

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

Political History of Nineteenth Century Sierra County - The Civil War Years, 1870's & 1880's - by Bill Copren

The voters of Sierra County were nothing if they were not inconsistent during these tumultuous years. In an almost complete about-face, they gave Stephen Douglas a plurality in the four-way presidential election of 1860. In addition, the Republican Party was now a serious contender. Abraham Lincoln was a close second to Douglas, and the logical choice, John Breckinridge, ended in third place. The Douglas Democrats captured both Assembly seats and elected the District Attorney and the Superintendent of Schools. This election established a certain pattern for Sierra County, it went for Douglas while the state gave Lincoln its electoral votes. Sierra County was to remain consistent in this single matter—it usually voted for losing candidates or went heavily for the minority party in so far as state elections were concerned.

The year, 1861, saw the completion of a political transformation in the county. During the late fifties, the county had moved from a pro-southern, states-rights position to a more moderate unionistic Democratic position, with strong anti-slavery Republican feelings. In 1861, the county went Republican for the first time—a political affinity

that was to continue right up into the 1880's. The Democratic party split into the Union Democrats and the Secession Democrats with the outbreak of the Civil War. In Sierra County these contingents split the party vote almost evenly in 1861, allowing the Republicans to carry every statewide and county race except Sheriff. Republican voters were still a minority but a large majority of the votes cast were for the union.



The following year the trend continued. In a three way race, the Republicans, now known as the Fusion Party, again swept the local elections. They gained complete control of county government and sent their candidates to the state legislature for the second consecutive year.

This time the Republicans enjoyed a clear majority over the combined vote of the National and the Union Democrats.

Politics became more traditionally oriented during 1863 and 1864, as the elections were contested between only two parties—the Unionists and the Democrats. Sierra County went for the Union Party candidates by majorities of two to one or

Political History - (Continued on Page 3) —

— 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

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Museum Curator: Virginia Lutes

Assistant Curator: Judy Lawrence

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

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

The Music at the Mine Concert Series Begins July 16th!

We know you're not going to want to miss the great line up of talent coming to the Kentucky Mine amphitheater this summer. Just cut out the schedule of concerts and pricing information provided below and keep it handy throughout the summer. Locations where you can buy tickets include: in Sierra City, the Kentucky Mine and Museum and the Old Sierra City Hotel; in Downieville the La Sierra Day Spa; in Graeagle at the Mill Works; at the Indian Valley Outpost; in Sierraville at Sierra Valley Feed; and in Portola at B&B's Thrift and Gift. Or hop on the web and purchase tickets through PayPal at www.kentuckymine.org. For more information call 530-862-1310.

Music at the Mine

2011 Summer Concerts
at the Historic Kentucky Mine
Sierra City, California

July 16 - Joni Morris:
A Tribute to Patsy Cline (\$25)

July 23 - Mumbo Gumbo (\$25)

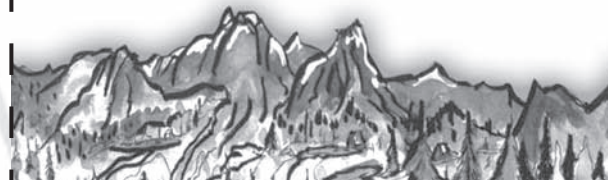
Aug. 6 - Bourgeois Gypsies (\$10)

Aug. 13 - Sourdough Slim (\$10)

Aug. 27 - Rock Bottom Band (\$10)

A 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.

Purchase online at
www.kentuckymine.org
or call (530) 862-1310
for ticket sales locations.



Political History - (Continued from Page 1) —

larger during these years. Thirty out of thirty-six precincts gave Lincoln and Johnson a majority in 1864. An interesting sidelight during these years was that the *Mountain Messenger*, in reporting the official returns, listed the Democratic Party under the title of “Copperheads”, a derogatory term for northerners with Confederate sympathies. It was also during these years and those immediately following, that the town of Smith’s Neck changed its name to Loyaltown and the streets in Sierraville were renamed Lincoln, Grant and Meade.

