

# The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

## David Gould Webber

By Virginia Lutes and Maren Scholberg



David G. Webber became a permanent resident of Sierra County in 1852, living first in Downieville and then on his ranch near Loyalton. During his lifetime he was a student, a laborer, a drug clerk, stock dealer, a gold miner, a building contractor, a horse breeder, a school superintendent, a rancher, a resort owner, a medical doctor and a philanthropist.

David G. Webber was born September 12, 1809, in Livingston County, N.Y. His parents were William and Susanna Weber of Scottish-Irish descent. At a young age he found work as a laborer on a canal, attending school in the winter. He was then indentured to a physician-pharmacist, Dr. Woodworth of Springfield, PA. Hoping to become a doctor, David Webber studied medicine under Dr. Woodworth during that time. Soon David was supporting in school, on his small income, 13 orphans, (one who later became a well-known Ohio lawyer). At the age of 21 he bought out his employer and remained in the pharmacy business for 12 years.

By the time he married in 1833, he had been admitted to medical practice and from then on, was known as Dr. David G. Webber. His wife was Margaret Bradish of Cramerville, PA. In 1835 they were living in Erie, PA, where their son, James W. was born. They adopted a daughter, but we have no further record of her other than that she did grow up and got married. Mrs. Webber died in 1842.

On the 1840 census of Pennsylvania, David G. Webber is listed with having in his household one male child under the age of 5; one male between 20 and 30; two males between 30 and 40; two females between 20 and 30; one female between 30 and 40. Besides David, his wife and their sons James, it is hard to say who these other people were, but evidently several were relatives.



*The old apartment house.*

In 1843, David Webber sold his business, adopted two more orphans and moved to Canada. There he adopted a Canadian boy and soon after that, he moved to Chicago, IL, where he adopted the Canadian boy's brother (whom he later supported through two years of medical study in Europe). He saved the life of an infant daughter of an indigent family and adopted her also. In 1845, while in Chicago, he bought a half-interest in a steam flouring mill as his next business venture. Then he spent four years as a contractor on the Illinois canal.

In 1849, the Gold Rush was on and Dr. Webber headed for California via the Panama Canal. He left his son James with his wife's family in Erie, PA. (James is on the 1850 census living with George Bradish. Some time later, James came to California, for he died in Sacramento in 1856.) In California, Dr. Webber found and adopted an-

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— 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

### OUT OF STATE MEMBERS OF THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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### Concert Series Information

The Kentucky Mine "Music on the Mountain" Entertainment Series continues with a great line up of musical entertainers. Ticket prices range between \$10.00 and \$15.00 for adults.

Date	Performer	Musical Format
August 5th at 7:30 pm	Bob Mora & The 3rd Degree Blues Band	Blues
August 20th at 7:30 pm	Blue Turtle Seduction	Jazz, Blues

### Annual Meeting Notice

The 2006 annual meeting of the Sierra County Historical Society will be held on September 10, at Webber Lake Resort. Lunch will begin at 12:30 p.m. Will all members bring your own lunch. The Society will furnish punch, potato salad and desert for all members. From 1:15 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. we will have our annual meeting. From 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. we will have an interesting program. A collection of photos of Webber Lake will be on display during our stay at Webber Lake. We thank the owners of Webber Lake Resort for allowing us to hold our meeting at this beautiful and historical site. Book sale at annual meeting.

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other waif on his way to Downieville, CA. He spent that first summer as a gold miner.

Dr. Webber bought Oak Ranch near Monte Cristo in 1851 but sold it the next year and bought a sawmill in Downieville. In the following four years Dr. Webber superintended the building of the first wagon road to Downieville., the first bridge across the Yuba River, and the County Courthouse, jail and jailor's house. This enterprise began in April, 1854, when Dr. Webber, who had submitted the lowest bid, was awarded the contract to build a County Courthouse and jail. Several sites were considered with Durgan Flat the final choice. Dr. Webber realized that the Galloway Road needed some repair work on it so as to haul the heavy metal materials and frames for the jail into Downieville. The following is a quote from the May 27, 1854, edition of the Downieville newspaper THE SIERRA CITIZEN: "Dr. Webber, with some half a dozen hands, has been engaged in repairing the wagon road between this place and Galloway's Ranch, and on Wednesday he succeeded in bringing down two wagons heavily loaded with iron doors and grating for the new jail. The Doctor thinks that a few days work would enable teams to go and come with faculty."

