

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —



Berger Children 1906

The Berger Family and the Berger Mountaineer Mine

By Andra Berger Carter and Barbara Carter Snelgrove

As the youngest son in his family, Theophile Berger's parents wanted the best for him, including the opportunity for a college education. The Bergers were struggling in Bern, Switzerland, just trying to feed and clothe a family of eight in the late 1800s. No funds were available for Theophile to receive a European education, so with the situation at hand, his parents sent word to a wealthy aunt in America, asking if she would watch after him and see that he receive a good education. The aunt, Ida Winter Hoffman, of Mt. Vernon, New York, was happy to accept Theophile into her life. After months of collecting and saving for overseas transportation, in 1865, at the age of 14, Theophile was on his way to New York to live with his mother's relatives.

Theophile arrived in New York in the summer of 1865 and eventually enrolled at Columbia University a few years later, where he studied and earned a degree in engineering. Throughout his schooling, many professors

and colleagues recognized his skill and precision as an engineer. After receiving his degree in electrical engineering, Theophile ventured to Virginia City and Gold Hill, Nevada, to work in the mining industry. There, he met Phillip Diedescheimer, a bearded German who was known in the mining industry for introducing the square set timber method, which supported and stabilized mountains in underground mining operations. Diedescheimer knew that Theophile's engineering skills would be useful and that his potential for wealth was great, and it is believed that Diedescheimer encouraged Theophile in his mining endeavors. The two men remained friends and business associates throughout their lives.

Theophile spent several years in the Virginia City area, during which time mining activities there were waning, and gold and silver ore production was slowing down. In Virginia City, Theophile learned about a place further north, Sierra County, California, just below the Sierra Buttes. Swiss acquaintances told him that the place "looked a lot like home" and that "gold was in the Sierra County hills." It was in 1882 when Theophile moved to this area and laid claim to a small gold deposit, the Berger Mountaineer Mine, which was located northeast of Packer Lake. He found another treasure there -- his wife Mary Magdeleine Seitz, a native of Downieville. Mary and Theophile married on January 23, 1889, shortly after they met one another. Their neighbors, many of them European ranchers and miners, helped plan a large, community-wide wedding celebration. The couple lived at the mine for many years, raising and educating seven children (Victor, Matilda, Edwin, Herbert, Olive, John and Thelma). They built a sturdy home, insulated with sawdust, which was a short distance from the entrance to the mine. The Bergers lived near the mine for more than 20 years. Their children were taught their daily lessons at home, by their mother and by private teacher, Nellie Dugan.

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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!

Officers and Executive Board of The Sierra County Historical Society

Mary Nourse, President	Bud Buczkowske, Director
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If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact any board member or email at info@sierracountyhistory.org

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

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

Sierra County Historical Society Membership Report

We have 39 new members who have joined us this year. Welcome and Thank you.

Included in these are 3 life members. Ryan Baum & Alice Wong from Davis, CA and the Paul Loeffler family from San Francisco, CA.

In additional we have 3 new business members. First, Old Sierra City Schoolhouse Vacation Retnal in Sierra City, Second, Tom's Snowmobile & Service in Sierra City and third, Leonard's Market in Loyalton.

The remaining outstanding new members are the following:

- Richard Meder of Loyalton
- Kristie Pearmund of Castro Valley, CA
- Russell Turner of McArthur, CA
- Anita Balkavek from Redding, CA
- Chuck & Pam Scimeca from Nevada City
- Dee Ann Radcliffe of Verdi, Nevada
- Ben Meyer of San Mateo, CA
- Richard & Clare Gardella from San Carlos, CA
- Joyce Hamilton of Sebastopol, CA
- John & Mary Ellen Smee of Oakland, CA
- K.L. Alberg fro Sacramento, CA
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- Mark & Deborah Panelli from Salinas, CA
- Katherine Hale from Vallejo, CA
- Laura Todd of Grass Valley, CA
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- Derek & Barbara Beverly of Sierra City
- Carole Donati of Santa Ynez, CA
- Chris & Marleen Hanson of Woodland, CA
- Earl & Betty Frye of Auburn, CA
- Gene & Paula Spreitzer of Sacramento, CA
- Williann & Mathew McPherson from Spokane, WA