The Republicans, in the following year, succumbed to the disease that had plagued the Democrats so severely in the fifties and early sixties. At the state Union Party convention there was a bolt and the bolters placed independent party candidates on the state ticket. However there were no Independents within the county and the faithful Union voters gave their party a clean sweep.

By 1867, the Republican split had become a yawning chasm. Nevertheless Sierra County continued to be solidly Unionist even as the Democrats were giving the Union and Independent Republican candidates a resounding defeat throughout the rest of California. Even James A. Johnson, a Downieville resident, who was elected as Democratic Congressman from the Third Congressional District in this election, lost his home county by a two to one majority. The year following, U.S. Grant barely won the California electoral vote for President with a majority of 552 popular votes. In Sierra County, his majority was 534.

Grant had carried the state in spite of, not because of his Union Party affiliation, and the next year the Republican was “routed, horse, foot and dragoons”. The Republican support of the Fifteenth Amendment was used by their opponents to play on the fear of Chinese suffrage. The state elected a legislature with a two-thirds Democratic majority. Sierra County, almost alone, remained solidly in the Republican camp.

The 1870’s

The county managed to record its vote for the victorious side for the next three years. Corruption in the state legislature and within the Democratic administration of Governor Haight was the apparent cause of a Republican landslide in 1871. The Republicans had also learned a lesson. Newton Booth was elected Governor on an anti-Chinese platform. Grant carried California by a safe margin in 1872. Sierra County gave him a three to one majority over Horace Greeley. Sierra County Republicans monotonously swept the county elections and sent a solid slate of G.O.P. men to the state legislature in 1873.

The two party system was just not to the liking of California politicians during the Nineteenth Century. The year 1875 saw another three-way race for state offices. This time even Sierra County was not immune as it gave a plurality to the Independent Party candidate for governor, John Bidwell. Sierra was the only county to give Bidwell a plurality; the republican split allowed the democrats to gain the statehouse. For the first time since the early 1860’s Democrats also captured Sierra County offices, a Sierra County assembly seat and the congressional vote.

The county was losing relative political power as the population of other parts of California grew at a faster pace than the mountain regions. Sierra County’s population reached its lowest Nineteenth Century point during the decade of the seventies. In 1877, the county was apportioned only one assemblyman, and elected a joint state senator with Nevada County. During 1876 and 1877, the county, nevertheless, continued to remain in the Republican fold.

The decade ended in a typical fashion in 1879 when Republicans, Democrats and Workingmen-New Constitutionists (a Marxist-reformist party) were all on the ballot. Also, typically, Sierra County gave large pluralities on majorities to the Republican candidates. This despite the

Political History - (Continued on Page 4) —

Political History - (Continued from Page 3) —

fact that B.G. Haskell one of California's leading Marxists hailed from Sierra County. Haskell Peak in the county is named after this family. Nevertheless, Sierra County had become a Republican stronghold during the Civil War; it remained loyal to the party right into the 1880's.

In 1879 California held a constitutional convention. The Sierra County Delegation, led by Henry K. Turner, fought against the new constitution and voted with the minority against accepting the newly written document. However, the state's constitutional delegates voted 120 to 15 to accept it and send it to the people for a vote. The new constitution was adopted by the people of the state in an election held in May. Sierra County, a general collection of "agin'ers", voted to reject it.

By this time a political machine had developed in the one party county. It was controlled by H.K. Turner and had its own party press—the *Mountain Messenger*. By this time the *Messenger* was the only paper in the area. Turner had been elected to four terms in the state Senate between 1869 and 1877 and was in firm control of a strong Republican Court House Ring.

The 1880's

In 1880, the Republicans used "Bloody-shirt" tactics against their Democratic opponents attaching

them to the treasonous secessionists who had caused the Civil War. The tactic, used continuously after the war had a telling effect and Sierra County gave a near two to one victory to James Garfield in the presidential race even though the rest of California went Democratic. James Weaver, the Green-Backer third-party candidate received only 12 votes in the county. (The Green-back Party was the precursor of the Grange and Populist



Illustration of Garfield assassination.

VICTORY!

