

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

In Memoriam - Milt Gottardi

By Bill Copren

Milton Tyrell Gottardi, Mr. Gottardi to most of us, passed away on October 7, 2006. Mr. Gottardi was one of the founding members of the Sierra County Historical Society when it was first put together during the mid-1960's. He was Treasurer of the Society at the time of his passing. Originally the Society's publication was produced by his high school classes. The first publications were generated on the school mimeograph machine. His local history classes toured the county seat in Downieville each year and were introduced to all the elected and appointed county officials. They were each assigned a particular county department for in-depth study. Mr. Gottardi will be missed by all of us who have an interest in Sierra County's history.

Mr. Gottardi was a member of the Loyalton City council for 36 years and served as Mayor of the city for 29 of those years. His community involvement was a lifetime avocation. He was the founder and director of the Sierra Valley/



Milt Gottardi

Loyalton Museum and Historical Park located in the park and recreation area of Loyalton.

He taught history, English, foreign languages, journalism and drama at Loyalton High School for 39 years. He taught me, my children and my step-grandchild. Instructing three generations of Sierra and Plumas County families was commonplace for this long-time teacher. He organized the trips to Washington D.C. for the high school juniors, trips which visited Gettysburg, Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown. As an instructor and

motivator of young people, he was unequalled.

The people of Sierra County and, particularly the citizens of the City of Loyalton have lost an invaluable human asset.

Donations in memory of Milton are being accepted by the Sierra County Historical Society.

For our final issue for 2006 of our membership newsletter, we have chosen to go back to the beginning of the publication of a newsletter for the Sierra County Historical Society. As noted elsewhere in this bulletin, we have lost a board member who was the driving force in producing the bulletins, Milton Gottardi. On April 25, 1969, the first bulletin was put into circulation by editor Milt. As a tribute to his work with the Sierra County Historical Society, we have selected from this first issue an article written by Mrs. Edna Westall Gottardi, Milton's mother, titled "Last of the Golden West, a history of the Golden West Hotel in Loyalton, California". We hope you enjoy this look back at the past. As you read

this article think of how this first publication came about, and try to picture a teacher at Loyalton High School who encouraged his students to love local history and to become involved in producing the original bulletins. Also of note, the officers were:

President - Mr. M. Stevens, Loyalton

Vice-President - Mrs. Al Nelson, Sierra City

Secretary - Mrs. J. McMahan, Sierra City

Treasurer - Mrs. G. Copren, Sierraville

The Editor Milton Gottardi, Cover by Greg Cross, Loyalton, and the Printer: Marilyn Nessler, Sierra Reproductions, Sattley.

— THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY —

The Sierra County Historical Society is an organization of people interested in preserving and promoting an appreciation of Sierra County's rich history. The Society operates a museum at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City, holds an annual meeting, publishes a newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free of charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$15.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION	\$20.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING	\$30.00
SUSTAINING	\$50.00
LIFE (per individual)	\$250.00

Please send dues to the Membership Chair:
Lynn McKechnie, PO Box 294, Sierraville, CA 96126

SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office Address:
Kentucky Mine Museum
PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125 (530) 862-1310

NEW MEMBERS OF THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bassett's Station _____	Sierra City, CA
Merrielyn Elorza _____	Reno, NV
Cora Dietrich _____	Sierra City, CA
Faris Dolgoff _____	Alleghany, CA
Anthony & Kim Folchi _____	Loyalton, CA
Robert & Mary Haggard _____	Roseville, CA
Bev Helrich _____	Stevensville, MT
Mike Hoaglund Family _____	Paradise, CA
Helen Kennedy _____	Portola, CA
William Loveridge _____	Loyalton, CA
Loyalton Pharmacy _____	Loyalton, CA
Larry McCaffrey _____	Sierraville, CA
Bob Morales _____	Sierra City, CA
Colleen Webber Nicholas _____	Sacramento, CA
Donald Schuyler _____	Gold Canyon, AZ
Theresa Smalls _____	Sacramento, CA
Moreland Stevens _____	Newcastle, CA
Underground Gold Miners Museum _____	Alleghany, CA
Eugenia Van Dalsem _____	Depoe Bay, OR

Members: Your Help Wanted!

We will be doing a calendar showing historic photos of Sierra County for a fundraiser again for 2008. This has proven to be a nice way to earn funds to support our historic projects, and we have sold out already for 2007. We are looking for your help for the 2008 calendar, do you have any historic photos you would like to see in the calendar? Please send original if you wish it to remain at the museum, or a copy if you want to keep the original, to Sierra County Historical Society, c/o Virginia Lutes, Box 145, Sierraville, CA 96126. Thanks!

