

# The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

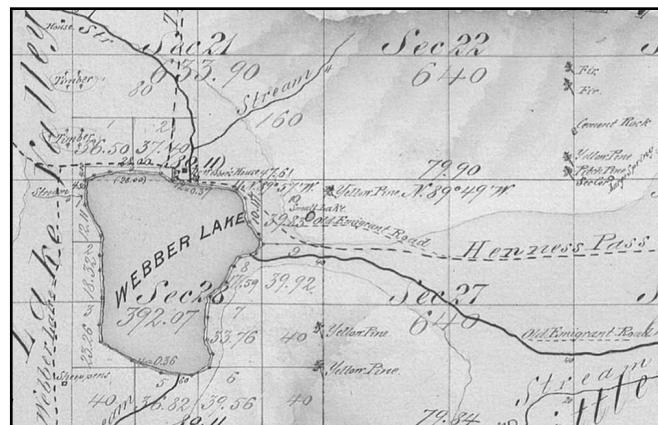
## **“The Webber Lake Hotel: an Over 150-Year-Old Treasure”**

by Corri Jimenez, M.S.

They found the proprietor, Dr. Webber, at home. His hotel furnishes excellent accommodations for about seventy-five people. The boys caught trout to their hearts' content with line, trolling hooks and spears. The climate of the lake was unusually fine. The air cool and bracing, rendering a fire necessary after sunset and two or three pairs of blankets very acceptable. The woods surrounding the lake are full of game, including quail, grouse, deer and bear...The hotel is crowded with people from all parts of the world, who manage to enjoy themselves immensely with fishing, hunting, picnicking, etc. A large number are camping out. The scenery is unsurpassed, the lake being surrounded by mountains covered with snow.

This excerpt from the Pacific Rural Press on August 10, 1872, illustrates a colorful image of its proprietor, Dr. Webber, and the Webber Lake Hotel as a bustling place in a serene climate that is evident to this day. Depicting a rare archetype in the area, the excerpt provides a window into the hotel, the proprietor, the scenery, and the cultural landscape. To give some context, visualize the Central Pacific Railroad had been completed to Coburn Station (aka Truckee), a rail stop setup in a sleepy town of about 1,000 people, and Reno at the time was a 4-year-old toddler of a city. Since 1850, visitors had traveled regularly on Henness Pass Road, the original Interstate 80 of the West and many sections are even set on the 1840s California Overland Trail. In 1859, the Truckee Turnpike Company received \$30,000 in investments on the San Francisco Stock Exchange in a 24-hour period, the equivalent of over \$850,000. The investments endorsed Henness Pass Road as a safe route, providing paving, maintenance, and bridges over waterways. By its opening in the fall of 1860, Henness Pass Road was busy with freight and supplies loaded onto wagon teams in Marysville which traveled during the day while stagecoaches rode at night. In addition to wagon and stagecoach traffic, pedestrians traveled on-foot or horseback to the gold camps that dotted the California and Nevada landscape, all the while dodging wagons on the route. Compared to other routes across the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Henness Pass Road was considered by many to be the “best” and less treacherous route,

which connected Marysville's Sacramento Valley to the goldfields of the Comstock Mining District in Virginia City, Nevada. At Webber Lake, visitors were allowed to camp, hunt, and fish for free, and at many times, the proprietor charged little to nothing for the use.



When this excerpt was written, traffic was decreasing on Henness Pass Road, so stage routes from Truckee's railroad depot, completed in 1868, amended trips to Webber Lake, bringing tourists to the lake to hunt, fish, and enjoy the scenery. Stage travel to the Webber Lake Hotel was approximately 40 miles, and cost visitors \$3.00 a trip, the equivalent today of \$68.00. In general, this Pacific Rural Press article is one of over

The Webber Lake Hotel (Cont. 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**

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## **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>	.....\$20.00
<b>FAMILY &amp; INSTITUTION</b>	.....\$25.00
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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  
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## **Kentucky Mine Bookstore Has Something for Everyone!**

The bookstore at the Kentucky Mine has expanded its inventory. We now have approximately 100 titles. There is something for everyone. We have begun to carry some historical fiction, as well as non-fiction. We cover every subject from Art to Rockhounding. Recently the Historical Society had the "Historical Houses of Sierra County", and "Historical Barns of Sierra County" reprinted. They can be purchased in our bookstore. Some additional titles to note are "Gold Miners Daughter" by Mabel Thomas, and "Elevation: 6,700 by Ernest Finney". "Gold Miner's Daughter" is an account of Sierra City in the late 1800's. Mabel Thompson's father was a foreman at the Sierra Buttes Mine. The account is of Mabel's life at the Sierra Buttes Mine, and in Sierra City from the age of 8 until age 10.

"Elevation: 6,700" is a work of fiction that takes place in 20th century Sierra County. Ernest Finney earned the 2016 California Book Award for Fiction, as well as the 2014 Clay Reynolds Novella Prize for the book. He is a part time resident of Sierra County. In addition to expanding our new book titles, we have greatly expanded our antique, rare, and used book section. There are gems, and some great deals out on the book cart. We are still accepting used books. If you have some you would like to donate bring them by the museum. We would like to look them over before you leave them. We may not accept all the books you want to donate, but any that we do accept help to bring much needed revenue into the museum.

The Kentucky Mine Bookstore is a great stop to get some early Christmas shopping done. We have books for everyone on your list as well as some very nice gift items. Stop by this summer when you are in the area.

### The Webber Lake Hotel (Cont. from Page 3) —

50 detailed accounts of this small touristy hotspot written in journals, newspapers, and guidebooks that illustrate Webber and his hotel during this period, which extended into the late 1880s in promoting the recreational resort.

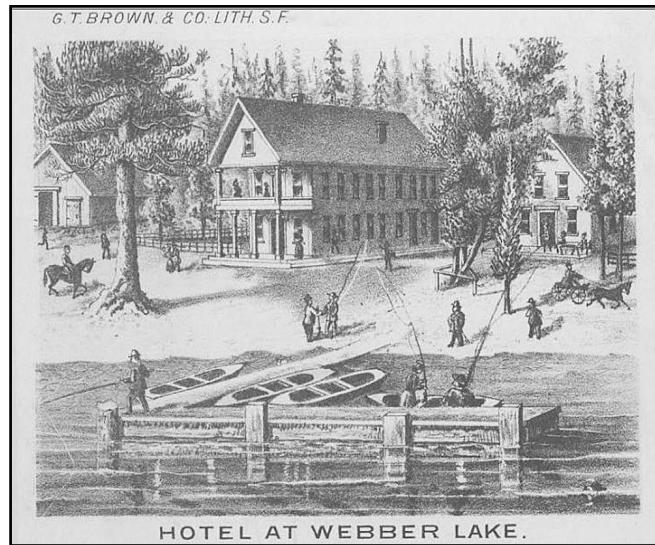
### Who was Dr. D.G. Webber?

**D**r. David Gould (D.G.) Webber was born on September 12, 1809 in Livingstone County, New York, to Scotch-Irish parents, William Webber and Susanna Gould. He interned with a physician in Springfield, Pennsylvania, and ultimately owned the medical practice. In 1833, he married Pennsylvania-born Margaret Brandish and two years later had a son, James, as well as adopted a little girl. Margaret passed away in 1843 leaving Webber a widower with two children. Historic records demonstrate that Webber in his early years adopted or fostered up to 50 children in his life; however, little information is known of his children, though a few became prominent professionals.

In 1848, James W. Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill along the American River in the Mexican-state of Alta California, which triggered a massive exodus of mainly men under the influence of gold fever who traveled west to strike it rich, a rarity like “seeing an elephant.” The following year, Webber was one of over 50,000 49ers who embarked to California. Webber's journey landed him in California in April 1850 where he trekked to Sierra County as an early pioneer in 1851. Webber's first began mining in the Sierra City area, and worked a sawmill in Downieville. It was established in 1852, the same year he stocked fish in his namesake alpine lake. In 1854 and 1860, he built several structures in Sierra County, including the first Sierra County Courthouse and Jail (1854), Durgan Flat Bridge (1854), Webber's Ranch (1854), and Webber Lake Hotel (1860). The courthouse and hotel have similarities as two Classical-designed, vernacular buildings constructed of logs that may have come from Webber's sawmill in Downieville. Historical documents also record that Webber owned property near Monte Cristo, Loyalton, and Randolph/Sierraville, and it is speculated he built many buildings as well as auxiliary buildings on his properties.