—
**The Supreme Court Gets
 Down to its Knitting!**

—
**And Fires the Slickens Case
 out of the Window!**

—
**How the News was Received—
 Flying Flags and Booming
 Bells, Crashing Cannons,
 Blowing of Steam
 Whistles, etc.**

agrarian parties that began to develop during this period.) Twenty of the county's twenty-five precincts went Republican. The following year, President Garfield was assassinated and Downieville, Forest City and the Buttes mining community (i.e. the Sierra City area) held funeral observances for the slain leader. In this year the debris problem became the most pressing state political issue. A special session of the state legislature was called and attempted to solve the flooding and "slickins" problems caused by hydraulic mining. Assemblyman George Wood, Republican from Sierraville, led the battle against the anti-debris legislation. He and other mining representatives from the moun-

Political History - (Continued on Page 5) —

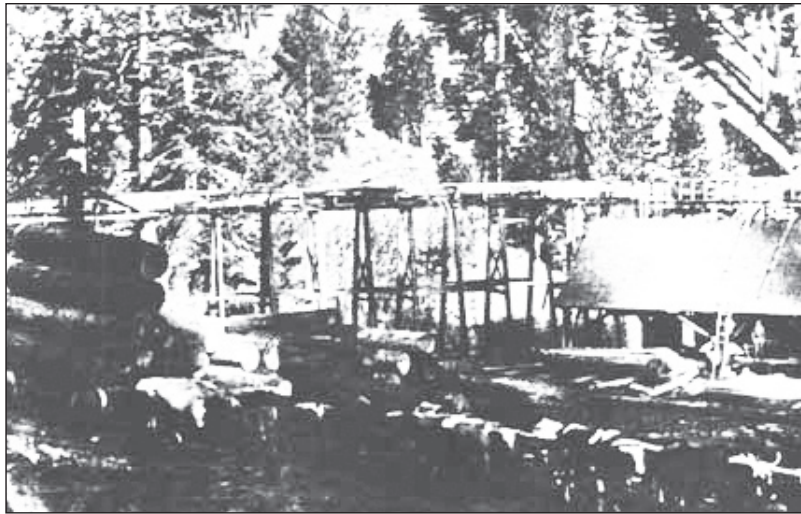
Political History - (Continued from Page 4) —

tain counties managed to defeat the Granger bills introduced by the Sacramento Valley farmers directed toward halting hydraulic mining.

For a number of years the *Mountain Messenger* had been the only newspaper in the county and had mouthed a straight Republican machine line. In 1882 two new reform minded newspapers, the *Sierra County Tribune* and the *Sierra Valley Leader* began publishing in Forest City and Sierraville respectively. Both were Republican papers but represented the reform or “Mugwump” wing of the party. They began a sustained attack on the *Mountain Messenger*, H.K. Turner and the court-house gang in Downieville. Both the new “Mugwump” papers began also to attack

President Chester Arthur and the so-called “Stalwarts”. The “Stalwarts” were the conservative, boss-ridden faction of the Republican Party at both the state and national level. The reformers were going after the bosses—local, state and national. Charges of corruption were published in the *Leader* and the *Tribune* against the “County Ring”, H.K. Turner and the *Mountain Messenger* machine. Observers noted that the political campaign that year was the dirtiest, most vile contest since the Civil War.

In August, Boss Turner lost control of the Republican county convention, bolted the convention and badly split the local party. The Downieville clique had lost control of the party machinery. The official Republican Party in the county was now controlled by the “Mugwump” reformers.



Lewis Mill located in Smithneck Canyon, fig. 32

The Democrats took advantage of the split and the campaign became one of mud-slinging, innuendo and personal attacks. A grand jury brought out evidence of widespread corruption. Finally, politics erupted into violence when the Republican reform candidate for sheriff, Jack Campbell, was gunned down in the streets of Randolph by a political assassin. The assassination, labeled a “Dasterdly Deed” by the *Tribune* wounded the Republican party fatally. Mass violence threatened in Sierraville as the reformers nominated A.S. Nichols for sheriff to replace Campbell.

Pistol shots broke the mountain quiet and political discussions erupted into fish fights and gun battles. Luckily no one else was killed.

The Republicans ran two tickets, a reform slate and the county machine nominations. The Democrats exploited the split and managed to

elect a number of their candidates to county offices. The two-party system had returned to Sierra County government.