"The Sierran"

We have exciting news, Judy Lawrence has volunteered to do our editor's job. Judy has printed our bulletin for a number of years, and she has done a terrific job in working with Milton Gottardi who had pulled our issues together.

We are always looking for interesting historical articles for the publication, and we would like to ask you to share your knowledge of our wonderful history.

If you are interested in writing an article for "The Sierran", you can contact Virginia at the above address, or mail to our official address, Sierra County Historical Society, PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96126.

Meet Your New Officers and Executive Board of The Sierra County Historical Society

Some faces are familiar and some new ones have joined the board. We welcome new board members Mary Nourse from Sierra City and Judy Lawrence from Sattley.

President: Bud Buczkowske, Alleghany

Vice President: Joleen Torri, Sattley

Secretary: Virginia Lutes, Sierraville

Treasurer: Bill Copren, Sattley

Board members in addition to those previously mentioned are Maren Scholberg, Sierraville; Suzi Schoensee, Sattley; and Sherrie Allen, Alleghany.

If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact any board member.

The History of the Golden West Hotel - Loyalton, California

By Edna Westall Gottardi

The main part of Loyalton, California, about 1897, was located along what was then called Summit Street. This street has since been renamed West First Street and runs from Highway 49 (Main Street) north to the High School. In 1897 the street was the principal business street and the center of town. Along it were several business houses, a few boarding houses, and a few rooming houses.

With the arrival of the Boca and Loyalton Railroad in Loyalton in 1901, and the building of the B&L station in the east section of town (close to the present Western Pacific Railroad Line) the business section of town shifted from Summit Street to this newer area.

In the summer of 1903, M.R. Olsen and A.O. Matson built a hotel in the newly developing business section of Loyalton and called it the Golden West Hotel. It contained a large kitchen, a dining room, a lobby and four bedrooms on the first floor, and sixteen rooms on the second floor. In 1905 a third story was added to the hotel. Mr. Leo Jellison, a retired saw filer living in Loyalton, remembers staying at the Golden West in 1909. At that time he paid \$.25 for his lodging for the night.

At this time, from 1903 to 1909, according to available records, there were five lumber mills operating in Loyalton, and there were about three thousand people living in or near the town.

In 1910 Mr. A. I. Medearis bought the hotel and removed the third story. It is surmised from a picture

taken in 1905 that he detached the lobby, turned it east and west and made it the Owl Pool Hall. Mr. Medearis rented the second floor rooms and used the kitchen and dining room for a grain storage. He also operated the store to the right of the hotel.

By 1915 Loyalton had fallen on bad times. Most of the mills had closed. People had moved away and many of the dwellings in the town were moved to nearby ranches in the area or even to other towns. The two remaining hotels in the town at the time were closed.



A picture of the Golden West Hotel taken circa 1905.

At this time there lived in Loyalton one Mr. Alfred Jones and his wife, Leona Jones. The Jones' had been visiting Loyalton for several years because of Mr. Jones' health. People in the town prevailed upon Mrs. Jones to reopen the Sierra Hotel when they learned that she had previously operated hotels. In the summer of 1915, Mrs. Jones and her sister, Miss Lucy Wear, opened the hotel.

History of the Golden West Hotel (Continued on Page 4) —

History of the Golden West Hotel (Continued) —

Mrs. Jones stated that their best and only customers when they first opened the hotel were an occasional drummer who wandered into Loyalton and a large group of Indians who came down into Loyalton from Indian Camp (located southwest of Loyalton behind the present Feather River Lumber Company) every noon for a plate of food. The Indians wanted their meal served in a pie tin, and they wanted to sit outside and visit among themselves as they ate. The lack of customers did not last long, however; within two years Jones and Wear, as they were known in the Loyalton Business community, (or Aunt None and Aunt Lucy as they were affectionately called by three generations of Loyaltonians) built a thriving business.

The Clover Valley Lumber Company opened at this time and many people returned to Loyalton. In the summer of 1917 Mrs. Jones and Miss Wear moved from the Sierra Hotel and reopened the Golden West Hotel, renting it from Mr. Medearis. He renovated the hotel and restored the lobby to its original place and built a parlor on the east end of the lobby.

