

# The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

*C.K. as he was fondly known was very active in the Kentucky Mine Museum and Historic Park in Sierra City. At a Historic Society Meeting in August of 1996, he was interviewed by Karen Donaldson. The meeting was held at the Historic Park, and C.K. pointed out items that came from mines in the area. Most of this was printed in our Fall/Winter 1996 edition of "The Sierran". Much of the following is in C.K.'s own words and expresses his love and interest of mining, people and Sierra City. The interview was transcribed a few years ago by Fran Burgard, a long time docent at the Kentucky.*

## C.K. SMITH

**Charles Kuhn Smith was born on August 4, 1924; he passed away on June 12, 2015.**

I want to tell you my beginnings. I was born here in this area in the 1920's. My mother and father lived at Lower Salmon Lake. They had a mine up there, and when my mother was pregnant with me, she got on our donkey and my father led her and the donkey to Graeagle where she got on the Western Pacific train and rode to Reno; and I was born in the door of my uncle's house. We never quite made it to the doctor, but the doctor did come. My mother stayed in Reno three days and got back on the train to Blairsden or Graeagle - got back on the donkey and rode the 10 miles to Salmon Lake. This is up over the old road that goes down by Frazier Falls instead of going on down the present road. They cut off at Snag Lake and went down through Lusk Meadows and on to Lower Salmon Lake. We stayed there until November when the snow started coming and then they went down to Downieville. So, my first real residence was in Downieville until about May of the next year when we went back to the mine. Then we moved to Sierra City, and we've been there ever since.

After I was six years old I used to walk with my dad to the Lone Wolf Mine in the summer-time and work and be there with him. My other brothers and sister lived in Sierra City with my mother. I grew up around this area. I walked from our house to the top of the Sierra Buttes about 15 times, trying four or five different trails, and visited most of the mines along the way for one reason or another.



Charles Kuhn Smith (C.K. or Charlie)

Some of them were active like the Sierra Buttes Mine. It was running when I was a boy here, and old enough to realize they ran 5 to 10 stamps of a big 40 stamp mill down in Hayes's field. They had a bull wheel that was running, That thing that was about 10 feet in diameter with a 100 foot-long belt. It ran that big mill. However, the tramway was down and wasn't running at the time. They hauled the ore down by truck - a Model T Ford. The Bigelow Mine was running when I was a kid. It was located just 500 feet north of the community hall. A fellow by the name of Johnny Font built that mill in 1935, and it was a beautiful 10 stamp mill. They were trying to open up that mine, the Bigelow. They had

Charles Kuhn Smith - (Cont. on Page 3) —

— THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY —

**T**he 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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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:

<b>INDIVIDUAL</b> .....	<b>\$20.00</b>
<b>FAMILY &amp; INSTITUTION</b> .....	<b>\$25.00</b>
<b>BUSINESS &amp; SUPPORTING</b> .....	<b>\$35.00</b>
<b>SUSTAINING</b> .....	<b>\$50.00</b>
<b>LIFE (per person/couple)</b> .....	<b>\$300.00</b>

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

**S**ierra County Historical Society held its annual meeting at Tin Cup Diggin's Park in Downieville on September 13. Following a picnic lunch, a short business meeting was held at which Joe Madigan was elected to the board to replace Arlene Amoedi who stepped down. Arlene's energy and passion will be missed, but we welcome Joe-another retired teacher-who also brings a love of history to the society.

Before scooting out of town for his sophomore year at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, SCHS secretary Cory Peterman led a walking tour around town that included a visit to the Yuba Theater and a short talk by BJ Jordan. Thanks to our membership and our guests for making it a memorable day.



