN DO SO ON THE ECM WEBSITE: HTTPS://HUB.CATALOGIT.APP/9821

FECM Events and Field Trips

PAST EVENTS

Alabama Gates 2024 Opening Reception, November 15

A big THANK YOU to everyone who attended the opening reception at the Eastern California Museum for the Alabama Gates 2024 celebration! What a wonderful time everyone had. . .catching up with old friends, exploring the Museum exhibits and collections, as well as supporting the Museum through book and gift purchases in the outstanding ECM Bookstore. By the end of the evening, visitors and locals alike were eagerly awaiting the upcoming weekend events!

Our gratitude also goes out to the Eastern California Museum staff, Museum Administrator, Shawn Lum, Curator, Heather Todd and Museum Assistant, Kelly Bahr for their ongoing dedication and passion for all things ECM, and their much appreciated support of the Friends of the Eastern California Museum.

The Alabama Gates 2024 was produced by There It Is--Take It!, in partnership with Sierra Forever (formerly ESIA). The program was supported by a 2024 Humanities for All Quick Grant through California Humanities.

In closing, the Friends of the Eastern California Museum would like to acknowledge the Schlinger Family Foundation for its ongoing support of FECM and its educational events and programs.

THE ALABAMA GATES PRE-RECEPTION AT ECM WAS AN INFORMATIVE AND FUN EVENT

UPCOMING EVENTS

..Save the date and mark your calendars!

Friends of the Eastern California Museum Annual Membership Meeting & Dinner

Saturday, March 15, 2025
4:30 Social Hour
5:00 Meeting/Dinner/Guest Speaker

Carson & Colorado Railroad/ ECM Appreciation Day
April 11,12, 13 (Friday-Sunday)

Come Celebrate #18, Slim Princess and the Eastern California Museum
More information coming!

NEW/RENEWED MEMBERSHIPS, DONATIONS, AND FOUNDER'S PATIO PAVING STONE ORDERS

RECEIVED BETWEEN 10/1/2024 AND 12/25/2024

BENEFACTOR:
GAYLE CREASMAN

SUSTAINING:
FAR WESTERN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH GROUP
YVONNE KATZENSTEIN

PATRON:
WILLIAM APT

CONTRIBUTING:
G. IKE FUJIWARA, RUTH KATZIN, JON KLUSMIRE,
SAM MILLER, HUGH SMITH, KAY WILSON

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STEVE & NANCI ADLER, LINDA & ROBERT ALLEBAUGH,
GREG & LORI HUMPHREY, DENNIS KRUSKA, MARK & BARB O'CONNOR,
DONALD & DEANNA SMITH, DALE & BRIAN SMOLKE,
GIL LARIMORE & LIZ TOTON

INDIVIDUAL:
KATHY BANCROFT, JEANNIE KALIVODA, PAUL KRYLOFF, SEAN LANGEVIN,
GEORGE MADRID, NANCY MULEADY-MECHAM, LAWRENCE MEEKER, KEN ZINNS

ADDITIONAL DONATIONS:
GAYLE CREASMAN
GREG & LORI HUMPHREY
ERIKA LAUFFER: IN MEMORY OF DALE INKLEY
ELLIE & DICK MANSFIELD
MCGUIRK FAMILY FUND
ANDREW STEVENSON & LIBERTY MUTUAL
LAURA FRANK & ERIC WIER

MANY THANKS TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

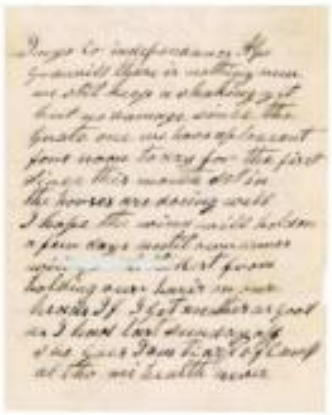
Curator's Corner, continued from page 6

In an undated letter from the same month, he wrote: "We still keep a shaking yet, but no damage since the great one. We have a pleasant forenoon today for the first since this month set in."

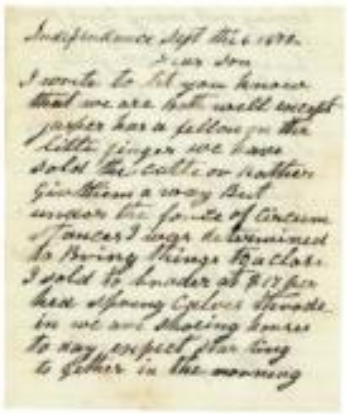
Aside from the tremors, Mr. Caldwell was also beleaguered by the constant wind during the month of April, of which he says: "This month has been more disagreeable than any since here the wind comes from the north three days then as many from the south, all cold, hard, and constant." In a separate letter he appears to have developed a good sense of humor about it and writes: "I hope the wind will hold on a few days until our arms [get a] little rest from holding our hair on our heads. If I get another as good as I had last Sunday, off she goes!"

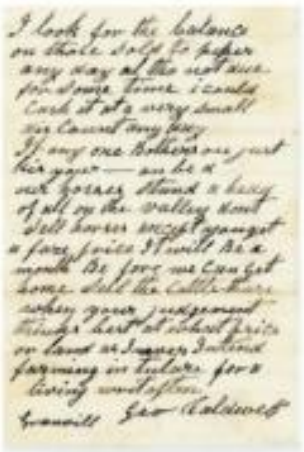
Much of the contents of these letters is taken up with George's business dealings and the health of his stock. He names a few people with whom he does business, including Stuart and Sinamon [Simon?] of Mono County, as well as Broder and Piper. Given more time and research, perhaps we will be able to confirm who these people are.