In 1922 business was booming. The Sierra Hotel had burned and the Golden West Hotel was the only hotel in Loyalton. All available rooms in the upper stories of four surrounding business buildings were rented by Jones and Wear for their borders. In 1923 the two sisters (Mrs. Jones having been widowed in the 1918 Influenza Epidemic) built rooms over the lobby, for by this time they owned the hotel.

Mrs. Jones and Miss Wear are remembered fondly by many as Aunt None and Aunt Lucy. They were honest, upright people, and many are the people of Loyalton who remember their kindness to all, particularly to people who were down and out. Their slogan was "Good Meals and Good Bed" and many a salesman stated that he attempted to organize his trip so he could stay overnight at the Golden West.

Sunday dinner at the Golden West was a rule for many of the families of Loyalton during these years. In those days there were few automobiles and the roads into or out of Loyalton were practically impassible for five months out of the year, due to snow and Sierra Valley

mud. Some still remember the starched white tablecloths, the linen napkins and the huge quantities of food served at the Sunday night dinners at the Golden West. Thanksgiving Dinner was especially important. Home made mince meat pies were one of the great specialties of that meal, as Mrs. Jones was noted for her pastries. The rolls and other pastries of Bing Foo Gee, the Chinese cook, were always a favorite with the local people. Miss Wear took pride and delight in the gardens and lawns that surrounded the hotel, and many of her fresh vegetables appeared on the tables. During the summer months one could always find people on the large lawn playing cards, visiting, having a party or just enjoying the flowers grown by Miss Wear.

In 1936 Lucy Wear died, and in 1937, Mrs. Jones sold the hotel to Axel and Lucy Nasholm. Mrs. Nasholm was a niece of Mrs. Jones. The Nasholms carried on the same traditions of good food and clean lodgings as had the previous owners. A bar was added to the east end of the hotel, and an additional dining room was added to the north end of the building for the Loyalton Royalty Club. One of the highlights of the year during this time was the Christmas Eve Sweedish Smorgasbord served by Mr. and Mrs. Nasholm for their patrons. The Nasholms ran the hotel during the hectic years of World War II, and her dining room was always packed with people, many of whom couldn't quite make their own ration stamps for food stretch quite far enough at home. Axel's Place (bar), as well as other bars in the community, became the social centers of the so called war years. On weekends large crowds would gather to have a sociable drink and forget about the war, only to spend most of the evening discussing the war. It was reported that the Mountain people of Loyalton and surrounding areas knew how to discuss and argue the course of the war, and even more knew how to forget their troubles, in the finest traditions of the Wild West.

In November of 1955, the Nasholms sold the hotel to Messers Sidney and Adrian Westall, brothers of Mrs. Nasholm. They operated the hotel until March 1957, when Mr. Adrian Westall bought his brother's interest in the hotel.

History of the Golden West Hotel (Continued on Page 5) —

History of the Golden West Hotel (Continued) 

Mr. and Mrs. A. Westall continued to operate the hotel, but in June 1963 they closed the dining room. The Ladies Aid Society of the Community Church continued to use the Rotary Room to serve dinners for the Rotary Club until 1968. In the Fall of '68 the decision was made to demolish the hotel, except for the bar. A few remaining roomers reluctantly moved away. One such roomer had lived in the hotel for 43 years and it was his only home in Loyalton.

A public auction was held in August of 1968 of the contents of the hotel. Many people came from far and wide to attend the auction. A holiday mood seemed to pervade the auction as people vied with their friends to run the price of articles as high as possible. The Loyalton Volunteer Fire Department was to receive one half of the proceeds of the auction for its help in organizing the sale. Said one bewildered antique dealer from Reno, "These people have gone wild. Look at some of the worthless articles they are bidding up." Little did he understand the spirit of small town people. Said one lady, who paid a considerable sum for an old obsolete

book, "This book has Jones' and Wear's names in it. My daughter used to wait on the table for them. There were no finer people ever in Loyalton. I'm glad to have this as a souvenir."

And so the old hotel was stripped of its belongings, which were, in the words of the antique dealer, mostly worthless, and yet, rich in memories and traditions to many of the people of Loyalton; traditions of hard work, honesty and hospitality that one would hope will never disappear from Sierra Valley.

Notes on the Author:

Mrs. E. Gottardi, a descendant of an old pioneer family (Westall) which arrived in Sierra County in 1858, writes with a feeling of nostalgia about the old Golden West. The Jones and Wear referred to in the article were aunts of hers, and she, herself, lived at the hotel during her Senior Year at Loyalton High School. Mrs. Gottardi, after teaching and being principal at Loyalton High School for some thirty years, is retired and lives with her husband in Loyalton, California.