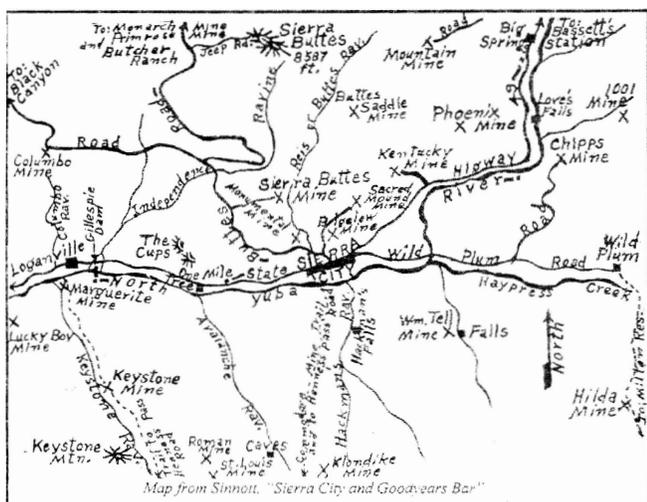
**A**t the October 6, 2015 Sierra County Board of Supervisors meeting, Greg Norton of Rural Counties Representatives of California presented \$4,170 to Sierra County Historical Society. Funds for this generous gift were raised in an auction to benefit the county represented by the current RCRC chair. We are grateful to Supervisor Lee Adams for his service in RCRC and for including us in his list of worthy groups. Accepting the award for SCHS are Bill Copren and Mary Nourse as Supervisors Adams and Roen look on.



## Charles Kuhn Smith - (Cont. from Page 1) —

an air compressor that ran the hot mill. They would take the solid steel and knot bits of it. Then they would put it into that, crack the air on it and would make the diamond head on the steel. It would be white hot as they would form that steel. They would probably have to hit it three or four times. Myrtle Thompson, called "Flashlight Myrtle" or "Flashlight Annie", had a son named Elmer who ran that thing at the blacksmith shop. We used to go up there at night and watch him form that steel into bits and what-have-you.

Another mine that was running in this area at this time was the Kentucky Mine. It ran off and on whenever they had the water pressure and the milling ore that they needed to make it affordable. They would run four or five stamps a couple of days a week, but they had quite a time getting the right amount of water from the Wixson Spring. At the same time they had the Buttes flume that was running water from Sardine Lake. The flume level up there was at least 1500 vertical feet above Sierra City. They did capture water from that huge flume and ran it down here. They were only authorized to use a certain amount, so they couldn't run it all the time anyhow.



There were just two people running the Kentucky Mine: Adolph Loeffler and his father Emil. They built the mill when I was a kid, one piece of lumber at a time. It was constructed from parts at the Phoenix Mine which is nearby. They resurrected 10 stamps from there. They did an excellent job; this is an excellent demonstration of mining in Sierra County as I know it. This ten stamp mill is one-fourth the size of the Sierra Buttes Mill, which had 40 stamps – and bigger stamps. They were 2500 lb. stamps and each stamp consisted of a shoe, a boss, a stem, a die and tappet, and a cam which

lifted it. There were five of them in each battery. There were eight batteries like that. You can imagine how long that 8" diameter solid steel shaft was that turned the stamps all at once. What a tremendous amount of power that was!

There were fewer oak trees here than you now see; most of the wood was cut and used up for firewood. You could stand where the Sierra City snowmobile shop is now and look down across at the flats and see every house. There weren't any trees.

The other mine that was running here when I was a boy in this town was the Sacred Mound Mine. Sometimes all four of those mines were running. The tailings leaving these mines ran down this creek here and ran into the river. From the Kentucky Mine it ran red sometimes. The Sacred Mound ran silver color; the ore that they were crushing was white. The Bigelow Mine was red sometimes. But in most instances they would start the mill in the morning and run maybe until 2 to 4 pm. Then they would shut down the mills because they didn't have the volume of water. By six in the evening (by Herrington's at least) the river would clear up and the fishing was superb.

That is about all the mines running at that time, but I am familiar with the names of the mines – like the Klondike Mine which was in back of the snowmobile shop in Sierra City. There's a trail that goes down there and crosses the river and goes up to the top of the hill to Hennes Pass. Right at the top of the pass was the Klondike Mine, and on over the top going down toward the Middle Fork in Box Canyon #1 is the Commodore Mine. Several miles west of that was the Keystone Mine which was very instrumental in providing some of the money for the Comstock Diggins in Virginia City. They made a lot of money at the Keystone. And, of course the Sierra Buttes Mine, the Colombo and the Monarch Mine.