In a letter to the editor on November 4, 1854, a reader wrote the following: "So much has been said about the bad road leading to Downieville via Galloway's in times past, that I never could be induced to travel in that direction for fear of having my neck broken by falling over the precipices; but I assure you (and you know I have had considerable experience on California mountain roads) that to say the least, these reports were highly colored, if not base fabrications by interested parties, to injure the Downieville trade. The road, as far as I have traveled on it (eighteen miles down the ridge) is far superior to that leading from Johnson's Ranch to Nevada." This is the road that Dr. Webber had resurrected.

He then turned his attention to the courthouse and jail. By August of 1854, five compartments of the jail were completed and the construction on the courthouse and offices began. To build the jail first, seemed a wise plan, according to the editor of THE SIERRA CITIZEN in the

May 13, 1854 edition as "the officers were put to great inconvenience in guarding prisoners in the rickety log cabin where they are at present confined." The courthouse was completed in December.

His next venture was in the field of education. Dr. D. G. Webber was Sierra County School Superintendent for two years. After that his attention turned to a new field.

In 1852 he learned about a little lake called Truckee Lake, headwater of Little Truckee River. He hired a guide to take him there and posted notices for filing a claim along the shore of the lake. The guide promptly 'jumped his claim', took the notices down and charged the Doctor fifty dollars for giving them up! Dr. Webber did obtain possession of the lake plus the surrounding area which he used for a stock range. It then became known as 'Webber's Station' but that was changed to 'Webber Lake' two years later. In 1854, he stocked the lake with two varieties of trout, the first in the lake because of the waterfalls a mile below. Then he made another change in his life and



*Scenic Webber Lake California*

'plunged enthusiastically' into the breeding of wild horses in Scott Valley, near Marysville, in the Sacramento Valley.

Tiring of that, he left in 1859, moved back to the mountains and settled in Loyaltown on the northeast side of the Sierra Valley. He bought a cattle ranch where he raised first class horses for both stage use and driving. He opened a pharmacy and resumed the practice of medicine. He became famous for his "Webber Pills", his own concoction which he prescribed for everything. He provided for

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the education of several poor children and paid for the medical education of a second cousin.

In 1860, Dr. Webber built the Webber Lake hotel and opened it to the public that year. He did not want to be an innkeeper but he did want to show off this magnificent landscape—the mountains with its variety of trees and the beautiful shrubs and flowers—to those who chose to come to his hotel. He mapped horse trails to the highlands and built bridle paths through the woods. His was the first attempt to capitalize on the attractions of the Sierra Lakes region and the natural landscapes.

Dr. Webber added a sanitorium for tubercular patients and a solarium for their sun baths. He was not interested in making money as his resort rates were “ridiculously low.” If the people could pay for the service, that was good; if not, it was forgotten. He continued to take in on credit a steady procession of ailing and insolvent people. His many interests and his open handedness set the tone of his resort.

He spent winters on his ranch, returning to Webber Lake every summer. He became acquainted with John Gill Lemmon, the well-known botanist of Sierra Valley, and helped collect plants for him. J.G. Lemmon named two plants in his honor: *ivesia webberi* and *astragalus webberi*. (Mr. Lemmon made numerous collecting trips by foot, horse, and wagon, in the summer, and in the winter he read and sorted plants on the table at Webber Lake Hotel, buried in 8 feet of snow.)

The old buildings were still standing in 1956 when John W. Hinckley visited Webber Lake. Mr. Hinckley (1884-1975) was a retired minister, author, historian and founder of the John Muir Society. He wrote that carpenters were repairing the old hotel, the old sanitorium and solarium were still standing, and numerous campers were enjoying the beautiful, secluded lake. “I walked about the old buildings, took color pictures of the grounds, the lake and towering mountains, and made mental eulogies on the singular philanthropist.”



*Webber Lake Hotel, built in 1860, still in use today.*

Dr. Webber died June 9, 1882, near Loyalton, of “rheumatism and general physical decay.” He was 77 years of age. His obituary in the Reno Evening Gazette included the following quote: “Though a man of considerable intelligence, his habits were queer beyond eccentricity, therefore his circle of warm friends was somewhat contracted, but those who knew him intimately could see many great qualities in him...old timers say that when he first arrived here he looked quite as old as when he died”. His funeral was conducted under the auspices of the Summit Lodge of Odd Fellows. He had requested that his body be laid

beside that of his nephew, Dr. Joseph Webber Jr., who died in Loyalton, at the age of 33, on October 31, 1871. Their graves are side by side in the Loyalton cemetery.