Respectfully submitted,
Suzi Schoensee, Membership Chair

**The Berger Family and
the Berger Mountaineer Mine - (Continued from Page 1) —**

Water proved to be an almighty force for Mary and Theophile. In February of 1904, their fifteen-year-old son, Victor, and his eight-year-old brother walked below the mine to Packer creek early one morning, to turn



Mary Seitz Berger

some water out of its flume, a regular duty for the two boys. Victor had to go into the creek to accomplish the task, and, as a result, was engulfed by a rush of water and timber. In an instant, he was gone. Mining camp workers and residents of nearby communities rallied to search for him. Victor's empty rubber boots were located first. Eventually, he was found lodged under a bridge that had to be "chopped away" in order to set his body free.

Years later, the Berger's mining operation came to a halt because of a ground water flood that filled its shaft. The mine, like Victor, drowned. Theophile and his family never experienced the wealth that they had hoped for. Water handed them the most substantial losses of their lives.

Victor's gravesite now sits in the center of a Girl Scout camp (along with his brother Edwin's and Edwin's wife,



Berger children with Victor, 1903

Helen), where it is respected and well cared for. Packer Creek is now known as Berger Creek.

Theophile and Mary eventually moved off of the mountain and a few miles down the pass to Sierra City to continue their lives, although Theophile was tireless in his efforts to keep his mining operation



Theophile Berger

going. They found a house to fit their remaining six children and paid for it with a gold nugget. The Berger family, Theophile especially, felt at home beneath the evergreen trees and the jagged California Alps.

Theophile's life ended in Sierra City in February of 1934, when he was 82 years old. His obituary states, "He was a highly respected citizen whose wise counsel and mature judgement was a powerful factor in the affairs of Sierra County and its citizens." Mary Berger died in 1945, in Alameda, California, where she was living with her daughter, Matilda.

When John Berger (1900-1993), the last surviving child of Mary and Theophile, spoke about his growing-up years, he explained that Theo and Mary cared deeply about all of their children, and that they were good parents who wanted the best for the seven of them. The children spent hours each day doing chores around the mine and the house, making trips to the creek for water, helping their mother prepare meals for the mine workers and doing their home-school lessons. According to John, his parents truly appreciated and valued their lives and experiences in Sierra County.

*See page 6 for the funeral notice and
other details of Victor Berger's drowning death.*

Historic Sierra Buttes Mine Headquarters Building Hosts SCHS Annual Meeting



Evan Dailey conducts a tour of he and Joanne's historic home

Members of the Sierra County Historical Society and their guests spent a beautiful autumn afternoon at the 2013 annual meeting held at the Sierra City home of Evan and Joanne Dailey on September 8th..

The home, which was moved to its present site from a higher level at the Sierra Buttes Mine, has been lovingly restored by the Dailey's along with the lovely grounds and orchard.

Before the delicious buffet lunch was served, Evan Dailey conducted guided tours throughout the home, pointing out interesting facts about the history of the building and it's relocation to its current location. The home retains much of its historic charm amid Evan's historic map collection and memorabilia from the Sierra Buttes Mine during its heyday.

A short business meeting featured reports on the 2013 season at the Kentucky Mine and Museum, the concert series, the progress of the Oral History Committee and the status of the Lagomarsino Cabin project. An election was held to fill three board positions. Don Yegge from Loyalton, Stuart Lauters from Downieville, and Arlene Amodei from Sierraville were nominated and unanimously elected to the board.

Don McKechnie was asked to read some remembrances that Carroll S. Hayes provided describing the years that his family lived in the home now owned by the Dailey's. Some of Carroll's fascinating recollections

included:

1. We all seemed to remember skiing off the front porch down into the meadow as the snow came off the roof and built a great mound to start from. It was great fun.
2. We remembered the great flood of 1938, the boulders crashing the river could be easily heard at the house. My mother was worried that the dam at Sardine Lake might fault sending even more water down the river, so we were invited up the road to the Humphries house to spend the night. I remember the four of us sleeping crossways in one bed and waking up the next morning to wood fired biscuits and gravy.
3. The toilet was on the downstairs porch, you had to go outside to access it. Needless to say, in the winter you hurried through your business to get back inside the house.
4. We recalled the gold scales that were in what is now the parlor. The assay office was outside where the patio is now.
5. There were a number of other buildings on the property besides the stamp mill; there was a music building where the miner's band kept their instruments and practiced.



