

April 30, 2012 | Posted by [Mike Roberts](#)

Clarksville Day bigger than ever this year



Village Life photo by Mike Roberts

You know about the ghost town of Clarksville, right? It's still standing ... barely ... just a half-mile as the crow flies east of El Dorado Hills Town Center, visible from the Bass Lake Grade on Highway 50, but hidden behind a locked gate for years.

The gate opens to the public once each year, thanks to the Clarksville Region Historical Society and local attorney Jim

Brunello, who now owns the old Tong Ranch and most of the town site.

The sixth annual Clarksville Day celebration returns Saturday, May 5. If you haven't been to Clarksville this is the time to catch a glimpse of life in the ranch community that predates El Dorado Hills by a century.

The adjacent Silva Valley interchange project, scheduled to break ground later this year, will bring the 21st century a little closer to Clarksville, likely consuming the event parking area and putting a big question mark on 2013's Clarksville Day.

Many of Clarksville's founding families — names like Tong, Kyburz, Fitch and Griggs — lived in tiny houses that still stand in the old town site. A couple appear to be one strong wind away from returning to terra firma.

Parking for the event, which runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., is off White Rock Road at Joerger Cutoff.

The Joergers are just one of the pioneer families that will be present Saturday. Descendants of ranch clans Payen, Kyburz and Walker (the ranch that became Serrano) have also confirmed and promised to bring family photo albums and exhibits that depict life in the dry Sierra foothills before the rest of us arrived.

Visitors are encouraged to stop by and greet the ranch families. Don't be shy! Ask where their kinfolk lived, what it was like and what hardships they endured. This is living history.

The first visitor to find a descendant who attended school in Clarksville and reports it to the Village Life table will get mentioned in next week's newspaper.

Presiding over this year's Clarksville resurrection is Reverend Peter Y. Cool, the itinerant Gold Rush minister reenacted by Cool resident Jerry Pozo.

The Lincoln Highway ran right through the middle of Clarksville. The nation's first coast-to-coast road was a harbinger of the automotive age, predating the more famous Route 66 by a decade.

Clarksville's "main street" is a pristine stretch of the original narrow concrete, a fact that delights members of the Lincoln Highway Association, who will return to share it's colorful past.

Arrive early for the classic car parade. Horse-drawn wagons, including a Concord stage, will shuttle visitors from the parking area on White Rock Road to the town site, a quarter-mile east.

As you enter into the town site check in and consider making a donation to the Clarksville Region Historical Society, whose volunteers put in hundreds of hours making the overgrown town safe for visitors each spring.

The stone ruins on the right date back to 1850, and spent time as both a saloon and a store, then became a Wells Fargo station until 1868, when the railroad bypassed Clarksville for Latrobe, the first of two bypasses that doomed the town; the second being Highway 50 a century later.

The house on the left is occupied by the Lester family, Clarksville's only residents. Please respect their privacy.

The shacks on the south side of the Lincoln Highway are the picturesque Griggs and Kyburz houses, both in a state of advanced decay and unsafe for interior touring, but make great screensavers.

The old flag pole and a "wing pole" mark the location of the old one-room Clarksville school, closed in the early 1950s. The Tong family purchased the school and dragged it down the road a piece, where it became the center section of the recognizable Tong barn, which will host exhibits by the local history groups.

The Sierra Nevada Mormon Pioneers return as the Mormon Battalion to regale visitors with tales of their grueling 2,000-mile march during the Mexican-American war in 1846 and 1847 as the only religion-based military unit in U.S. history.

The Mormons bring an entire encampment, replete with pioneer artifacts and a replica of the Howitzer the battalion received from John Sutter. They'll fire it at regular intervals. Stuff your fingers in your ears.

Geezer, gold miner and kid-magnet Russ Kurz returns with his old-time flume, pans and crusty persona, offering gold panning instruction. Kurtz seeds his flume with gold and emerald flakes he pulls from the American River. Junior miners can keep what they pan.

The old Mormon Tavern, razed to make way for Highway 50, was once a Pony Express station. Pony Express reenactors, 20 riders strong, will conduct remount demonstrations across from the barn throughout the day.

The historic Tong family cemetery and the larger Clarksville Cemetery, which is visible on the hilltop above the movie theater, will both be open for touring.

Coloma reenactors return with an entire working blacksmith shop. Mountain Men will demonstrate their black powder musket skills and provide hatchet throwing and bull whip demonstrations. The

“Sierra Nevada Guns for Hire” conduct their unique brand of theater with side arms throughout the day.

The Gold Country Lace Makers and Rescue Fire Department are also back.

Clarksville Day is a free family event, the kind of event that makes El Dorado Hills a great place to live. It’s made possible by sponsors The Parker Development Company, The El Dorado Hills Firefighters Association, Wilkinson Portables, Waste Connections, the El Dorado Hills CSD and Veerkamp Engineering.