

# The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

## Camel Association Headquarters In Downieville

*Virginia Lutes*

**I**n the office of the Secretary of State of California, a certificate of incorporation under the name “The California and Utah Camel Association” was filed. It was the 19th May 1859, the capital stock was \$12,000, in shares of \$100.00



each and the duration of the company was twenty years. The principals of the Association were John E. Ager, E. G. Bryant, J. J. Cooper, Q. A. Clements, Wm. R. Tennent, C. L. Sholes, James Kane, Samuel W. Langton and E. M. Gates. The Trustees of the company were John E. Ager, E. G. Bryant and John J. Cooper. Downieville was to be the principal place of business. The object of the company was the introduction of and employment of the camel on the Pacific Coast. The camel was to be used as a means of transport for both supplies and passengers in the Sierra's; much of the area was still reached only by trail.

Numerous newspapers of the time covered the story of this unusual corporation, including the Sierra Democrat, Sacramento Union, Daily Alta California and the California Farmer and Journal

of Useful Sciences. Well wishes were extended to the company. Following that very little information was located, a short article in the Sierra Democrat dated March 17, 1860 read “If you want to travel to the Silver Country – if you want to get there quick, and ride all the way – take the stage at Marysville, and come to Downieville. We will have a camel train by Jamison in a few months, but meantime mules are cheaper than legs.” By this time many had left Sierra County to try their fortune in the Comstock Silver rush. That may have some bearing on the failure of this company, since there is no record of camels ever have actually been employed in the venture, and it is known that some of those involved with the company headed to the Virginia City area from Downieville.

Even though our Sierra County camel company did not survive, interest in camels as a form of transportation was high in the United States in the mid-1800's, especially in the arid climates.



*The only known photo of an Army camel.*

The first camels were brought to California by a young navy officer in 1857, imported from Tunis via Texas. He was leading a surveying expedition, using twenty five camels. This young officer was Edward Fitzgerald Beale (1822-1893), and he was

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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

- |                                                                |                                    |
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| Dianne Bruns,<br>Museum Curator                                |                                    |

If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact any board member or email at [info@sierracountyhistory.org](mailto: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 person/couple) ..... \$300.00

In addition, Museum Renovation Project donations are gratefully accepted.

Please send dues and donations to:  
S.C.H.S.

c/o Don Yegge, Membership Chair  
PO Box 336, Loyalton, CA 96118

### Kentucky Curators Report August 2014

*Dianne Bruns*

The 2014 season found us quite a bit busier than the 2013 season, with over 2000 people visiting the park this summer. Of those 2000, 1149 went on tour.

We had a great staff this summer. In addition to Keith and I, Don McKechnie led 3 to 4 tours a week. Dustin Strine also proved to be a great help, and kept our bathrooms clean, we received many compliments.

We are using the "PastPerfect" software and are bringing our museum up to date using the computer to enter donations, track inventory, update membership etc. Keith and I also fully accessioned 108 items that were donated in 2014 alone. 101 of these were gifts, and 7 were loans. We were able to complete 1985 accessioning on the computer. Keith is fully trained on PastPerfect, this took practically the whole summer. He was a great addition to our museum and summer. I am proposing that, if he is available, we offer him the position of intern next summer. He is great with the guests, willing to wrangle rattle snakes, and now is trained on our PastPerfect program.

Looking forward to next season, we will have new flooring in the museum! In order to accomplish this everything will need to be moved from the museum, and then returned and exhibits re-set. I would appreciate any volunteer help you would care to offer. Remember you can contact our Historical Society year round by internet. [info@sierracountyhistory.org](mailto:info@sierracountyhistory.org), or [museum@sierracountyhistory.org](mailto:museum@sierracountyhistory.org).