Answering to “Doctor,” Webber was a compassionate but guarded person who never turned a visitor or patient away. Webber boasted a tall stature at 6 foot 5 inches and suffered from bouts of skin rashes, known

as erysipelas, and typhoid pneumonia that resulted in loss of sight in his left eye and amputation of an index finger on his right hand. In 1864, emigrant Lucretia Epperson fell ill on the California Overland Trail and sought a doctor in the Sierra Valley. According to her journals, Epperson said Webber, “refused pay for [the] visit, [and] we were thankful to him and hope some day it will be my privilege to pay him tenfold.” Numerous newspaper articles and guidebooks recalled Webber's kindness toward the poor and unfortunate. These describe his philanthropic treatment of visitors, to which he often provided “gratis” medical treatment. Sierra Valley resident biologist J.G. Lemmon, and good friend of Webber's said that “the sick either in Sierra valley or those who come to the lake for treatment, if indigent, are cured free of charge.” Lemmon, as a result, was so humbled by Webber's generosity in providing his medical experiences free-of-charge that he named three native plants after his friend: Webber Needle Grass (*Achnatherum webberi*), Webber's Milk-vetch (*Astragalus webberi*), and Webber's Ivesia (*Ivesia webberi*). In addition to vegetation, other landmarks across Sierra County bear his name, including a mountain peak, a flat, a waterfall, and a lake, all within proximity of his resort that was originally set up as his way station and hotel.



### The Henness Pass Road Stop of the Webber Lake Hotel

**T**he Webber Lake Hotel was one of over 20 stage stops, ranches, and hotels that peppered Henness Pass Road and dated from 1849 to 1865. The

**The Webber Lake Hotel - (Cont. on Page 4) —**

**The Webber Lake Hotel - (Cont. from Page 3) —**

stops provided blacksmithing assistance and were the service garages of the trail adjacent to barns, corrals, and stables—parking lots of the time for the guest's animals. Restaurants, stores, and inns were found at some of the stops, providing sustenance and needed beds at reasonable prices, which made these stops little rural communities. Other important assets of these stops were camping grounds and grazing lands located near waterways for travelers and their livestock. Overall, the stops, provided resting places and necessary services for weary travelers on the 188-mile route. It was an approximately 30-hour stage trip, that was much longer on-foot or horseback. For perspective, a wagon traveled 10-20 miles a day or 2 miles an hour. Reno was 40 miles away from Webber Lake for a wagon traveler on Henness Pass Road, making it a two-day trip; therefore, these stops on the route provided welcome relief for travelers.

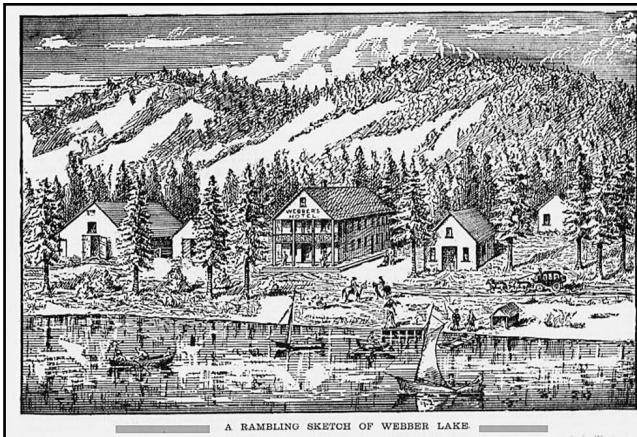
As early as 1854, Webber built "Webber's Ranch," cited in period newspapers as a stop to visit on Henness Pass Road, although no descriptions were given of it or its location on Webber Lake. The second building he built is believed to have been "Webber's Station," which was a way station and could have been established earlier than the "ranch." The station aided the toll takers on the turnpike who maintained and graded the road. Currently, the way station stands east of the hotel.

In 1860, Webber supplemented his properties with the construction of the Webber Lake Hotel, a two-story structure built of hand-hewn, stacked logs that are covered with wood weatherboard siding. The Classical style hotel is adorned with an Egyptian-revival front doorway and original wood sash windows, which are wood-peggued and have beautifully thin muntins. The hotel has a side hall and a dozen rooms are off the hall. Many of the spaces retain the original rose wallpaper, paint colors, and decorative wood details. Reflecting on the 1872 Pacific Rural Press excerpt, we see that the hotel could accommodate 75 people; however, 100 visitors have been recorded in period newspapers and it is speculated that other buildings located around the hotel were used as supplemental lodging to accommodate that number of guests.