The Monarch Mine had a fellow by the name of Mr. Holmes who used that very skip right there. That's a manned skip that went down roughly 800 ft. in the Monarch Mine. When that shaft was sunk, it was sunk by Alec Ostrom's father, Ike Ostrom. He sunk that shaft 350 feet. He rode down in the Monarch Mine with that cage right there. And then they ran into some water and I understand they had a tough time the next 300 or 400 feet down. They put a vertical tunnel under the mountain that intercepted this shaft and they drained the water out into a canyon, they called it the Monarch Drain.

Charles Kuhn Smith - (Cont. on Page 4) —

Charles Kuhn Smith - (Cont. from Page 3) —

**W**hen I went to school here there were about 40 kids in the grammar school and 25 or 30 in high school; although there were only 3 in my graduating class.

When we were kids, we'd go to Sardine Lake. There's a road to the left just before the road to Packer to the right that comes to the Mountain. Mine. We used to go down that road and get into that flume which was about 3' wide and 2' deep and float down that flume. It was really neat!. It was about a 1500' vertical drop from the big tanks at the Buttes going down an 18" pipe to a 12" pipe to a 6" pipe and finally to a nozzle, about two and a half inch to three inch. It spun that great big water wheel. The one at the Butte Mine was 15' in diameter and generated 500 horsepower to run the big mill. The belt was 3' wide and 100' long.



Steam Donkey at our Historic Park, CK Smith negotiated this delivery to the park

The donkey engine over here came from the Rocky Bar Mine across the river when Lowell Robinson was cutting down logs on the other side of the hill. I thought that would be a great opportunity to pick up this old donkey engine that was used by Mrs. Phelan who owned the Bigelow House and the Rocky Bar

Mine. I remember as a kid I'd get out of school at 3 o'clock and I'd go home and take off my school clothes and run over to that donkey engine. Sometimes I cut wood for it and at 4 o'clock sometimes I got to blow the whistle. You could hear it all over town. That's why I retrieved it.

This old monitor here came from the Pride Mine right up across the street from Bassett Station. I saw that monitor working. A fellow leased it to Martha Pride when I was a boy - about 1934 - and they were able to put a debris dam on Deer Creek. They activated that monitor right there. They washed a lot of gravel out of the Pride Mine down to the debris dam.



Monitor used at the Pride Mine for hydraulic mining

When we were kids in the school we had plenty to do. We'd come home, take off our school clothes and put on our work and play clothes so we could go out and feed our animals, bring in the wood, and stuff like that. Maybe go out and cut some wood. After that we could go fishing.

That little old saw down there came from the Fournier Ranch. They sawed wood on that saw, I guess from 1900 to 1940, for forty years they used that saw. They used it with water power. There were a lot of places in town where they had old one lunger motors-stationary motors they called them. They ran threshing machines in Sierra Valley years ago. On this side of the hill they used them to run wood saws and little mills. There used to be fifty little mills around this whole country, but when W.W. II started the mines went dead. They stopped mining.

Charles Kuhn Smith - (Cont. on Page 5) —

## Charles Kuhn Smith - (Cont. from Page 4) —



There are still a lot of mills left around here. If you get off the beaten path and you walk to some of these places there are still some old mills standing. And particularly if you go up the old Commodore Trail – the Klondike Trail. They cut the big sugar pine shakes for buildings. Also walking up the Klondike trail there is an old asbestos mine, but not enough for a commercial venture.

When my Dad was working our mine, probably around 1929, he took out a pocket of about \$2500.00 that was 2 to 3 years of wages. Then in 1933 or '34 he got another \$1500.00 out of it. In 1929 gold was \$20.00 an ounce, and that was in gold coin.