So ends the first thirty years of Sierra County politics. In 1883, the State Supreme Court ruled against the hydraulic mines on the debris question and they began to fold up. During the 1880's the towns of Gibsonville, Scales and others started their slow death. In the same decade, the Lewis Mill was constructed in Smithneck Canyon. During the nineties four other large sawmills were established in Loyalton. The balance of power shifted to the eastern side of the Sierra and a new era opened in Sierra County, economically and politically.

Quilt Featuring Historic Mining Photo Collage Could Be Yours!

Scenescenes from the gold rush era in Sierra County are featured on a quilt that you can take home if you have the winning ticket in a drawing that the Sierra County Historical Society will be holding at the society's annual meeting in September, 2011. The quilt was created by a talented group of women in the Sierra City area, Irmke Schoebel, Susan Hopkins, Renetta Hayes, and Margaret Boothby, who have worked over a year on this one-of-a-kind quilt. Using a technique that transfers photographs to fabric, the group was able to turn historic photos into a quilt pattern that is both beautiful and provides a fascinating glimpse at the mines, buildings and people from the golden past. The quilt is hand-stitched and made to last as a heirloom your family will treasure.

Tickets to win the quilt will be available at several community events during the summer and also available at several locations in Sierra City including the Kentucky Mine and Museum, the Sierra Country Store, and the School House Gallery. Tickets will be available in Sierraville at Sierra Valley Feed. If you are out of the area and would like to buy tickets for a chance to own this incredible quilt, you can mail a check to Sierra County Historical Society, P.O. Box 260, Sierra City, CA, 96125. We will mail your ticket stubs to you. The tickets are available for a \$1.00 donation each or 6



The quilt features many photos from the gold mining era including a Fourth of July costumed pageant celebration (inset photo).

tickets for a \$5.00 donation. All the proceeds will go to the Sierra County Historical Society, a registered non-profit 501c, to help support the society's ongoing outreach and projects for the preservation of Sierra County's past. Donations may be tax deductible.

For more information about the quilt and where you can view it this summer, or for other drawing ticket sales locations call 530-862-1310.

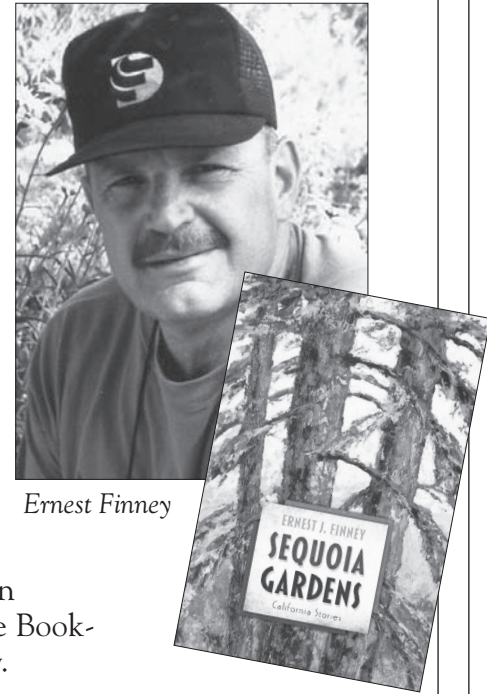
Alleghany Author Ernest Finney Tells Tales of the Golden State in his New Book

The setting of Ernest Finney's book, *Sequoia Gardens*, is California, from the Bay Area, to the Central Valley, to the Sierras. The book is a collection of stories revealing the gritty reality of life on the wild side in the Golden State.

The story of gold rush era miners in the Sierras titled "Up on the Yuba" tells the tale of a group of placer miners panning for gold on the Yuba River, their dreams of striking it rich, and the reality that they encountered. Finney's writing is obviously based on knowledge of placer mining

in the Yuba River region during the gold rush, and his storytelling is colorful and compelling.

Sequoia Gardens is available online at amazon.com, or locally at the Two Rivers Gallery in Downieville and The Book-seller in Grass Valley.