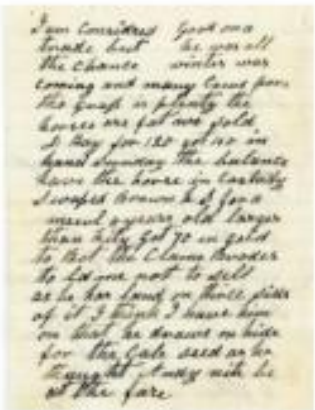
It appears that Mr. Caldwell left the Owens Valley in the fall of 1872. In a September 6th letter he wrote, "We have sold the cattle, or rather, given them away. But under the force of circumstances I was determined to bring things to a close... It will be a month before we can get home." In reviewing U.S. Census records and Voter Registration records, it does not appear that this branch of the Caldwell family ever settled in Inyo County, and the majority of their family are buried in the Visalia Public Cemetery. George himself passed away less than a decade later in 1881 at the age of 73.



UNDATED LETTER, POST-1872 EARTHQUAKE, FROM GEORGE CALDWELL







GEORGE CALDWELL'S SEPTEMBER 6, 1872 LETTER CONCERNING CATTLE SALES

Aqueduct, continued from page 3

DWP head William Mulholland—inspecting the San Francisquito Dam project at the time—was "apoplectic" when told the Owens Valley news. DWP soon sent two carloads of detectives toward the scene, but Sheriff Collins scared them off south of Lone Pine, warning: "If you go up there and start any trouble, not one of you'll get back to tell the tale." Although participants were reported as unarmed, photos show Winchester rifle boxes being used as tables during the occupation.

Within a few hours, hundreds had gathered to watch the scene unfold at the Alabama Gates. Los Angeles reporters arrived by evening, and they were welcomed to sleep among the forty men keeping overnight watch. By Monday, the aqueduct south of the Alabama Gates had run dry. Though it was reported that "the open gates are costing the city $10,000 a day," engineers estimated LA's water supply wouldn't be compromised unless the aqueduct remained diverted for at least three months.

Soon, a large, elaborate hand-painted sign appeared in the middle of Bishop's main intersection, declaring where everyone had gone: "If I am not on the job, you can find me at the Aqueduct."

[The conclusion of this story will be featured in an upcoming issue. An extended version with footnotes is available at the ECM.]

NOTICE OF PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE OCTOBER 2022 FECM BY-LAWS

The revisions to the 22 October 2022 FECM by-laws address the following:

1. The elimination of the Membership Coordinator position, Article 9. Section 9.1 andSection 9.8. Upon the elimination of the Membership Coordinator, a Membership Committee will be established.
2. The removal of the board resolution requirement which sets the number of board members at 9, 11, or 13 members, Article 7, Section 7.2.

REVISIONS TO THE FECM BY-LAWS MUST BE APPROVED BY THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP. IF YOUR FECM MEMBERSHIP IS CURRENT, YOUR BALLOT WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ANNUAL RENEWAL PACKET WHICH WILL BE MAILED IN THE LATTER PART OF JANUARY.

FRIENDS OF THE EASTERN CALIFORNIA MUSEUM FOUNDER'S PATIO PAVER ORDER FORM

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Yes, I would like to order a paving stone for the Eastern California Museum's Patio in the amount of:

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Please write your desired paving stone inscription in this space:

THE EASTERN CALIFORNIA MUSEUM RESERVES THE RIGHT OF APPROVAL FOR ALL PROPOSED INSCRIPTIONS.

DONOR NAME(S) _____ **DATE** _____

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Please return this form with your payment to:
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Alternately, you can order and pay online at www.fecm.org, under the Suppoort Us tab or scan the QR code below.

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE EASTERN CALIFORNIA MUSEUM!

The Friends of the Eastern California Museum work to promote, preserve, and protect the important collections and memories that make up Inyo County's only regional museum. The Friends raise funds and contribute time and work to help maintain and improve the Museum's buildings and grounds. We support special exhibits and arrange for speakers who come from far and near. We have partnered with the Carson and Colorado group to display and promote the restored Slim Princess steam engine. We also provide funds to maintain the Museum's collections and enhance its permanent exhibits. Every March we hold our Annual Meeting, with a potluck dinner, silent auction, and guest speaker. We invite you to join with us to support the Museum. FECM is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Members receive a newsletter, email invitations to special events, programs, and field trips, and a 10% discount at the Museum Bookstore.

NAME _____ EMAIL _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ DATE _____

Do you prefer to receive the newsletter and announcements by email or mail? Please choose one.

___ Email ___ U.S. Mail

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS:

___ Individual- $25 ___ Family- $40 ___ Contributing- $100 ___ Supporting- $150 ___ Business/Organization- $150
___ Patron- $250 ___ Sustaining- $500 ___ Benefactor- $1000

Enclosed is my payment of $_____. Make checks payable to FECM and mail to us at PO Box 33, Independence, CA 93525.
Alternately, you may pay membership dues online by selecting the Membership tab at www.fecm.org or use the QR Code on p. 7!

FRIENDS OF THE
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED