

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

Holly House

By Mary Nourse

Personification. I've always been guilty of it. I have a penchant for naming cars and even pieces of furniture, and I totally get the thing about ships being female; so I was not at all surprised when our dear old Holly House began revealing secrets and stories to us. The first story predated our 1974 purchase of the historic Sierra City mansion. The legend touted by former owner Jeanne McMahon was that the house was haunted by the ghost of "Olivia", a young houseguest who supposedly perished of pneumonia after taking a chill on her way home from a dance in town.

After thirty-three years in the house and still no signs of a rustling taffeta ball gown, I think we can safely say that myth has been debunked. Besides, the true stories are definitely more interesting.

From the outset Holly House teased us with the usual bits of memorabilia familiar to owners of older homes: bits of china and square nails in the driveway, old newspapers beneath the hallway flooring, and antique tools in the basement. But since we followed a long series of owners

who had no compunction to loot the old girl, there were more substantial treasures to be found. The cover page of the abstract of title to the house indicates the historic significance of the property since it was part of "Lot No. 1" of the town site of Sierra City. The earliest

record in this document is a water claim dated 1852 by V. Challaye & Co. with the intent of putting a quartz mill on the property. Lot 1 was originally part of the large Sierra Buttes Rancho



Holly House as it appeared circa 1900.

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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!

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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	\$15.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION	\$20.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING	\$30.00
SUSTAINING	\$50.00
LIFE (per individual)	\$250.00

Please send dues to the Membership Chair:
Lynn McKechnie, PO Box 294, Sierraville, CA 96126

SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office Address:
Kentucky Mine Museum
PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125 (530) 862-1310

NEW MEMBERS OF THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- Bassett's Station..... Sierra City, CA
- Merrielyn ElorzaReno, NV
- Cora Dietrich..... Sierra City, CA
- Faris Dolgoff..... Alleghany, CA
- Anthony & Kim Folchi.....Loyalton, CA
- Robert & Mary Haggard Roseville, CA
- Bev HelrichStevensville, MT
- Mike Hoaglund Family.....Paradise, CA
- Helen Kennedy Portola, CA
- William Loveridge.....Loyalton, CA
- Loyalton PharmacyLoyalton, CA
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- Bob Morales..... Sierra City, CA
- Colleen Webber NicholasSacramento, CA
- Donald Schuyler Gold Canyon, AZ
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- Moreland Stevens.....Newcastle, CA
- Underground Gold Miners Museum Alleghany, CA
- Eugenia Van Dalsem Depoe Bay, OR

Historical Society Members, Please Remember To Pay Your 2007 Dues!

Individual	\$15.00
Family & Institution	\$20.00
Business & Supporting	\$30.00
Sustaining	\$50.00
Life (per individual).....	\$250.00

"The Sierran"

We are always looking for interesting historical articles to include in "The Sierran", and we would like to ask you to share your knowledge of our wonderful history.

If you are interested in writing an article for "The Sierran", you can contact Virginia at the above address, or mail to our official address, Sierra County Historical Society, PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96126.

Officers and Executive Board of The Sierra County Historical Society

Some faces are familiar and some new ones have joined the board. We welcome new board members Mary Nourse from Sierra City and Judy Lawrence from Sattley.

- President:** Bud Buczkowske, Alleghany
- Vice President:** Joleen Torri, Sattley
- Secretary:** Virginia Lutes, Sierraville
- Treasurer:** Bill Copren, Sattley

Board members in addition to those previously mentioned are Maren Scholberg, Sierraville; Suzi Schoensee, Sattley; Sherrie Allen, Alleghany; Mary Nourse, Sierra City; and Judy Lawrence, Sattley.

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

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and as such changed hands numerous times. In 1881, when the property transferred ownership to J. Gardella, the following personal property was included in the sale: one heating stove, one cooking stove, three mules, two wagons, one cow, one donkey, eight tons of hay, and five thousand pounds of potatoes.

In 1885 H. Watt Hughes purchased a portion of the property and on it built a grand scale home. The very architecture of the house revealed something about his vocation of gold mining and of his perceived station in life. An upstairs room later known as “the gun room” featured a built-in weapons cabinet and reinforced floorboards presumably to accommodate the weight of a safe. (Further research revealed that Hughes was an officer of the Swastika Mine and a partner in the Young America Mine.) The mansion, somewhat ostentatious for Sierra City at the time, features high ceilings, bay windows, hand grained woodwork, and elaborate architectural details. But a charmed, luxurious life was not to be for the Hughes family. According to an 1886 article of *The Mountain Messenger*:

“Last Thursday, while Mr. and Mrs. Watt Hughes were on their way up from below on the stage, and while between Camptonville and the Mountain House, it was discovered that their six-month-old infant had died in its mother’s arms. The child was not known to be at all sick, and the fact that it passed away without a struggle, proved that death was caused by some trouble with its heart.”

After her tragic loss, Mrs. Hughes reportedly left Sierra City with her surviving children, no



Adeline Castagna

longer willing to tolerate the primitive mountain lifestyle. Because the house holds an allure to those with connections to her, we were provided with that information and a portrait of the Hughes family by some of their descendants who stopped by for a visit in the 1990’s.