The Webber Lake Hotel was one of many buildings believed to have been built by Webber along his lakeshore. In 1864, county records record Webber owning a "hotel and ranch," and by 1866, he owned 1,000 acres around his lake as well. He also built a warehouse, stables, barns, and a blacksmith shop, as cited in a sales advertisement in the Pacific Rural



Press. California and Nevada newspapers also regularly recounted bear, wolf, and deer hunts along with trout fishing. California's extinct grizzly bears were "tolerably numerous" around Webber Lake Hotel, cited as early as 1864 in the Virginia Evening Bulletin, and Nevada residents in Virginia City participated in a few bear hunts at Webber Lake in the late 1870s. Hotel guests dined, at this time, on local mountain game that included bear steaks, venison haunches, spitted hares, broiled quail, or roasted grouse. Boats and other amenities were provided for free to those interested in fishing out on the lake. During the mid-1880s, Webber managed his resort with his adopted daughter Mary and her husband A.J. Anderson. Little is known of Mary Anderson except that she managed the Hot Springs Hotel on Brockway in Truckee. A Truckee newspaper cited Mrs. Anderson as, "an excellent landlady...as all will attest who visit Webber Lake while she had charge there...the Hot Springs Hotel will soon regain its former popularity."



A RAMBLING SKETCH OF WEBBER LAKE

## The Webber's Recreational Resort

**A**fter 1868, freight traffic had dwindled considerably on Henness Pass Road, thus Webber rebranded his hotel as a recreational "health" resort, which was part of a national trend to get people out to enjoy nature. Webber's good friend J.G. Lemmon wrote an extensive article on June 9, 1877, for the Pacific Rural Press titled, "Webber Lake and Its Attractions." Lemmon wrote,

Of all the popular resorts found on these passes the highest and prettiest, and that which proves the most satisfactory because most beneficial and cheaply enjoyed, is the noted mountain gem of Webber lake... The fishing and hunting unexcelled, the climate cool and health-giving, the waters pure and delicious, added to all which the entertainment or medical assistance furnished by the proprietor, Dr. D. G. Webber, at his spacious hotel and sanitarium is of the most satisfactory kind, for he is a genial, efficient, liberal-hearted gentleman, and one of the most skillful, sympathetic, benevolent and successful physicians in California.

Like most historic accounts of Webber, this excerpt provides insight into a period that speaks volumes about what the resort offered as well as giving glowing praise to Dr. Webber. As a physician, Webber added the sanitarium for patients and delivered medical treatment. Visitors also could sunbathe in his solarium, fish on the lake, or hunt in the woods, in addition to receiving medical care, if needed.

Recreational guidebooks and period newspapers complemented and amended Lemmon's 1877 article, promoting Webber and his hotel as a place to go to relax. The newspapers advertised activities like hunting and fishing at the lake, keeping it flourishing as a resort. In addition to newspapers, guidebooks were primary, historical sources and provided a perspective

of Webber and his lake. These reached a wider audience than the local newspapers and they advocated nature and other outdoor hobbies. Frederick E. Shearer wrote *The Pacific Tourist: an illustrated guide to the Pacific R.R California and pleasure resorts across the continent* (1879), and he recounts, "Webber Lake is one of the most popular resorts for trout fishing on the coast." W.F. Edwards in *Tourists' Guide and Directory to the Truckee Basin* (1883), said, "Dr. Webber is a genial host, ever studying the welfare of his guests... The grounds about form admirable camping, and taken altogether, Webber lake is one of the most delightful spots in the Sierra Nevada mountains, and the tourist cannot well afford to miss it." A third guidebook, *Tourists Illustrated Guide to the Celebrated Summer and Winter Resorts of California: Adjacent to and Upon the Lines of the Central and Southern Pacific Railroads* (1883), written by Benjamin Cummings Truman, was published by the H.S. Crocker & Company. Crocker was one of the "Big Four" railroad tycoons and also a visitor to Independence and Webber Lakes. Truman writes about, "nice camping grounds all round with plenty of grass and water." The backing of Crocker and his familiarity with Webber Lake is significant, in that it may have been possible that Crocker had some stake in promoting Webber Lake as a recreational site. The one thing these guidebooks have in common is offering a glowing perspective of Webber Lake Hotel and its proprietor, Dr. Webber.