The following is another quote with a different view of Dr. Webber: “The Doctor has a large warm heart and all old pioneers hold him in high esteem. He has had some reverses of fortune but like pure gold always comes out purer and brighter form every ordeal. He has been more active than most Pioneers, has done a great deal to develop the resources of the State, and deserves a bright record in her annals.” Augustus Moore of Moores Station—1830.

Dr. D. G. Webber made his home in Sierra County for 33 years. During his lifetime he was always concerned about the orphans and homeless children he came across. Since all the adopted children did not live in his household, it appears that he made arrangements for their education and paid for that. The following is a quote from SIERRA NEVADA LAKES: “There is no accurate count of the number of children he adopted or financially staked, but it must have been well over fifty. By 1860 his wards were widely scattered throughout the country, and all of them had found useful niches in life—two had become doctors, one became a lawyer, others were in business, and some were farmers. Webber’s support of the homeless, nameless, and unfed was one long record of unblemished charity, which went hand in hand with a dauntless zeal for odd projects.”

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### Quotes from MOUNTAIN MESSENGER of Downieville:

“Dr. D. G. Webber was a member of a rescue party in Feb. 1865. An avalanche caught 14 men with nine horses who had set out from Sierra Valley to Henness Pass Road through Webber Ravine.” (Feb. 4, 1865)

“Dr. David Webber, a retired physician, has an excellent hotel at Webber Lake.” (Sept. 9, 1876)

### From the NEVADA STATE JOURNAL—1888

Webber Lake Hotel was opened last week...one of the favorite resorts of the mountains and will always remain so. It is a great place for fishing, the trout there taking a fly more readily than at any other lake...Spring improvements are being made and many rooms have already been engaged.

### From the RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL—1891

WEBBER LAKE HOTEL This famous resort will be open to the public from and after June 5, 1891. Stages will connect at Truckee with the morning East bound train, from the West on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Parties from Reno and vicinity intending to go by stage from Truckee will have to go up the night before and remain over night, or telegraph to hold stage awaiting their arrival.

A wooden plaque marker with the following words was placed on Webber Lake Hotel on Sept. 10, 1961, by Wm. M. Stewart Chapter of E CLAMPUS VITUS. WEB-



Dr. David Gould Webber, buried in Loyalton next to Dr. Joseph Webber (Sept. 1809 - June 1882)



Dr. Joseph Webber died in Loyalton at the age of 33 on October 31, 1871.

BER LAKE HOTEL. BUILT IN 1860 BY DR. DAVID GOULD WEBBER, THE LAST OF 30 HOSTELRIES ALONG THE HISTORIC HENNESS PASS ROAD.

The present owner of Webber Lake and Resort is C.O. Johnson of Roseville, CA.

### A note of interest—

In 1884, James O'Neal was convicted of the murder of John Woodward, a dairyman at Webber Lake. Although there was a great deal of hunting, the murder weapon was never found. In 1985, while Doug Garton was caretaker at Webber Lake, he found an old pistol in the well. Lee Adams, Sierra County Sheriff, said it could very well be the “missing murder weapon.”

### Research sources:

*History of PLUMAS, LASSEN AND SIERRA COUNTIES 1882* - Fariss & Smith

An article in OAKLAND TRIBUNE by John W. Winkley - Sept. 2, 1856

SIERRA-NEVADA LAKES by George and Bliss Hinkle - 1949

PIONEER EXPERIENCES by Augustus Moore, 1830  
From UCB Library

SIERRA VALLEY JEWEL of the SIERRAS by James J. Sinnott

DOWNIEVILLE GOLD TOWN on the YUBA by James J. Sinnott

**Come see this historic place and attend our Annual Meeting on Sept.10.**

## The Humphrey Family of Northern California and Northern Nevada

By Virginia Lutes

*The following is taken from a longer account written by Marvin B. Humphrey in 1992. It came to our Historical Society from Don Schuyler whose wife Freda is a grand daughter of George Wilson Humphrey.*



his story covers a period of about 150 years from the time Geo. Wilson Humphrey came to California to the present (July 1992). The history of the Western branch begins not in Nevada or California, but in the small village of Yarmouth, Maine. Before that, is an unbroken line to William the Conqueror in England.

In Yarmouth, the family was well known for producing many sea-going people. Captain Omar Jr. Humphrey and Herbert N. Humphrey captained clipper-type ships of that era that sought paying cargo all around the world. However, there were some who did not care to follow the sea, and George Wilson Humphrey was one of them.