6. One winter the miners were clearing the heavy snow off the roof of the mill building; my dad had been running a fire hose on the roof to get the snow to slide off. When it started to slide off, he tripped on a pipe and fell. The snow buried him under about eight feet of snow. Luckily, the miners were able to get him out before he smothered.

**Historic Sierra Buttes Mine Headquarters Building Hosts
SCHS Annual Meeting - (Continued on Page 5)** —

**Historic Sierra Buttes Mine Headquarters Building Hosts
SCHS Annual Meeting - (Continued from Page 4)**

7. We remember picking black tartarian cherries off the first and seconds porches. The tree was right next door to the house. We also used to watch deer and bear raiding the trees down in the orchards below the house.
8. We had a hydraulic powered washing machine as well as a hydraulic powered electric plant. The family served the town with electricity in the early days. The plant was where the back patio is now.
9. We recalled some great meals in the house. Vic and Bertha Halleck of Packer Lake would bring down a huge catch of trout; my mother would do the rest of the fixings from the garden. The Loffmark brothers would come down and play their fiddle and violin.



Members and guests enjoy a delicious luncheon during the annual meeting



The beautiful patio area was the setting for the business meeting

How Lemon Canyon and Many Plant Species Got Their Name

Editor's Note: Lemmon Canyon, located approximately one mile south of Sierraville, California, in Sierra Valley, was named after the ranch owned by B.F. Lemmon, and many plant species in the area were identified and named by his brother, botanist J.G. Lemmon. Unfortunately, the name of the canyon was misspelled on the original maps and records and that misspelling has continued to be designated to this day.



John Gibbs Lemmon came to the eastern Sierra to recover from the effects of a long internment in a Civil War prison camp. His life-long interest in botany was stimulated by the unknown flora of Western Nevada and Eastern California. Lemmon fought in the Civil War for three years before he was captured. Upon his release from Andersonville prison, he came West to live with an elder brother, Frank, whose home was one mile south of Sierraville, California.

There he later wrote, "I woke up one early morning of October, 1866, an emaciated, feeble survivor of Andersonville prison atrocities, then increased by a liberal diet of one year to weight of about 90 pounds. As I peered out of the windows, and later groped about the premises, the strange flowers, bushes, and even the trees proclaimed the fact that I was in a practically unknown world."



J.G. Lemmon

"Now I was thrust into a real workshop where things were still being created. The thought was a staggering one, yet full of inspiration. Ignoring weakness and pain, I at first groped about the yard upheld by the fence rail. The next day I was able to walk a little way alone, being greatly stimulated by handfuls of unrecognizable plants. In a few days I could go farther, assisted by my aged mother, and the good Dr. (David Gould) Webber, who put me up on his horse and accompanied me often a half mile or more, picking up what plants I desired."

At the suggestion of Professor Eliphalet Lewis Case, a Sierraville school teacher, Lemmon sent his first

**How Lemon Canyon and Many Plant Species
Got Their Name - (Continued on Page 6)**

How Lemon Canyon and Many Plant Species Got Their Name - (Continued from Page 5) —

50 plant specimens to Henry N. Bolander, the only botanist on the Pacific Coast at that time. Lemmon was overjoyed with the results of his first shipment. Lemmon wrote, "This first list . . . informed me that the curious five-leafed clover, found intruding



J.G. Lemmon and wife Sarah on one of their research expeditions

upon Frank's front doorstep had become (overnight) *Trifolium lemmoni*. Flaming up beside the gate was *Castilleja lemmoni* (paint-brush). Beneath the beehive back of the house nestled *Antennaria microcephala*. Across the road from out of a mass of rocks peered the large leaves and purple flower, *Asarum lemmoni*. . . A little further, hiding under the sagebrush near Beckwourth Pass, stands erect the fourth member of this interesting genus *Astragalus casei*, named at my request in honor of Professor E.L. Case, the teacher at the Sierraville School, an my assistant during many weary climbs. . . *Ivesia webberi* was found in Sierra Valley on Dr. Webber's ranch, and later on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada on Purdy's ranch near Reno, Nevada."