### Camel Assoc. Headquarters - (Continued from Page 1) —

entrusted with the delivery of sensitive dispatches to Washington from Commodore Robert Stockton, the head of the Pacific Squadron. This took place in the critical months before the Bear Flag Revolt, and the United States move to occupy California. Lt. Beale went on to play a critical role in the conflict with Mexico. After the war Beale continued to be a key figure in California, he delivered the official dispatches on the discovery of gold back east, but he also is remembered for bringing camels to California, accompanied by a Syrian camel driver named Hajj Ali who was brought to the US to train our soldiers to handle camels. Due to the language barrier, and his easygoing nature he was tagged with the nickname "Hi Jolly". This experiment opened the door to further use of camels, and Hi Jolly took part in numerous camel projects in California and Arizona.



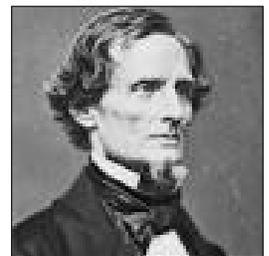
In 1863 a dispute erupted over the California/Nevada boundary lines. In April of 1863 the two authorized a joint survey to resolve the poorly defined boundary before Nevada was to become a state.

The terrain to be covered promised such contrasts of terrain that the surveying party outfitted itself with boats, snowshoes, sleds, pack animals, tropical netting and a small herd of Bactrian camels for desert travel. Since the easternmost portion of Sierra County borders with Nevada, this survey would have included our county.

Following the Mexican-American War a vast amount of territory was claimed by the United States. Congress appropriated \$30,000; the funds were to purchase camels for use on routes across the 529,189 square miles of territory acquired. During 1856 and 1857, over one hundred camels carried mail over some of this new country. By 1864, this venture ended in Texas. The camels were sold at auction to a freight outfit to carry freight to and from Nevada mines, others went to circuses or zoos, or were turned loose. Wild camels were seen as late as 1929.

This was not the beginning of use of camels; we go back in history even further to explore the U.S. Military Use of camels. In 1836 a recommendation was made to Congress by Major George H. Crossman that the army should experiment with the use of camels since the main desert challenge for military animals was lack of water and forage. Camels could go longer without water than mules or horses. In the late 1840's a group of junior army officers was posted in the southwest frontier, a desert area. They began to think seriously about the use of camels. A West Point graduate Major Henry Wayne was the most enthusiastic. In his investigation of camels he found that there were two distinct species, the Arabian Dromedaries which had one hump, and the Bactrian, with two humps. He looked into their usefulness in arid climates. The Arabian was better used as a saddle animal, while the Bactrian which was heavier and slower, was better used as a beast of burden. At the conclusion of his study Major Wayne recommended to the War Department that the importation of camels should be done in order to test the feasibility of a camel cavalry.

Politicians now entered the discussion. Jefferson Davis, Mississippi Senator at that time was chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs and who later would become President of the Confederate States of America studied Major Wayne's recommendation;

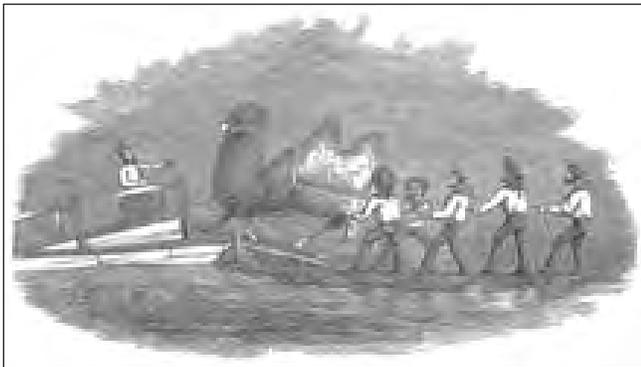


*Jefferson Davis*

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### Camel Assoc. Headquarters - (Continued from Page 3) —

he liked it. He knew that camels had been used in Egypt during the Napoleonic campaigns. Davis imagined American soldiers astride dromedaries chasing hostile Indians off trails along the emigrant routes. He envisioned camels carrying small artillery cannon on their humps, and advancing the US presence further into the west and south. He and Beale agreed that camels could conceivably help in the new territories. Camels were swift and strong and could penetrate regions where horses and even mules could not go without ample supplies of water. Davis was so fascinated by the idea that he worked with his wife to translate a French work on the military use of camels.