At the age of 18, he came west to California. Little is known about just how he got to California but it can be assumed that he, living in a coast town and coming from a family of seafaring people, came by ship, probably working as a deck hand or an able-bodied seaman in a clipper



*George Wilson Humphrey 1934 - 1894.*

did not follow it at all. He clerked for Langston Freight line and also became a rider and driver for the company which carried supplies to the many camps in the vicinity. This way he found himself in Sierra Valley and in 1859-60 he started his own freight operation in Sierraville, California, to Virginia City, Nevada. In 1862, he married Edith Lockhart, who had come west to visit her sister.

around the horn. Jumping ship in San Francisco, he no doubt headed for the interior and the gold fields, since he was first recorded as a clerk in the mining camps of Allegheny and Forest City in Sierra County, California. Born in 1834, this must have been about 1852, when mining was a flourishing business, but he apparently

George W. and Edith had a family of 11 children. Wm. died at birth, but five boys and five girls made up the family living on the ranch he had acquired over a period of years. Apparently he began to acquire ranch property, upon which to raise horses that were needed in the freight-line business.



*Edith Lockhart Humphrey 1844 - 1894.*

Living on the ranch in the 1885 era, the family of G.W. and Edith was made up of John, Frank, Herbert, James L., and Jacob B, the boys, and Henrietta, Mary Josephine, Susan Winifred, Camille, and Muzette, the girls. The coming of the railroad had made the pack train business obsolete so the boys, now mature, operated the ranch as a partnership in the cattle business, together with a retail meat market in Truckee, California.

Following the death of George W. in 1894, the boys dissolved their partnership and began to go out on their own. They became well known in Nevada and especially around the Reno-northern California area. All of northern Nevada and eastern California made up the region the Humphrey men operated in, and it should be noted that for the most part, the ranches they began to put together were within the California counties of Nevada, Sierra, Lassen, Plumas and Modoc. All of the five-county region was easily covered by the transportation means of the day. On horseback and with horse driven wagons, the basic needs to get around were filled. It wasn't long before that method of getting around was stopped in favor of the automobile.

The men in the family all became pioneers in the development of western Nevada. They were all involved in livestock buying, selling and trading in and around Reno

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in the years 1900-1930. John and Frank were always close and were partners in such ventures until John's untimely death in an automobile accident in 1907. Herbert, James and Frank did not partner up after the original partnership broke apart. Later, Frank and Jake had several business relationships, mostly in the meat packing business in Goldfield, Broderick (near Sacramento), and later still in Santa Rosa, California. James L. was always out on his own but in the same type business, ranching and cattle.

George W. Humphrey died in 1894 and is buried with wife Edith in Sierraville, CA. John Edwin Humphrey Sr., after the death of G. W., moved to Reno about 1900 but kept his relationship with brother Frank in the ranch in Sierra Valley and in other ventures in and around Reno. In fact, one of the earliest recorded livestock brands in California was the JF combine. It was used as late as 1930. John and Frank also did some things out of partnership, and John became involved in mining. He was on an inspection trip to the mines in Olinghouse, east of Reno, when his car went off the grade and he did not survive the accident. With his death, the John and Frank relationship ended. There were two children, John E. Jr. and Francis. John E. still lives in Reno, retired from a lifetime career in banking and agricultural finance. He had no children.

Frank E. Humphrey Sr. was an active rancher and livestock man from the beginning, on the old home ranch in Sierra Valley. After a period of time he bought out all of his brothers' and sisters' interests in the home ranch. In addition, he acquired many of the neighboring ranches. Among them, but not necessarily all of them, were the O' Haras, the Flints, the Robins, the Freemans, the Dysons, the McElroys, and the Walter Edes. In 1900 he married Clara Bender, the daughter of the prominent banker and businessman C. T. Bender. In 1907 Frank built a nice home for Clara and himself on the southwest corner of Ralston and West 5th Street in Reno, which stands there today. Between 1905 and 1912 three children were born. The first child, a girl, did not live. The two boys were Marvin B. Humphrey (the author of this text) and Frank E.

Humphrey Jr. In 1912 Clara suddenly passed away. Frank married Emma Witte in 1916. She survived him.