I worked in the 16 to 1 Mine in 1941 (Alleghany). I mucked in the mine, was skip tender on the main shaft and was a miner on the 1700 level where they hit these big pockets today. And, when I was working there with Don Winstead who lived right downtown, next to the Wells Fargo Building, he and I were drilling on the 1700 level when we hit a \$660,000 pocket. Now, that was when gold was \$32.00 an ounce, so just imagine what that would be worth at today's price. As a skip tender it was your job to load all the dynamite onto a flat car and take it in from the main shaft to the 49 shaft and put it down to all the miners in the 49 shaft so they could move their rounds. When I was working in the 16 to 1 Mine, basically the ore ran about \$10.00 a ton, but every once in a while they'd hit a tremendous pocket that just kept the mine going and kept the stockholders bragging about their investment for a long time. I don't know of another mine around here except the Sierra Buttes Mine that had a record anywhere near the 16 to 1 Mine. When I went to work in the 16 to 1 in 1941, they paid me forty cents an hour - \$3.20 a day.

Board and Room at that time at Grecio's Boarding House was \$45.00 a month so you know the \$32.20 I earned every ten days of work, at R/B at \$45.00 you know I didn't have much left.

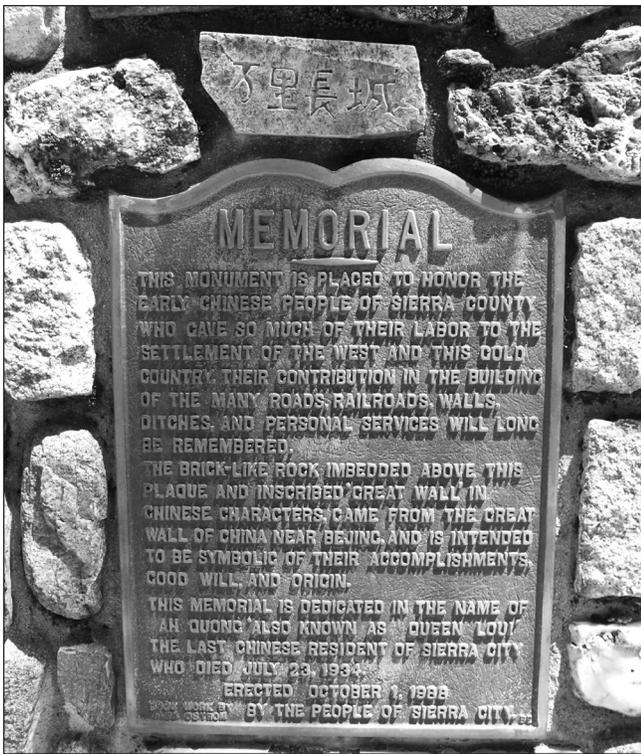
I want to say something about Queen Louie. He was the last Chinese resident of this town that I know of. Queen Louie lived up here at the forks in the road going to Sacred Mound Mine, the community garbage disposal and the cross road to the cemetery – Butte Ave. He lived on the right side possibly about where Billie Madsen lived. He had a little old house in there. I can remember going to town with a little wheelbarrow to get some bread or a bucket of peanut butter for my mother when I was about six years old; and I came out on Spring St. (it wasn't named at that time). There was the Sierra City Hotel which was right on the corner of Spring St. straight across the street from the Wells Fargo Building. It was a big hotel, bigger than the one down where Sierra Buttes Inn (Old Sierra City Hotel) is now. They had a drive-through where the horses and teams that were pulling the people in by buggy would come in. People could get out under hotel cover and walk to the lobby and to their rooms and all. Then the horses went out in back where they have the motel now. Anyhow, when I was a kid, that hotel was long since used. I was standing there, and there was a caretaker by the name of Mansfield who had a 30-30 rifle across his hap because us kids – not particularly me only – but some of the kids in town would go by and he'd scare 'em and then we'd throw rocks at the building. He was a good threat and we'd circumvent the area whenever we saw him. We'd go up on the back street on Butte Ave. and come down right in front of Billie Madsen's place and there was Queen Louie. And he had a chop block that was big and high. He was always chopping onions or tomatoes or celery or something and he had a bunch of knives stuck around it you know. Here I'm six years old and I go down there and Ooooh, there was Queen Louie – he just didn't get the best treatment from some of the kids in town and was threatening. He had a knife in his hand when he saw me and so I sped down the hill by the Masonic Lodge with my wheelbarrow and went to the store. At the store, I didn't want to go back by Queen Louie's and I didn't want to go to where this guy was sittin' with a 30-30, so I stayed there for a while until the guy with the 30-30 went into the hotel and then I hurried home to the Flats and made it!