Bing Foo Gee**By Edna Westall Gottardi**

Nothing can be written about the Golden West Hotel without some reference being made to Bing Foo Gee, the colorful Chinese cook, who was chef at the hotel for almost 35 years.

Fortunate indeed was the Golden West when Gee answered the ad for a cook in a San Francisco paper. He arrived in Loyalton in June of 1922 on the mail sled in the midst of a wild snow storm. Little did he realize that he was to remain in the town of Loyalton for the next thirty-five years, and that he was to become a valued member of the Jones and Wear family and a personage of renown in the town.

Gee was a happy, gregarious individual. Every morning, come rain or shine, as soon as breakfast was over

and dinner well on its way, he would don a clean white apron and make his way down the north side of Main Street as far as the business houses extended, and then back up the south side of Main Street. He would stop at all the business houses, which included stores, other eating establishments, the hardware, the garage, the bank, the post office, the pool halls and the barber shop. At every establishment he would stop a while to visit. He was "getting scoop", so he said, and he really got it from his conversations and his keen observations. By noon Gee was reported to know everything that had transpired in Loyalton during the previous twenty-four hours.

Since his retirement he has lived in San Francisco.

Annual Meeting Report

September 10, 2006 - Webber Lake



The day could not have been more beautiful when around 50 members and guests invaded the Historic Webber Lake to hold our annual meeting. Our hosts, Ken and Joan Brethausser went out of their way to make our group feel welcome to this delightful spot in Sierra County. President Bud Buczkowske welcomed the membership and then asked for a moment of remembrance for the victims of 9-11. Bud asked for each individual present to introduce themselves before he noted some accomplishments for the past year. Our organization and board has a good working relationship with the county; the Forest Service permit for the Keirn-Largomarsino cabin is progressing; the Kentucky Mine Portal is being worked on with Bill Copren as the lead person.

Bud then suggested that the regular business of the organization be referred to the regular board meeting in October, when the election of officers will take place.

Kentucky Mine season report - Anne Eldred reported on the 2006 season, attendance was down. There is a new display of photos of the "over north" area. The bat study is continuing, with a new video in the museum.

"Music at the Mine" - Joleen Torri reported that attendance was up, and even though it was not a financial success, the concert series was a success in the community. The promoters for the season, Bob Morales and Karen Killebrew did a good job.

Membership report - Lynn McKechnie presented the following:

Total Membership	239
Paid Memberships	182
Life Memberships	24
Complimentary Memberships	15
New memberships this year	15

Board positions, three seats are up for renewal: Bud, Virginia, and Suzi.

It was moved and seconded to reelect these people. Passed.

Vacancy left by Woody Brooks: Mary Nourse nominated and voted in, welcome Mary.

There is a vacancy left by Milton Gottardi. Also an "alternate board member" position is vacant.

Virginia expressed for the organization a thank you to the staff at Kentucky Museum, Anne Eldred and Laurie Unland. Also thanked publicly were: Jim Connolly for many days at Kentucky Mine Museum. Jim completed the new exhibit with photos donated by Jann Garvis from her book "Roar of the Monitor", Jann also did backing on photos and assisted Anne and Jim with display. Elda Faye Ball at Sierra Valley Museum in Loyalton for research assistance for "Sierran" articles, and for selling many books and items for us. Bob Morales for work on "Music at the Mine", and for donating lodging for entertainers at Old Sierra City Hotel. Lynn McKechnie for being our membership chair. Tom Hennessy for removing, repairing, replacing flag pole and a new flag at Kentucky Mine. And to our Board of Directors for overseeing all of the many projects that our organization handles. Many hours are donated every year to keep this Historical Society a viable organization.

Meeting was adjourned.

A historical program followed the meeting. Doug Garton who was operator of Webber Lake for close to 30 years gave a review of his days at the Lake. He showed historic photos and explained that he found a pistol in a well at the property that is believed to be the murder weapon of the last murder which resulted in a hanging in Sierra County. (Follow up story on this murder is in this issue of "The Sierran". Virginia Lutes talked on some history of Doctor Webber and the resort at Webber Lake. The old hotel building was open for guests to view. The annual meeting was enjoyed in this beautiful setting. Thank you Joan and Ken, for allowing the meeting at their place of business; and Doug and Virginia for the interesting program.