*Loading a Bactrian camel onboard ship in Turkey.*

Eventually, \$30,000 was appropriated by Congress to purchase 50 camels and hire 10 camel drivers.

Vermont Senator, George Perkins Marsh (one America's first students of ecology), published two works of the camel. He believed that the habits of the American Indian resembled those of the nomadic Arabs, and may be a way to end the government's seemingly endless conflict with the Indians. He felt that the introduction of the camel among them would modify their modes of life as much as the use of the horse had. He reasoned that in the long run the camel would provide the means of raising Indians to a state of a somewhat civilized life. Also, products of the camel, such as wool, skin and flesh would prove of value to the tribes, which he felt would otherwise be fated to perish alongside the buffalo.

The natural history of the camel may surprise some in that camels were in the Americas for millions of years before humans. The camel family evolved here and spread via the land-bridge to the Eastern Hemisphere. One species of true camel persisted in California until 15,000 years ago, and the South American branch, which includes llamas, still flourishes today.

Camels thrive on sparse desert vegetation, thorny plants, and dried grasses that other beasts of burden will not eat. The camel can travel much farther without water than other animals, due to an unusual metabolism and internal cooling system. It can endure high temperatures with a minimum of drinking water. Camels can obtain sufficient moisture for survival from food plants in cool temperatures. When it does drink after a prolonged dry spell, it can take in as much as 25 gallons of water within a few minutes.

As a pack animal a camel can truly excel. Whereas a strong mule can carry up to 300 pounds, a packhorse less. A Dromedary camel can haul easily 600 pounds over a 30-mile distance in a day; a Bactrian can carry up to 1,000 pounds.

Pads on a camel's chest and knees support the camel's body when it kneels—every time it is mounted or dismounted, loaded or unloaded.

The experiment of the use of the camel in the military ended at the start of the War of the States; Davis and Wayne, supporters of the camels both entered the war on the side of the Confederates. Many forts across the southwest were abandoned, and interest waned in Texas, where horsemen objected to the use of the camel, fearing the loss of business for the horses. And maybe, the animal's ability to spit, balk, and not obey orders may have had something to do with the end! As to why our local Association failed, we may never know.

*(Source materials for this article, Desert USA, James Sinnott Sierra Valley, Camels in the West, California Missions Resource Center, and the California Newspaper Collection online.)*

## Early Sierra City History 1849 to 1871

By James Connolly, member of our Board of Directors



hirteen miles above Downieville, on the north fork of the Yuba River, at the base of the north side of the Sierra Buttes, lays the historic gold mining town of Sierra City. As to who were the first white men prospecting for gold to come to the area is uncertain, but there may have been men in the area in the summer or fall of 1849. In the spring of 1850, P. A. Haven and Joseph Zumwalt came over the divide where the Sierra Buttes Mine was soon to be discovered, finding plenty of signs of Indian activity along the river, but no indications that any prospecting for gold had been done yet. The two men had spent the previous year prospecting in the river at the site of Downieville. Later in 1850 a settlement was made where the town now stands consisting of a few cloth tents, tent coverings of log-side walls, and a few log and shingle huts, which was typical of all early developing mining camps.



*Buttes Mine above Sierra City*

The first mining was done in the bank and stream gravels of the North Yuba River, but the famous gold-bearing quartz ledge of the Sierra Buttes Mine was soon discovered, by one account, in 1850 by a man named Murphy or some Italians. Another account says it was discovered in 1851 by prospectors traveling on the trail that went up the mountainside northwest of the town, toward the later Monarch Mine and ending at Butcher Ranch. Prospectors had been traveling over the trail and the gradual wearing down of the trail by mules exposed a ledge of quartz in which free gold could be seen. A third account says that Julius and Christian Reis discovered it in 1851. By 1852 twenty arrastras were pulverizing the ore. The Independence lode was also discovered in 1851. John Lavezzolo settled at this time on Charcoal

Flat, but left a year later after his property was taken by claim jumpers.