Ernest Finney

Membership Corner: June 2011 News From Suzi Schoensee, Membership Chair

Since our last mailing of "The Sierran" we are fortunate to have received four new family memberships! We want to extend a thank-you and warm welcome to these wonderful people. They are Sarah Kucserka joining in March from Los Angeles, CA, Maurice S. Obrien joining in April from Sparks, Nevada, Andrew Ringwald and Briana Morrison of Chico, CA, and Anthony Schoensee and Alana Flores of Oakland joining in June.

As of March, one of our earlier family members has decided to commit themselves for life. For this we are exceedingly grateful and also extend our thanks with a warm, grand welcome to the Life Membership of Paul & Jean Foerster from Los Altos California! With their life membership check they wrote a lovely, informative note which I would like to share with you. In the note they said, "Thought that we would like to honor my parents with a life membership. They are buried in Sierraville after a long awaited retirement on Willow Road. We are summer people at 226 Willow Road. My father Julius Welke came to Loyaltown from N.Y. in 1911 and shortly after married my mother, the school "marm" — Irene Small. They left there in the mid 20's, but always planned to return to the valley. We also love our Sierra Valley and summers spent there." Signed, "Jeanne Welke Foerster and Paul & family."

We now have 29 life members.

Questionnaire Results (continued from March)

I last reported that Noel Turner was one of the 10 persons whose family had resided in Sierra County for the last one hundred sixty-one years. He called and asked me to correct that report. His family moved from Goodyears Bar in the 1940's but had been in the county since the 1850's. He now resides in Washington D.C. I was delighted to learn through our conversation that he is a long lost cousin of mine. We share the same Great, Great, Great Grandmother & Grandfather — Clarista and Thomas Turner.

There are two new membership questionnaires which I have received since March and they have revealed that there are two additional families whose relatives have lived and vacationed in the county for 161 years. **The Peterman family** have been pioneers, gold seekers, farmers, loggers, and business owners in the communities of Alleghany, Downieville, Loganville, Sierra City and Forest City. **Clysta McLemore's family** were gold seekers, farmers, loggers, business owners, millworkers and vacationers in the areas of Rocky Point and Sierra Valley. Some of her family is buried in Sierraville cemetery.

As you may recall, in the last "Sierran" I reported of the 10 families who were still living in the county

Membership Corner - (Continued on Page 8) —

Membership Corner - (Continued from Page 7) —

who had history here for the last 161 years. There are thirty of you not living here presently, but, who also have had family history here since 1850. I would like to relate to the reader ten of these people in this publication. I will tell about all of you as time and space allows. Your names and bits of facts which you imparted and communities which your ancestors settled are the following: **1.) Kathy McCaffrey and William Corbett's** people were pioneer gold seekers between the years of 1850-75 with history from Brandy City and Downieville. They now own a second home in Sierra City. **2.) Julie and Timothy Deary's** ancestors were gold seekers, ranchers and business owners of Goodyears Bar, Downieville, Sierra City, Indian Valley, Loganville and Poker Flat between 1850 & 1875; **3.) Marjorie Dieckman** had relatives who were pioneers, gold seekers, ranchers, & business owners from Downieville, Sierra City, Loganville and Loyalton between the years of 1850 and 1975; **4.) Margaret Dodgson** is the youngest

daughter of Margaret Lambert related to Theodore Perry and Amanda Blasdell who married and settled in Sieraville between the years of 1850 and 1950; **5.) Frank Frye** had ancestors who were gold seekers in Sierra City in 1850; **6.) Richard and Clare Gardella** had family who were gold seekers and farmers in Sierra City between the years of 1850 and 1875; **7.) Susan Gardella**, related to the Loefflers who owned the Kentucky Mine, had a family who were gold seekers and farmers in the villages of Sierraville and Sierra City; **8.) Carlton and Neva Hansen** had family who were pioneers, gold seekers, millworkers, and business owners in Sierra City between the years of 1850 and 1975; **9.) Richard Hanson** had his people in Port Wine, Queen City, Scales, St. Louis, Laporte and Downieville who were gold seekers and business owners between the years of 1850 and 1925; **10.) Neal and Carla Lucett** had family who were gold seekers in Sierra City at the Kentucky Mine (Carla is a Loeffler).

To be continued...