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Clara Sheldon Smith Photography at Sutter County Museum

The Community Memorial Museum of Sutter County is featuring a new exhibit spotlighting the work of early art photographer Clara Sheldon Smith. An important woman photographer working in the Sacramento Valley at the turn of the 20th century, Mrs. Smith owned a portrait studio in Marysville and also took commercial assignments in the area. Her portraits combined sensitivity with informality to reflect her very unique style, bringing out the essence of her subjects through the glass plate negative. Her artfully composed landscapes and commercial photographs are also important now from an historical perspective. Her work spans the years 1896 to 1908.

Visitors to the exhibit may see a photograph of D Street in Marysville or Bridge Street in Yuba City and recognize buildings that still exist, but the unpaved streets with trolley tracks running down them will be a jarring reminder of 100 year’s interim. Many views reveal buildings or features long gone from our daily landscape.

Clara Smith and her husband Frank pioneered moving picture theaters in our area, owning first the Novelty Theater on E Street in Marysville, and later the Liberty Theater and Lyric Theater. In 1916, they opened the Smith Theater on Plumas Street in Yuba City, very near where the Sutter Theater building is now. In the Novelty Theater, there were only benches to sit on. Clara ran the carbon arc projector, while Frank narrated the silent film, and their three daughters sold tickets, ushered and sang to piano music. A local boy provided sound effects with coconut shells or broken glass
This very special exhibit of Clara Sheldon Smith’s photographs will open with a reception on Friday, August 26 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The public is invited, and admission is free. The Community Memorial Museum of Sutter County is located at 1333 Butte House Road in Yuba City. Regular open hours are Tuesday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4:00 p.m. For more information, call the Museum at (530) 822-7141

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