



Today's technology preserves town's past

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Published 10/30/2009 - 9:40 a.m.

Today's technology is playing an important role in preserving Ramona's past.

Using a high-end scanner, David Hunsberger is digitizing about 2,500 photos from the 1800s and early 1900s of families that lived in the Ramona- to- Santa Ysabel area and in the Santa Maria Valley. The photos will be saved on a hard drive and can then be transferred to DVDs where they will be more easily accessible, and there will be no worry of deterioration, Hunsberger said.

"Photos degrade over time," he said. "Now these electronic files won't do that."

Besides easier accessibility to view the photos, another benefit to the project is that the museum will be able to make or e-mail a copy of a photo that is requested.

The project was initiated by Ken Woodward, director of the Guy B. Woodward Museum. Woodward's father, Guy, founded the museum and was instrumental in collecting many historical photos and documents.

Woodward wanted to make sure the collection would never be lost and would be available for others to view. He was aware that many major museums had been using computer technology to preserve their historical documents and photos.

It is a big project, however, and requires technical knowledge.

After talking with Charlotte and Bob Hunsberger, who are members of the Ramona Pioneer Historical Society, Woodward learned that their son, David, might be interested in volunteering his time to digitize the information.

David Hunsberger is a scientist with a degree in microbiology, but he said he is a technical person who often works with computers and even builds his own computers.

Although Hunsberger had never been involved in a project like this before, he said that after learning about it, "The project appealed to me."

To have the best photo quality, Hunsberger bought a scanner with 600 dpi (dots per inch). Then using Microsoft Excel, he set up the program so that someone could search a person's name and then find all the photos in which that person appeared.

"He constructed a database that makes it so much easier to cross-reference all of the people who appear in the pictures with their names," Woodward said of Hunsberger's work.

Judy Nachazel, president of the Ramona Pioneer Historical Society, said, "We've been wanting to do this for a long time. It's been a wonderful opportunity for us to have someone who has the ability to get the project running."

Nachazel said the museum has file cabinets full of photos of early pioneers, news, postcards, letters, documents and other items that tell the history of Ramona.

"We're trying to take care of what we have," she said.

Hunsberger said he has been working on the project for two or three months, about eight hours a week. It takes approximately five minutes to scan each large photo. He estimates he has 300 more hours of work to finish digitizing the photos.

Many of the photos contain large groups of people. Woodward said one photo shows 10 different families and had all the names on the back.

"They just had large get-togethers in Ramona," Woodward said. "Everyone knew each other."

According to Hunsberger, Woodward can recognize many faces in the pictures.

"He's just a wealth of knowledge about the archive," Hunsberger said.

Woodward does know a lot about Ramona's history. His ancestors began heading out here from Iowa in 1898. They were all farmers and dairymen who were tired of the harsh winters, he said. At that time there was a lot of publicity about Southern California, so the Woodward family, including aunts and uncles, pulled up stakes and traveled by train out to the Ramona area and went into farming.

When Guy Woodward retired in the 1970s, he began his collection of historical information. Woodward said his father tape recorded people who were in their 80s or 90s and he asked them for photographs. Families were going through their trunks to find their old photos, Woodward said.

"He always had tremendous respect for the old-timers, the pioneers," said Woodward.

His father spent so much time on this project that Woodward commented, "My mom said she never saw him from sunup to sundown."

According to Woodward, his father was a friend of the Ransom family and the heirs of Leona Ransom, per her

wishes, donated the Verlaque house for the museum.

He said his father realized the importance of saving historical information.

"He really accumulated for future generations," Woodward said of his father.

Woodward sees that the importance of learning about family history can vary by generation or even by age.

"As time goes on and as people lose contact with previous generations, people lose interest," said Woodward.

And yet, he said, there are people who ask for pictures and want to be in touch with the past.

If the intent is for the grandparents to tell their grandchildren stories and show pictures, the interest isn't there, Woodward said. But he sees those same grandchildren, as they enter their 40s and 50s, now interested in family history.

Woodward gives presentations to groups in and outside of town, and to schoolchildren.

"Once we get the pictures digitized, it will be so much easier to do a PowerPoint presentation," he said. "It's really those visuals that impact people."

Woodward added that he's thrilled by the thought that all he needs to take is a laptop to make a presentation.

Surprised at how long it takes to scan each photo, Woodward said he will be assisting Hunsberger. Once the photos are all digitized, Woodward plans to move on to the next project: scanning all the records, writings and other historical documents.