After many more excursions to explore and collect specimens in the western Great Basin region, J.G. Lemmon had an article published in *Pacific Rural* titled "Scenes in the High Sierra." In later correspondence Lemmon wrote "The fact that a certain plant has been named *Astragalus lemmoni* in honor of my pioneer efforts in inspecting this valley, the honor is too great for me to wear modestly as I should, but if diligence in future is a guaranty I mean to deserve it."

In 1880 Lemmon moved to Oakland, California, but he made frequent trips to Sierraville the remainder of his life. Lemmon was one of several California resident botanists who formed a nucleus for organized scientific life on the Pacific Coast. He died in Oakland, California, in 1908, and his herbarium is now at the University of California at Berkeley.

Victor Berger Drowning Notice and Funeral Card

Last Thursday evening the remains of Victor Berger was found pinned under a bridge not far from the house. The searchers had about given up hopes of ever finding him. One of the searching party reached under the bridge and felt his foot- both boots had been torn off. They had to chop the bridge away to get him out. Ed Lacrue brought the news to town and several men went up with a coffin. He was buried up there as it was impossible to get to town. Mr. and Mrs. Berger have the sympathy of everybody.



Victor Berger, age six months

Card of Thanks

To the gentlemen named below:

Hugh Wilson	Ed Langton
Ed Westall	John Bassett
E. Loeffler	Peter Goff
Herman Busch	Dan Thompson
Peter Kieffer	A. Seitz
J. Spellenberg	Ed Lacrue
Victor Titus	Charles Hobby
Hans Hansen	Paul Zerga

and Albert Nelson, who, in storm, wind and icy waters, were searching for our dead boy Victor, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks. We also wish to thank the kind ladies who sent flowers.

Mr. and Mrs. T. Berger
and Children
Sierra City, March 2, 1904

President's Message

H. G. Wells once commented that history is a race between education and catastrophe. In watching my grandchildren at play (OK, careening at snail's pace in an ore car) at the Kentucky Mine last weekend, I reflected on the amazing educational riches of our local history. Not only is the Kentucky literally a gold mine, but our historical society-its people and its endeavors-move us forward in such a way as to avoid disaster.

SCHS is having an amazing year, despite considerable challenges. Our dedicated KY Mine curator Virginia Lutes and her energetic assistant Judy Lawrence both had to resign from their positions just before the museum's season opening. We dodged a bullet when the talented Dianne Bruns stepped up as acting curator. With the able assistance of caretaker Toni Strine as well as volunteer help, she guided the museum through a successful season. The gift shop did well, and numerous artifacts were acquired including some furniture from Frances Brett for the Lagomarsino cabin. Membership chair Suzi Schoensee reports that we have 21 new members, including 4 lifetime memberships. We hosted just one concert this year due our small volunteer workforce, but it was a big one-Mumbo Gumbo-and was a tremendous financial success. We welcomed three new board members: Arlene Amodei, Stuart Lauters, and Don Yegge. All of them bring myriad talents to SCHS.



Our oral history project is moving along nicely thanks to the efforts of Virginia Lutes, Elda Ball, Fran Burgard, and Susan Hopkins. I am working on a slideshow about mining using historic photos loaned by Carroll Hayes. Carroll also wrote a childhood memoir of life at the Sierra Buttes Mine, which was shared at that site during our annual picnic. I don't know what to tell you if you missed that picnic; it was amazing! Joanne and Evan Dailey graciously opened their historic home to us and it was truly a memorable event.

Our volunteer web-master Cindy Ellsmore is moving us forward in ways we could never have imagined. The website is constantly growing and changing; please visit often to see everything from our calendar of events to job postings. Don't miss the "General History of Sierra County" by our own Bill Copren. Cindy also has introduced us to "Past Perfect", a software program

for computer based collections and membership management; Don Yegge will install it on a computer that he generously donated to us. We are also considering internet access for the museum and a SCHS facebook page.

None of this technology was available when the Kentucky Mine museum opened in 1977, but the existing carpet was there from the outset. Returning to the opening comment about catastrophe, I'd like to mention that the board has committed to paint and re-carpet this winter. Duct tape can only go so far...feel free to make a donation toward this project!

Thank you for your continued interest and support.

Mary Nourse



The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

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