Charles Kuhn Smith - (Continued on Page 6) —

Charles Kuhn Smith - (Continued from Page 5) —

Finally my mother took me up to Queen Louie and introduced me to him and showed me that he was a friendly guy and wouldn't raise a knife against anyone unless you threw a rock at his house. So, I became friend with the old gent, and my mother was friendly. He taught her a lot about garlic and chives and lettuce and things like that. I think it was about 1934 when he passed on.

When I was a kid I was told that Queen Louie's neighborhood was the red light district. There were several houses of ill repute in that area. But I can't say that was in my time, because it was before my time.



In 1985 my wife and I made a trip to China for about 21 days and walked the Great Wall and visited a lot of cultural sites. When we got off the wall and down to where the bus was there were some pieces that came from the wall. So I went over and picked up this piece the size of a brick and I put it in my bag and came home with it. Now I didn't go up on top of the Wall and chisel a chunk of rock out of the wall, I just picked a rock up, but it did come from the Wall. In his book "Give me a Mountain Meadow", McGlashen tore these Chinese people up one side and down the other. I just couldn't believe that people treated the Chinese people like that after they spent all this time building the railroad from New York to San Francisco

and the toughest part of it was through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Because of the way they treated the Chinese after all they did to develop this country, I thought there ought to be a monument to their memory. While I was in China, I had a Chinese person write the Chinese character, "Great Wall". Then I took it to Nett's Monument, they carved out the Chinese characters and it is sitting right over there on top of that plaque to Queen Louie. It honors the last Chinese in this town and it says "Great Wall" on top of it. And, that's about all I have to say".

The parents of Charlie, Mark and Fanny (Kuhn) Smith purchased a home in Sierra City where C.K. and his siblings grew up. In later years C. K. met his future wife Winabeth Covert, while both were vacationing in Sierra City. In 1947 they married and expanded the family with three sons, David, Dennis and Darrel. The couple was married 68 years, with the main home in Grass Valley, and the beloved home of his parents in Sierra City often used.

Charlie was a veteran of WWII, joining the US Army in 1943. He fought in the battle of Leyte Gulf. At the end of the war he was in Hiroshima with the Occupation Army. When he returned to California C. K. returned to work at Pacific Telephone and Telegraph. When he retired and spent more time in Sierra City, he purchased a small water system "Sierra City Water Works". He was a member of the local Masonic Lodge, where he received the prestigious Hiram Award. Winabeth and C.K. traveled the world and enjoyed their family.

We will miss our conversations with C. K. and his joy in storytelling. He was very much a part of our Kentucky Mine Museum and Historic Park; we would not have many of our artifacts without C.K. Virginia Lutes.



*Editor's Note: We are very fortunate to have a healthy colony of Townsend's Big Eared Bats spending their summers in our stamp mill at the Kentucky Mine. For several years we have been monitoring the progression of the deadly fungus known as white-nose syndrome as it makes its way from the east coast towards the west. This is the latest bulletin from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We have already put in place precautions at the mine to prevent this catastrophic syndrome from being introduced in our bat colony.*

## Fungus That Causes Bat Disease Detected in Nebraska

LINCOLN - The fungus known to cause white-nose syndrome (WNS) in hibernating bats, a disease that has decimated bat populations in the United States and Canada, was recently discovered for the first time in Nebraska.

The fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* - or *P. destructans* - was detected in samples sent to researchers at the University of California, Santa Cruz for testing. The samples were collected in 2015 from bats hibernating in a mine in Cass County in eastern Nebraska. Northern long-eared bats, tri-colored bats and big brown bats tested positive for the fungus.

WNS has killed more than six million bats in North America since it was first discovered in New York in 2007. In some states, winter bat numbers have declined by more than 90 percent. Since it was first detected, WNS has been confirmed in 26 states and five Canadian provinces. The fungus has been detected in four additional states, including Nebraska.