Follow Up to Our Annual Meeting

Doug Garton found a revolver in a well at Webber Lake when he was manager there. The revolver came out of the well with the leather holster intact, as it dried, the leather fell apart. Doug contacted Sierra County Sheriff Lee Adams, who is also a local historian. Lee knew that the O'Neal murder weapon had never been located, so the two began a search to establish if this revolver was in fact the missing murder weapon. Doug is in possession of documents which strongly indicate that, yes, this gun is very probably the murder weapon. Doug has the weapon mounted for display at his Webber Lake Hotel apartment, and was kind enough to display it and tell of the finding and research work done to establish this as the murder weapon, at our annual meeting. The following are stories that were located concerning the murder of Mr. Woodward, and the hanging of James O'Neal.

"Daily Nevada State Journal", Reno, Nevada August 9, 1884 "Tragedy at Webber Lake"

"Constable Nash received a telegram from Truckee yesterday morning informing him that John Woodward, a dairyman at Webber Lake had been shot and killed by a young man named James O'Neal who had made his escape. Later in the day O'Neal was heard of in Dog Valley, and ere this has probably been arrested. The particulars of the tragedy could not be ascertained."

"Reno Gazette Journal", August 29, 1885 "O'Neal to Hang"

"The Supreme Court of California has affirmed the decision of the Superior Court of Sierra County, in the case of James O'Neal, convicted of the murder of John Woodward, near Webber Lake, in 1884, and the lower court has been directed to fix the day of execution."

"Downieville, Gold Town on the Yuba", by James J. Sinnott "The Hanging of O'Neal"

"On August 7th of 1884, John Woodward, - who was known also as John Woodward, was found shot to death at Webber Lake.



Artist Rendition of Webber Lake Hotel. Courtesy: Doug Garton

Suspicion attached to James O'Neal who had been working for Woodard in a dairy, and evidence was such as to justify his being charged with murder."... "Evidence during the trial indicated that O'Neal had been discharged from the employ of Woodard and that they had quarreled over the payment to O'Neal of wages for his labor, and that in the dispute Woodard was shot by a revolver which was in the possession of O'Neal. O'Neal claimed that in a scuffle, Woodard hit the revolver and that it accidentally discharged. However, other evidence developed outweighed the idea of an accidental shooting." The first trial was dismissed by the Court, the jury having failed to agree.

"In the new trial the jury rendered a Verdict of guilty in the first degree, and Judge Howe set the date...for sentencing". "F.D. Soward, an attorney of Downieville who had been appointed as counsel for O'Neal, moved to set the verdict aside and have a new trial granted. Judge Howe denied the motion and pronounced a sentence of death by hanging."

Numerous legal maneuvers by the defense delayed the execution, but in January Soward became a Judge, and was disqualified from defending O'Neal. "An appeal was made to the State Supreme Court to set aside the verdict and order a new trial, but the State Court upheld the verdict."

Follow Up to Annual Meeting (Continued on Page 8) ➤

Follow Up to Annual Meeting (Continued) ➤

It was common practice for invitations to the execution to be posted.

The following describes this invitation:

“Office of the Sheriff of Sierra County Downieville,
Nov. 21, 1885

Mr. R.H. Squires

You are respectfully invited to be present
at the official execution of

JAMES O’NEAL

Which will take place in the Jail Yard at Downieville,
Cal., on Friday, November 27th, 1885, at 2 O’Clock P.M.

S.C. STEWART
Sheriff of Sierra County”

“The Sierra County Tribune” of December 4, 1885

“He mounted the gallows with a firm step...Just before the black cap was drawn, he bade goodbye to Dr. Jump

and a few others among the spectators whom he recognized, at the same time taking his hat from his head and slinging it into the crowd. The black cap was drawn over his face, and amid the deathly stillness of those present, the bolt was drawn, and the body shot downward the six feet which had been allowed.

After the drop fell there was not a movement of a muscle visible. The neck was broken by the fall.”

“The Mountain Messenger” of November 27, 1885

“James O’Neal, who was convicted of the murder of John Woodward, will be executed in Downieville at 2 P.M. today, Strenuous efforts have been put forth to secure a commutation of the sentence, without all avail.”

“This was the last execution to be held in Downieville and in Sierra County, and it was the only time that particular gallows frame was used. The gallows for many years was stored, disassembled, in the attic of the old and original Court House, which had been erected in 1854, and which was entirely destroyed by fire in the late summer of 1947...“it was later assembled and placed on a spot at the rear of the new Court House, where it can be seen today.”