In 1852, Sierra City consisted of two large buildings (one on the former site of the Catholic Church at Main and Church Streets), a bakery, and several gambling-houses and saloons. The succeeding winter was a harsh one and the entire town was demolished by the heavy snows due to the frailty of the roofs of the buildings. Food was scarce and everyone went away. Instead of rebuilding right away, small settlements developed at the Sierra Buttes and Independence mines including grocery, general stores and saloons. By 1854, Langton & Bros. stagecoach was coming in from Downieville. In 1855, Doyle & Co. put up a sawmill at the site of Sierra City, which at the time had one solitary log cabin standing.

It was not until 1858 that a permanent town got a foothold. Rich diggings had been discovered on the flats west and east of the town. Shanties were erected and Sierra City was once again established. Soon after Lafayette Thompson built a hotel and restaurant on a site adjacently east of the present Post Office. John Lavezzolo resumed mining on Charcoal Flat (later known as Busch's Flat) and had a potato ranch east of the site of Scott's Hotel. In 1860, Michael Carrigan and several others built a sawmill on Busch's Flat. In 1861, Wilcox and Hutchingson built the Yuba Gap hotel on the site of the later Scott's hotel.

By 1863, G. B. Castagnetto, who had come to Sierra City in 1859, had a store, saloon and ranch on the south side of Main Street, east of Thompson's hotel, barn and corral. Theodore Wilson had a saloon on the north side of Main St. across the street. I. T. Mooney had a slaughterhouse and stable at Loganville. Miss Hannah Riley started a private school in the Masonic Hall, which had been built a year earlier. In 1864, Castagnetto's place was called the Sierra Hotel. James Kane had a sawmill and house near Sierra City. Freud Charlay had a ranch west of Sierra City known as the Freud & L Leboslezo Ranch. The Italian ranch was also in the vicinity. I. T. Mooney had a butcher shop and home on Kanaka Flat (now the Bee Ranch).

In 1864, a Post Office was established with S.M. Wilcox the first Postmaster. Wells Fargo & Co. opened an Express Office with A. C. Busch as agent.

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James Winstead had a house in Sierra City, the Milton Hotel & Whitney ranch were located on the Truckee Turnpike near Milton, John Anderson had two buildings in Sierra City on Main Street east of Castagnetto's, Victor Chalaye had the Sierra City Ranch east of Reis Ravine, James Galloway had 160 acres on the river one half mile above Sierra City, I. T. Mooney had the Kanaka Flat Saloon on Kanaka Flat, and S. M. Williamson had the Compton Co. water-powered sawmill on the river four miles above Sierra City.



In 1866, John Scott was at the Reis Mill, I. T. Mooney had the Kanaka Bar Hotel, G. B. Castagnetto had a store, A. C. Busch and C. A. Heringlake took over the Yuba Gap Hotel. In 1867, Peter Goff, who had lived and mined in Sierra City since 1860, opened a boarding house and livery stable. In 1868, the present schoolhouse was built with the first classes held there on rough benches in the unfinished building. H. H. Bigelow, who had come to Sierra City in 1861, had a house on the hill

