

# The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

## Political History of Nineteenth Century Sierra County - The First Decade, the 1850's - by Bill Copren

The area now embraced by Sierra County became a part of Yuba County by the Act of February 18, 1850, Dividing California into Twenty Seven Counties. As the mining region developed around Downieville, the local population began to want a county government that was closer and more responsive to their needs than that at Marysville. Communications with Marysville were difficult, and in the winter, impossible. By 1852, the population of the eastern portion of Yuba County had reached almost 5000 persons. In April of that year, the state legislature divided this region Yuba to form Sierra County.

From 1852 until May of 1855, all the governmental business of the county was transacted by the Court of Sessions. This body consisted of the County Judge and two Associate Justices, elected each year by the justices of the peace in the county from among their members. In May, 1855, the state established the supervisory system of county government and Sierra County was divided into three supervisory districts. The supervisory plan governed the county for the remainder of the

nineteenth century and continues, with modifications, to this day.

California politics during the period, 1852-1882 were confused, chaotic and complicated and sometimes violent, reminding one of the French

Third Republic. In the thirty years from 1852 to 1882, Sierra County failed to hold statewide elections only four times. In the other twenty six years, the electors went to the polls to vote for major federal, state and local officers. In well over half these elections three or four significant political parties waged the contests.

In the first two years of Sierra County's existence the voters appeared strongly Democratic. In 1852

the Whigs escaped being completely shut out of office only by capturing the position of County Clerk. Franklin Pierce, the Democrat, won a large majority in the presidential race. The gubernatorial elections, the following year, were a repeat performance as the Democrat, John Bigler, carried



*Mob justice was sometimes the rule of the day in Sierra County during the 1800s.*

— 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!

**Officers and Executive Board of The Sierra County Historical Society**

**President:** Bud Buczkowske, Alleghany

**Vice President:** Joleen Torri, Sattley

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Board members in addition to those previously mentioned are Maren Scholberg, Sierraville; Elda Faye Ball, Loyalton; Suzi Schoensee, Sattley; James Connolly, Sierra City; Mary Nourse, Sierra City; Eli Scholberg, Loyalton; Jane Cooper, Loyalton.

**Museum Curator:** Virginia Lutes

**Assistant Curator:** Judy Lawrence

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

**Before We Know It Music Will Fill the Summer Nights at the Kentucky Mine!**

Be sure to mark your calendar now for the great line up of groups for summer 2011. The Pre-show BBQ will start at 6:00 (NOT included with the show) and the concerts will start at 7:30. Ticket prices support the Sierra County Historical Society.

- July 16 - **Joni Morris: Tribute to Legendary Ladies of Music** ..... \$25
- July 23 - **Mumbo Gumbo** ..... \$25
- Aug. 6 - **Bourgeois Gypsies**..... \$10
- Aug. 13 - **Sourdough Slim**..... \$10
- Aug. 27 - **Rock Bottom Band** ..... \$10



**Become a Member!**

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** .....\$20.00
- FAMILY & INSTITUTION**.....\$25.00
- BUSINESS & SUPPORTING**.....\$35.00
- SUSTAINING**.....\$50.00
- LIFE (per individual)** .....\$300.00

(The board increased membership fees commencing in June of 2008)

Please send dues to: S.C.H.S. Membership Chairperson, PO Box 54, Sattley, CA 96124

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the county by over 500 votes. Sierra County was allowed a state senator and two assemblymen. The democratic candidates easily won all three legislative seats.

The election of 1853 ended in a somewhat divided result. Both the Whigs and the Democrats captured local offices. Election day violence which was characteristic during California's early period raised its ugly head in Sierra County on election day this year.

Whiskey flowed in torrents when miners made their annual pilgrimage to the polling places. On this particular election day, September 7, a drunken brawl broke out between John Potter, better known as "Baltimore Jack", and a gambler named Jack Muntz in Downieville.

The fight centered around a mining claim in Forest City and fed on the election day tension. Baltimore Jack was stabbed and died on the following day. After a coroner's inquest, Muntz was turned over to the sheriff. The next day, Friday, a group of armed men arrived from Forest City bent on seizing Muntz from the sheriff and trying him by the law of Judge Lynch.

Sheriff Ford managed to disperse the mob and later when the leaders continued agitating the matter, Ford arrested one of the more vocal ring-leaders. This provoked the mob again and another attempt was made to seize the prisoner confined in one of the upper rooms of Craycroft's Saloon. The sheriff formed a *posse comitatus* from "every good and law abiding citizen in Downieville." At one o'clock in the afternoon, the mob rushed the

stairs to the second story room which was protected by the sheriff and local deputies. A pistol accidentally went off in the pursuant melee and Thaddeus Purdy, the District Attorney aiding the sheriff, dropped, fatally shot in the back of the head. Total warfare nearly broke out before the situation eased temporarily when participants grasped the terrible consequence of the accident. Two hours later reports came in "that a large reinforcement was on the way from Forest City and Oregon Creek, all armed, to seize the prisoner from the sheriff even if it cost them their lives."