"While the presence of the fungus is disappointing, it is not surprising," said Mike Fritz, Natural Heritage zoologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. "With the fungus being present in states around us and the migratory nature of bats, it was probably only a matter of time before it was documented in Nebraska."

"Although the fungus has been found in Nebraska, the signs of WNS, white fungal growth on the nose and lesions on the wings, have not yet been observed on any bats in the state," he said.

Recent studies have shown that the value of insect control by bats to agriculture is worth several billion dollars annually. This value includes reduced crop loss to insect pests, reduced spread of crop diseases and reduced need for pesticide application.

WNS does not infect humans and is only known to affect cave-hibernating bats. The fungus thrives in cold, humid environments and invades the skin of bats, disrupting their hibernating behavior and depleting their fat stores.

"There is no cure for white-nose syndrome," said Jeremy Coleman, National White-nose Syndrome Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "But researchers are studying several potential treatments that show promise for controlling the fungus and reducing impacts of the disease on bats." These include bacteria and fungi that inhibit the growth of *P. destructans*, environmental manipulations, genetic modifications to reduce the virulence of the fungus, vaccines and other biologically-based anti-fungal compounds.

Researchers from the Commission, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Omaha and University of Nebraska-Kearney began monitoring mines for the fungus in 2014.



# The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

P.O. Box 260

Sierra City, California 96125

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## New Book From Ernest Finney Set in Sierra County

**E**rnest Finney's novella, *Elevation 6,040*, is set in 1981 Sierra County. It follows a family's journey as mother Moonstar and her children move from an isolated cabin they share with father Sebastian high on a ridge in California's northern Sierra, to a warmer, lower elevation. The narrative follows the unexpected changes in the lives of thirteen-year-old Roscoe and his brother and sister as they face uncertainties that force them to question everything they have known for sure, as things begin to fall apart. The book is available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

*It's 1981, and thirteen-year-old Roscoe McAdams and his brother and sister have always lived with their parents Sebastian and Moonstar in an isolated cabin high on a ridge in California's northern Sierra, though often in spring when Moonstar can't stand the snow anymore she takes them for a stay down below. They've mostly been home-schooled. Then, through a fluke that April, Moonstar becomes a substitute teacher in a small town and enrolls the kids in school there. Roscoe assumes that when summer comes they'll go back to the ridge and Sebastian: that's how it's always been. But they don't, and then everything Roscoe thinks he knows for sure begins to fall apart.*

"The mark of a great story, I think, is when, at the conclusion, the reader doesn't want it to end, not because the subject matter is necessarily pleasant or the situation necessarily happy; rather, it's because the tale is so lovingly and consistently rendered, so infused with a sense of character, place, and time, that the plot itself diminishes to mere background and one forgets that what one is reading is fiction. This story does that. It resonates long after the final sentence, haunts memory. This is a novella of beauty, imagination, and the unique bonding of a unique family in a unique situation that captivates from the first few lines and never releases its grip. It is unrelentingly honest, often difficult to absorb because of the discomfort it creates. Peopled by fascinating and original characters, it comes alive on the page and enters the heart, often leaving one breathless. I was often reminded of the work of Norman Maclean and Edward Abbey. It's a beautiful tale of our own time and of a generation that, somehow, has managed, for the most part, to forget itself, even in the legacy of its progeny."

—Clay Reynolds, Final Judge

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ERNEST FINNEY

Ernest Finney writes stories and novels, mostly set in California, often in the San Francisco Bay area, where he grew up or in the Central Valley or the Sierras. His short fiction has been included in a number of anthologies, among them *O. Henry Prize Stories*, where his story "Peacocks" received an O. Henry first prize, *Best of the West*, and *Best American Mystery Stories*. His books include four novels, *Winterchill*, *Lady With the Alligator Purse*, *Words of My Roaring*, and *California Time*, and three story collections: *Birds Landing*, *Flights in the Heavenlies*, and *Sequoia Gardens: California Stories*. He lives in Sierra County, California.



Winner, 2014 Clay Reynolds Novella Prize

ELEVATION: 6,040



ERNEST J. FINNEY

ERNEST J. FINNEY

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