below the Reis Mill. In 1869, I. T. Mooney had a meat market, Peter Goff operated the Butte Eagle Hotel, Issac Martinetti, who had come to Sierra City in 1867, built the National Hotel & Saloon on Main St. west of Goff's, and G. B. Castagnetto was operating a saloon. In 1870, George Abbe operated a livery stable known as the Darling & Abbe Stable. A.C. Busch built a fire-proof cellar opposite his hotel; John Francowe had an unfinished building on Main St. which was used as a saloon. A. Macklin had a water-powered sawmill two miles above Sierra City, H. H. Bigelow built the Bigelow House, and James Winstead had a meat market. In 1871, Joseph Schiaffino had a stone store on Main St. west of Goff's, J. B. Soracco had a store and lot on Main Street west of Abbe's Stable, and Harry Warner, who had settled in Sierra City in 1858, took over the meat market of James Winstead, also operating a slaughterhouse. A.C. Busch built over the three-story brick Busch building with the first floor occupied by the Busch & Heringlake Mercantile business along with the Wells Fargo office, the second floor a residence, the third floor a public hall. John Counter had a saloon on Main Str. East of the National Hotel & Saloon. A blacksmith shop also existed. Thomas Englis had a small store on Main Street west of Busch's.



Early photo of main street in Sierra City

*(Editor's note: James compiled this information for use at the Kentucky Mine Museum, it is hoped he can continue his fine research of old newspaper and other written accounts of our Sierra County History)*

## Major Museum Refurbishing Project is Underway!

**P**hase one of the museum preparation for the flooring project (packing and storing the artifacts) is complete! We had an amazing crew on Monday, October 20, including Dianne Bruns, Donna Sharp, Dustin Strine, David Ervin, Cindy Ellsmore, Mary Wright, Susan and Tom Hopkins, Della and Woody Brooks, Don McKechnie, Don Yegge, and Mary and Rich Nourse. Bryan Davey stepped up to connect us with packing boxes when we ran out. By the end of the day, we had removed and safely stored many of the artifacts in preparation for the new wood laminate flooring that will be installed in November.

A county crew helped out with the heavy lifting and moving of the cases, etc. that remained in the museum. This will be done over a two-day period since the floor will be laid in two sections.

The SCHS is also planning on having wood covers installed for the museum windows.

When the museum opens for the season next Memorial Day, it will have a new look with fresh paint, durable wood laminate flooring, new window coverings, and all our wonderful artifacts displayed at their beautiful best!



*County workers move out the safe which was originally housed in the county courthouse in Downieville. The safe, as you can see, is VERY heavy!*



*The museum is now ready for the new wood laminate flooring installation!*



*Part of the crew on preparation work day - L-R, Don McKechnie, Susan Hopkins, Tom Hopkins, Mary Wright and Cindy Ellsmore.*



*Donna Sharp carefully dismembers our dress mannequin*

# The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

P.O. Box 260

Sierra City, California 96125

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## Historical Society's Annual Picnic

The Sierra County Historical Society's annual picnic was held on Sunday, September 14 at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City. Members and guests lunched under the trees, and after a short business meeting were treated to a talk on Downieville history by board member Bill Copren.

Preceding the event a memorial bench was dedicated in the name of gold miner and historian David Smith who passed away last year. David was the son of Charles and Beth Smith of Sierra City and Grass Valley. Since David was known as a lover of stories, it was only fitting that those in attendance were invited to share favorite stories of him.

A Story told by David Smith, and Retold by Davis Loy, age 8, and Susan Hopkins after David took Davis, Susan and Tom Hopkins to visit the gold mine.

### David's Story: The Bear

David got bitten by a caterpillar. Nine times! He felt like he wanted to faint. Oh dear! He was outside in the wilderness. He had whisky to drink, but he did not feel good. He had beer but still did not feel good.

He had juice, but still did not feel good. Then water... finally, he called for help.

Then David heard a big noise in the woods. He saw a BEAR! He shot a bullet into the air with his gun. Then the bear was so scared he turned around in his skin and ran off. David felt good again! He was all better!!!

We hope that this story will bring a smile to your face, and a happy memory of David.

Next time you visit the mine, be sure to stop for a rest on the rustic bench located by the trestle.

*(This memorial bench purchase was made possible by a generous donation by Susan and Tom Hopkins).*

*Mr. and Mrs. C.K. Smith share a moment with family on son David's Memorial Bench.*