This increased the anxiety and fear of armed warfare. A justice of the peace issued an order to halt the sale of all "spirituous liquors and wines." Saloons closed their doors in swift compliance. With the aid of the court order, Sheriff Ford regained control of the situation.

The citizens of Downieville had turned out "to a man", to back Ford against the mob of outsiders. Order returned. The prisoner was held over to be tried immediately on the return of Judge McCann. Muntz was subsequently tried, and with the help of gamblers' money, acquitted. (All quotations are from the *Mountain Echo, Extra Downieville, Sept. 9, 1853*)

In 1854 the strong state Democratic party was torn apart over the election of a United States Senator. The party split down the middle into an "Electionist" and "Anti-electionist" factions. Because of this division, the Whigs gained significant victories in the county by electing the state senator, John Scellan, and an assemblyman, W.T.



*Downtown Downieville in earlier days.*

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Ferguson. This election was the beginning of a long period of party splits and bolting, first in the Democratic, then later, in the Republican Party.

The Sierra Citizen, a Downieville newspaper, noted something of even more immediate significance during this 1854 campaign. It indicated that a third party was forming. California was (very early in its existence as a state) reeking with political corruption. The “Know-Nothing” party was organizing as a reform organization. The Citizen welcomed them to Sierra County if they were truly reformers, but intended to reject them if it turned out that this secretive group stood only for the anti-Catholicism and anti-foreigner positions that were the basic planks of the “Know-Nothings” national platform.

The county was to become a stronghold of the “Know-Nothings” or—as they came to be called, The American Party—for the next three years. The Americans drew adherents from both Whiggery and Democracy, totally destroying the Whig Party. The growth of the American Party in California during 1855 was phenomenal. The Whig Party simply disappeared and, in September, the “Know Nothings” elected J. Neely Johnson, as Governor of the Golden State. Sierra County gave Johnson a three to two edge over incumbent governor Bigler. Only El Dorado, Placer and Sacramento counties gave Johnson a larger majority.

In 1856 and 1857 the American Party remained strong in Sierra County even as it’s strength was ebbing elsewhere in the state. Sierra County politicians gained powerful state party positions and sent “Know Nothing”, W.T. Ferguson to the state senate. He was a strong contender for the U.S. Senate seat and powerful in American Party circles until he was killed in a politically inspired duel in 1858. This duel was one of three in Sierra County involving politics or politicians during the 1850’s. The California practice of resolving political quarrels on the field of honor eventually culminated in the famous Terry-Broderick duel in 1859 where a California Supreme Court Justice killed a sitting United States senator.

Retracing our steps for a moment, in 1856, James Buchanan carried the county by a very narrow margin over the Know Nothing, Millard Fillmore, in the race for the Presidency of the United States. The new Republican Party’s candidate, John C. Fremont, received only a token vote even though the famous Republican orator, E.D. Baker, a close friend of Lincoln, had stumped the county. The following year the Democrat, John B. Weller won the gubernatorial race, over the American candidate, Bowie. The Republican candidate was a distant third with ten percent of the vote.

With the death of Senator Ferguson, the Know Nothings (American Party) faded away as quickly as they had appeared. California and Sierra County politics returned to their normal chaotic condition of two major parties, numerous splinters, bolters and independents. The powerful Democratic Party split over the issue of the Lecompton Constitution in 1858, a powerful national issue surrounding the slavery issue in “Bleeding Kansas”. The Democrats fielded a pro-Buchanan, “Lecompton” Party and an “Anti-Lecompton” faction. The Whigs and the Americans had disappeared in Sierra County and the Republicans had not yet formed a county organization. The Lecompton forces carried the county offices and elected both Assemblymen. The incumbent Anti-Lecompton congressman, McKibbin, from Downieville, defeated his pro-Buchanan opponent in a close race. The vote for Republicans running for state offices was so small as to be almost non-existent.

By 1859, the Republican vote *was* non-existent in the county. The only two parties were the Lecompton Democrats and the Anti-Lecompton, “National Democratic Party”. At this time the National Democrats were led on the federal level by Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The pro-administration Lecompton faction swept Sierra County, and the state, by large majorities defeating Douglas’s supporters. The Republican candidate for governor, Leland Stanford received only five percent of the county’s vote.

*(To be continued in the next issue of the Sierran)*

## Pioneer Experiences of Augustus Moore

The following is an excerpt from the "Pioneer Experiences of Augustus Moore," which he wrote in 1878 for the Bancroft Library.

