

Paper Mache for 9-11-26 by David Read

Every once in a while, someone asks why our arts organization is involved in local history. It's a fair question. Aren't we supposed to be putting on concerts, hanging paintings, producing plays, teaching art classes and generally encouraging people to sing, dance, paint, act and do beautiful things? Well, yes. But there's that other word in our name: culture.

We are Yuba Sutter Arts & Culture, and culture is an enormous umbrella. It includes art and music, certainly, but also food, architecture, traditions, celebrations, language, neighborhoods, family stories and the places where important things happened. Culture is what a community creates, inherits, remembers and passes along, which makes history very much our business.

That's why we have developed close relationships with organizations dedicated to preserving and sharing our region's history. I am an appointed member of the Yuba County Historic Resources Commission, and YSAC serves as its fiscal sponsor. That sounds terribly bureaucratic, but it is actually pretty important. The Commission is made up of volunteers who care deeply about Yuba County history. By providing an organizational and financial umbrella, we can help the Commission receive funding, undertake projects and create programs that might otherwise be difficult for an all-volunteer organization to manage. We also provide meeting space, venues for lectures and presentations, along with marketing support. It's a pretty good partnership.

One example is the upcoming Dannebrouge Mine Tour in Browns Valley. The mine dates to the mid-1850s and was part of the hard-rock quartz mining industry that followed the first frenzy of placer mining during the Gold Rush. There is something very different about standing at an actual mine site and imagining the people who worked there generations ago. Suddenly history isn't a chapter in a book. It's a place.

The same idea is behind our participation in Doors Open California, a statewide program of the California Preservation Foundation. This year, Yuba County's featured locations include the historic Packard Library in Marysville and the Arboga Assembly Center, two places with very different stories but equally important connections to our past.

And this is where history and art begin to overlap. An historic building is architecture. An old photograph is visual art and documentation. A diary is

literature. A traditional song is music. A quilt can be both craft and historical record. A mural can tell the story of a neighborhood. Theater can bring historical characters back to life. Even an old neon sign can tell us something about who we were and how our communities once looked. History isn't just a collection of dates. It's storytelling. And storytelling is one of the oldest art forms humans have.

Yuba County has an extraordinary history that includes the indigenous Maidu people, Gold Rush settlements, agriculture, military history, Japanese American incarceration, historic architecture and generations of multi-cultural families who built lives here. Some stories are well known. Others are in danger of disappearing. We spend a lot of time in the arts talking about creating something new. But culture also requires us to protect what came before, because someday what we are doing right now will be history too. Somebody ought to leave them a good story.

And speaking of history, this week marks the 25th anniversary of September 11, 2001. I was living in Washington, D.C., that morning, sitting in my office about 30 minutes from the Pentagon and watching the unimaginable events unfold in real time. Twenty-five years later, September 11 itself has become history for a generation too young to remember it. For those of us who do remember, it remains something more immediate. Perhaps that is another reason preserving history matters. Eventually even our most vivid memories must be entrusted to others. Remembering is part of culture, too.