## Webber's Death

**I**n 1877, six years before his death, the Pacific Rural Press published an article about Dr. D.G. Webber and his afflictions: "The people of Sierra valley pray that he may long be spared to them, but whenever Death shall come, be it sooner or later, he will but recall the spirit of a true man which has been sent among us to illustrate the high capabilities, uses and destiny of humanity."

When Webber died on June 8, 1883, the Reno Evening Gazette said that, "he was one of the oldest of mountain pioneers" and "though a man of considerable intelligence, his habits were queer beyond eccentricity." The Reno Evening Gazette and Pacific Rural Press excerpts provide insight into Webber's value to the county as well as how fondly he was revered in the Sierra Valley. Webber was laid to rest in Loyalton's Mountain View Cemetery aside his second cousin, Joseph C. Webber, a fellow follower of his to California.

**Webber's Death - (Cont. on Page 6) —**

**Webber's Death - (Cont. from Page 5) —**

In closing, Webber was a pioneer, a miner, a builder, a proprietor, a physician, and a philanthropist in Sierra County. His resumé extensively listed the many roles he held in the area, all enumerated in the historic record. The Webber Lake Hotel is a testament to Webber's business model, which set a precedent for the four property owners who followed his example. After Webber's death, outdoor enthusiasts and San Francisco societies bought the hotel, its resources, and land. These owners continued to market it as a recreational resort, which had begun with Webber. In the 1920s, the Johnson family bought property around the lake that included the 1860 Webber Lake Hotel and promoted conservation of the land and natural resources. In 2012 the Truckee-Donner Land Trust

bought the Johnsons' property including the hotel and other historic buildings. These have been in private hands since their original construction. Those of us who study cultural resources, historic architecture and/or who are absorbed by the beauty of nature are immensely grateful to Dr. D.G. Webber and all those who followed him for leaving us with this amazing treasure that we now all can appreciate.

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*Corri Jimenez has a Master of Science degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon and last year wrote the Sierraville School National Register nomination. In 2015, she wrote the Webber Lake Hotel Historic Structures Report for the Truckee-Donner Land Trust. Currently, she is in the process of nominating the hotel to the National Register of Historic Places.*



# You're Invited



You just read the fascinating article about the Webber Lake Hotel and now you have a wonderful opportunity to visit this fascinating historical site yourself because we are holding our Annual Meeting at the Webber Lake Hotel on September 9! Hope you can join us!.

## *An Architectural History Tour of the 1860 Webber Lake Hotel at Webber Lake*

*Sunday, September 9, 2018 at 1:00 PM*



Picnic hosted by the Sierra County Historical Society. Reserve your complimentary lunch now by September 1st and please RSVP to Mary Nourse ([mnourse46@gmail.com](mailto:mnourse46@gmail.com)) or 530-862-1123.

# The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 260  
Sierra City, California 96125

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

THE SIERRAN SUMMER 2018

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## THE FINAL SHOW OF THE KENTUCKY MINE CONCERT SERIES 2018

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The final show of the season features an Americana/Celtic infusion featuring the “cowboy music” of Dust in My Coffee and the Irish folk rock of One Eyed Reilly. The show is scheduled for Sunday, September 3rd at 2:00 PM. Dust in My Coffee will open the show performing their unique, contemporary take on the music that originated “around the campfire on the American west” during the post-civil war western migration. Dust in My Coffee’s songs often have a Celtic flavor, the result of the influence of Irish laborers who played a major role in the building of the transcontinental railroad.

One Eyed Reilly will headline the show and perform a rowdy mix of traditional Irish/Celtic stylings and modern “pub folk-rock”. One Eyed Reilly delivers both upbeat, raucous (though very melodic) tunes and beautifully rendered Irish ballads. The bottom line is a One Eyed Reilly show will joyously take the audience on a musical ride that embraces both Irish traditions and nods to the American landscape. We do not offer the BBQ option on our Sunday afternoon performances but, as always, you are welcome to bring your own food and refreshments to the show. Tickets are \$16 adv./ \$19 door. Tickets and information can be obtained on the aforementioned website and/or by contacting Chris at 530-862-1076

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