**D**uring the spring of 1860 I began building up the place known as Moore's Station on the Henness Pass. This spring I also discovered a very beautiful lake three miles long and half a mile wide. This lake up to that time had remained unknown. It is surrounded by high mountains and timber and so situated that it cannot be seen until nearly approached. The lake is full of mountain trout and the scenery is of the wildest description. It is about four-thousand feet above tide water and will someday be a favorite place of resort. On the fourth of July, 1862, I again visited the lake with a party of friends and had a trout dinner. As I had discovered the lake my friends proposed that I should also name it. I did so calling it Independence Lake.

In July of 1863 I was married to Rebecca Rose Rofs. In '63 I also built a sailboat for the lake and named her Susie Dana in honor of that lady, she being the third woman that ever saw the lake and presented a flag to the boat. The boat was launched on the 19th of June and she was christened the Susie Dana by the breaking of a bottle of wine over the bow of the boat by Mrs. Roberts of Grass Valley, she being there with a party of friends on her bridal tour. She was also the first lady who ever stepped on board the boat. This bridal party were on the boat when she made

her trial trip which was satisfactory. She ran the whole length of the lake in twenty-two minutes with twenty-three on board.

The boat was built and owned by me alone and no other man ever had an interest in her. The first winter I had her hauled out on the land but the next she sank in a storm near her landing which consisted of a tree fallen into the lake to walk out upon and to step into the boat. She was never raised and the ice or storm moved the tree across the boat and there she still lies in 1878. She was a beautiful boat and it cost me about six hundred dollars to build her. She carried many festive parties and contributed

largely to the enjoyment of the guests at Moore's Station. Some very distinguished people have sailed upon her and some of her trips have been made memorable by very excellent music both vocal and instrumental. She was the pioneer boat of the lake and many people remember her with pleasure.

Standing at the front of the lake and looking up the lake, one sees a very high mountain three or four miles to the right or south-west from the head of the lake. This mountain is called Mount Rose in honor of my wife Rebecca Rose Moore who was the first lady who ever climbed to its summit.



*Independence Lake*

## “Register” Provides Account of Sierraville History - by Judy Lawrence



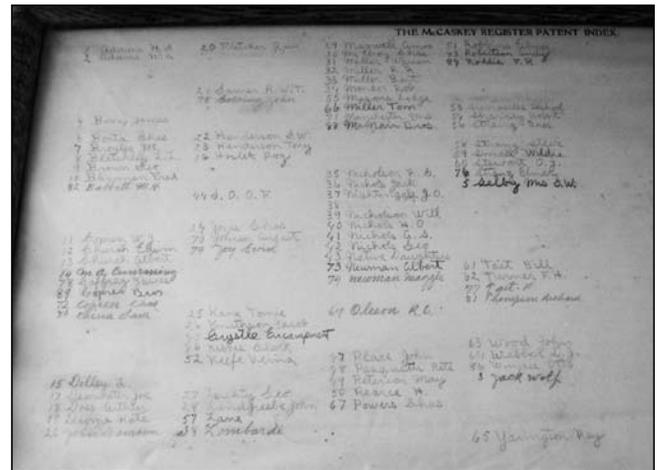
In many ways it resembles a small writing desk but the strange looking piece of “furniture” in Arthur and LaVerne Monaco’s Sierraville home holds stories of purchases and payments made to the Johnson General Store which operated in Sierraville for many years, closing during the latter part of the 1940s. The register works much like later accounting systems worked. There are multiple “pages”, actually pieces



of thin wooden sheets, that can be turned to reveal accounting slips that are attached to the layered “pages” with spring-loaded clips. It appears that each family or business had their own position on the “page” boards where an accounting was kept as to what was purchased, when the purchases were made, and what was paid or owed on the purchases. Well-known local family names are prominent



on the dated account sheets clipped to the register “pages.” Names like Strang, Dolley, Bonta, Church, Copren, Newman, Nichols and Lombardi are included in the lists of patrons.



Phyllis Mitchell, who now lives in Loyalton with husband Chester, remembers going into the two-story store after her grandfather, Chance Goodrich, who was a partner in the Sierraville Lumber Company, bought the store. It was located near where the Los Dos Hermanos restaurant is now located. Unfortunately, no photos of the store seem to have survived, or could not be located at this writing. However, Phyllis has vivid memories of the way the store looked when she would sneak in as a child. “Everything was left just like it always was,” she said. There was a barbershop in the store with all the barber bottles still in place. In the back were boxes of high-button shoes and other clothing items like corsets and ribbons. The store also carried food items such as the “My Wife and I” salad dressing bottles lined up just as they had been when the store was one of Sierraville’s popular shopping stops.