During his most productive years in Nevada, from 1900 to 1930, in addition to banking and livestock, Frank operated a business known as the Humphrey Supply Co. that had been originally started by brother Herbert and acquired by Herb Nichols, an employee of Swift & Co. Nichols was himself killed in an accident in the company ranch near Sparks and subsequent to that Frank purchased the company from the widow. Continuing to grow and expand in ranches and cattle he founded Humphrey & Witte with brother-in-law Henry Witte. Their headquarters were near Standish, CA. Frank also founded with Victor Christensen the H-C Cattle Co., with headquarters at Likely, Modoc County, CA. Humphrey & Witte did not survive, but the H-C still continued under new management after Victor

Christensen was killed in an auto accident. During those years, Frank also had interests with brother Jake in meat-packing plants in Broderick, near Sacramento, and in Santa Rosa, CA, not at the same time nor were all of the ventures successful. The Humphrey Supply Co. did not succeed and was finally liquidated, the oldest established meat-packing

business in Nevada. When he died, it was known as the Humphrey Meat Packing Co. Frank passed away in 1936. It is safe to say that no other person in Reno had a greater reputation. He was known all over the West as a man of great integrity.

Herbert G. Humphrey moved into Reno about 1900 after G.W.'s death and the break up of the original partnership. He became very active in the mining and livestock industries. At one time in his life he was part of the Union Land & Livestock Co. and Humphrey & Moffat, who operated large ranches in central Nevada as well as meat-packing plants in the San Francisco area. These companies also went through tough times in the Depression of the twenties but later became big and powerful as the bad times faded away. Herbert married a Sierra Valley girl, Guidice (Dicie) Cavitt, and they had two sons, Harold and George. Herbert died in San Francisco in 1927.



*The George Humphrey family at their Sierra Valley Ranch in Sierra County. George is not pictured. Edith is in the center. 1894*

## The Humphrey Family (Continued from Page 7) ◀

James L. Humphrey also moved into Reno about 1900 and began to expand into the ranch and cattle business. He stayed quite close to Sierra Valley and bought the Mapes and Bates ranches as well as some others near Beckwourth. He also acquired properties in Lassen and Modoc Counties, CA, near Milford, and north toward Alturas. These are still in family hands today. He did not partner up with his brothers but became very prominent on his own. They had five children: Freda, Gordon, James, Lucille, and Jack. James L. died in Reno in 1944.

Jacob Butler Humphrey moved to Nevada, as did the others, but his first move was more into central Nevada, centered around Austin. He married a Resse River girl, Inez Keough, and had a business career that took him out of central Nevada into California. Jack had one son, Omar, who died young and is buried in Austin. In his career, Jacob did do some things with his brothers. He was the first President of Santiago Oil Co. He at one time had an automobile dealership in Marmon cars, and together with Frank, some ventures into meat packing. He was one time CEO of the Yolo Meat Packing Co in Broderick and the Santa Rosas Meat Packing Co. Jake died in 1951. His widow married again twice and lives today in Los Angeles at age 99.

To sum up, as of July, 1992, there are nine living male Humphreys that are descendants of Geo. W. Humphrey.

This includes Jack W. Humphrey, son of James L. Humphrey Sr., who is still involved in ranching, with headquarters at Milford, CA. Jack and his wife Margaret have operated a successful cattle operation for many years in and near Honey Lake Valley, living at Milford, CA. Jack and Margaret have one son, Scott.

*(Editor's note: The Humphrey family in Milford is the last of the Humphreys in the ranching business in Northern California.)*

And now the five girls of the Humphrey family (as of 1992)

Henrietta (Nettie) married John C. Wood and moved to San Francisco. They had one son who lost his life in WW1. Nettie died in San Francisco.

Mary Josephine married Jess Swigard, the owner of the Sattley store. They had four children: Marion, George, Irvin and Henrietta. All are deceased.

Susan married W. Holmes Goodwin, a school teacher in Beckwourth. They moved to Reno where he became a well-known businessman. They had two children. All are deceased.

Camille married a banker from Goldfield. They moved to the Bay area. Of their three children only the son, Theodore, is alive and living in Tucson, AZ.

Muzette married Zach LaDuke of Oakland, California. After his death she married James G. Ballard. They had no children.

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## Historical Society Members Invited To View Petroglyphs

**S**ierra County Historical Society vice president, Bill Copren, is again going to lead a group of society members on a walk from Gold Valley to the Hawley Lake petroglyphs. We will all meet at Bassetts Station at 9:00 A.M. on September 30, 2006. Mr. Copren has enlisted a number of persons with special vehicles to haul us into Gold Valley. We will then walk the Downieville-Johnsville trail from Gold Valley to Hawley Lake where

we will have lunch and then walk to the petroglyphs. The petroglyph walk is reserved for Historical Society members and their families only. This walk is not open to the general public.

Interested parties can contact Bill Copren directly at (530) 994-3376 to sign-up.