Fortunately, the wonderful store register has been preserved over the years with its written accounts of life in a simpler time. LaVerne Monaco, who purchased the accounts register from Phyllis Mitchell’s mother June Polastrini, invites anyone who would like to view the register, and perhaps read about your family’s transactions at the Johnson General Store, to give her a call and come see this unique part of Sierraville’s history!

## Membership Corner - News From Suzi Schoensee, Membership Chair



Welcome and Congratulations to all the 24 new members who have chosen to join us this year!

You wonderful people are: Louise Ahart, Mike Amsbry, Sean & Heather Anson, Thomas & Elizabeth Archer, Christie & Jerry Brzyszc, Lillian & Mike Downing, Charles & Mary Ervin, The Harlan Family, Lois Hoegeman, Karen & Billy Laux, Dennis G Lawrence, Judy Lawrence, The Mark E. Perryman Family, Jim Ramsey, Karen Rickman, Lynn Stewart, Laura Thomas, & Mark & Debra Panelli.

A huge "shout out" goes to our three new LIFE-TIME COMMITMENTS from, Carrol Hayes, Andrew Ponta and Dick Alvarez.

To those of you who have renewed your memberships this year, I extend sincere appreciation and gratitude on behalf of the board of directors.

### QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS SUMMARY:

I SEND A GREAT BIG " THANKS" TO THE 155 MEMBERS WHO RETURNED THEIR SURVEYS.

I would like to share with you the information I have received. There is so much to report that it will take a few "Sierrans" to report it all to you. Hopefully it will be as interesting to you as it is to me. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT 40 OF US HAVE HISTORIES HERE IN SIERRA COUNTY WHICH REACH BACK ONE HUNDRED SIXTY ONE YEARS TO 1850. Of these forty, 10 continue to live in the county and will be detailed below. The other 30 people, plus the rest who responded to the questionnaire will be written about in the future. Please call or write to me if you do not want to share your histories. My phone number is (530) 994-3208.

In the survey, many of our members noted that they were interested in family histories. Elda Fae has given us her history and published it last year in the Sierran. Andra Berger-Carter sent a

letter which I will share with you in full below. It would be great if all of our members would send us their more in-depth family histories. We would love to hear from you and to publish you too.

Here are the summaries of the 10 residents who still reside in the county with histories dating as far back as 1850.

1.) Lee Adams, of Downieville, our former Sheriff and present supervisor is from pioneer stock and his relative was the Surveyor General of the State of California.

2.) Elda Fae Ball, the present curator of the Milton Gottardi Museum in Loyalton, is related to the family who pioneered and ranched in & named Ball's Canyon which is connected to Long Valley next to Highway 395.

3.) Robert Burelle, of Calpine, has descendents who were pioneer ranchers, logging business owners, & millworkers from Sierra City, Sattley, Sierraville, & Laporte.

4.) Andra (Berger) Carter of Sierra City whose family has been pioneers, gold seekers and business owners, has the Berger Campground and Creek named after her Great Grandfather. This is the letter she has written: "My grandfather, Theophile Berger, owned the Mountaineer Mine. The family home was near the mine above what is now Berger Campground and Berger Creek. My two uncles' gravesite are near the Girl Scout Camp. At age 14, my Uncle Victor was swept away and drowned in raging creek water. His younger brother, Edward, was with him, but, was unharmed. The family later moved to Sierra City and lived in the Charles Smith home. The Bergers had seven children. My grandmother was Mollie Seitz Berger. Her father, Joseph, owned the butcher shop on the main street of Sierra City. My grandparents and great grandfather are buried in the Sierra City Cemetery, also three

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of my aunts have memorial plaques on the wall of the cemetery. My great grandmother Seitz is buried in Downieville. My sister, Beverly Berger White, was a member of the historical society prior to her death in 2007.”

**5.) Marian Lavezzola**, of Downieville and retired career woman at the courthouse had ancestors who pioneered Lavezzola Ranch & named Lavezzola Creek.

**6.) Sue Marcucci** has had family who were gold seekers, ranchers, millworkers, and business owners in the villages of Goodyears Bar, Downieville, Loganville, & Sierra City.

**7.) Suzi Schoensee** lives in Sattley. Her great-

great grandmother was Clarista Turner, sister of the Turner brothers who settled Sattley. She has gold seeking roots in Morrystown, Charcoal Flat & pioneer ranching roots in Sattley and Kettle. Her great grandparents Frances Campbell & Hattie Turner-Hale-Campbell had the Kettle post office inside their home which was quite close to Marble Hot Springs.

**8.) Noel Turner** Has ancestors who were pioneers, gold seekers, farmers, ranchers, loggers, millworkers, and business owners in the settlements of Downieville, Sierra City, and Sattley.

**9 & 10.) Bill Copren & Donna Walton** have relatives who were gold seekers, ranchers and loggers from the communities of Goodyears Bar, Sattley and Sierraville.

*(To be continued...)*