The title abstract told us that the Hughes sold the house to Lawrence and Adeline (Castagna) Holley in 1911 for the sum of \$1,760. Since then the house has been known as the “Holly House”. (The “e” was dropped from the spelling when holly trees were planted in the yard.) Through the years the Italianate mansion served alternately as a private home, a boarding house, and an annex to the Sierra Buttes Inn (currently known as the Old Sierra City Hotel). These facts were confirmed by several business signs found in the basement as well as photographs of the boarding house days.

My husband Rich and I purchased Holly House in 1973 as our family home, and in exchange for

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many tumultuous and costly years of renovation, she rewarded us with her warm hospitality and an intimate look to the past. Immediately after moving in, we got a sense of her history when we came across a quilt in one of the bedrooms dated 1892 and an oak dresser monogrammed with the initial “L”, presumably for Lawrence Holley. But the real treasures were shown to us in 1978 while we were in the throes of a major remodeling project. In removing lath and plaster from the walls of an upstairs closet, local contractor Cy Rollins found a cache of postcards, letters, and telegrams which had apparently fallen through from the attic above. Most of them were love notes written to Adeline Castagna prior to her marriage to Lawrence Holley.

What makes the story titillating is that they were not from her husband, but from Armando Brusco, her former suitor who addressed her fondly as “My Dear Dearie”, “Lovey”, and “My Little Bunch of Skirts”. Armando’s steamy correspondence took place from 1908-09. Some of his letters were sent to her in Sierra City and others to a finishing school in Berkeley where Addie was continuing her education. (Sierra City School records showed that she had failed that era’s version of a high school exit exam.) Armando’s last passionate card to her was post-

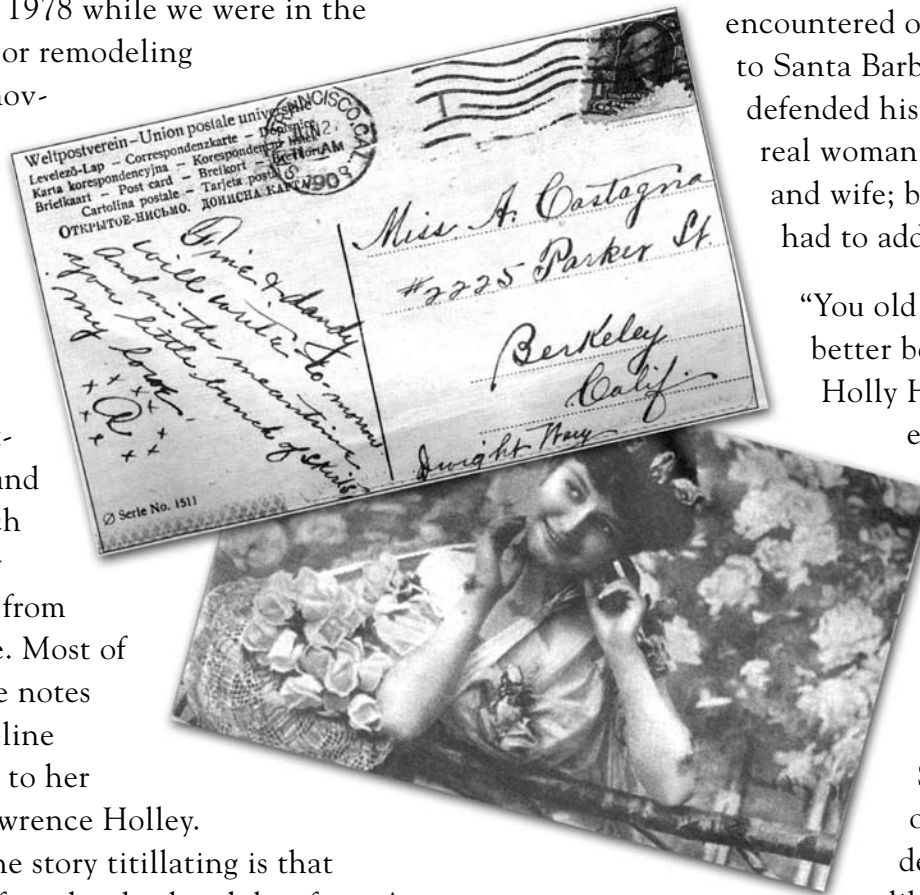
marked August 4, 1909. One month later, she married Lawrence Holley. I was shocked that Adeline would toss aside the chance to receive Armando’s “carloads of kisses” in favor of a lifetime of Lawrence’s clumsy endearments like, “O you big dear” and “You big bunch of love”. Fortunately, Holly House shared enough of his correspondence for him to redeem himself. Sort of. One letter revealed that in the face of a

“red hot suffragette” who he encountered on a business trip to Santa Barbara in 1914, he defended his Adeline as “a real woman, a true mother and wife; but then he just had to add “you old dear.”

“You old dear” might better be applied to Holly House by generations of folks

for whom she is the keeper of fond memories: people like Jim and Myrtle Lamb, Sierra City old timers now deceased, who, like many others,

rented rooms there when they first came to Sierra City; for Julia Rosasco who, while working as a mother’s helper to Adeline Holley, courted her husband on the front porch; for Jean Innes Herrington who, as a teenager, provided maid service when the house was under the auspices of the Sierra Buttes Development Corporation; and most of all my family for whom the Holly House will always simply be home.



Music at the Mine - 2007

By Bob Morales

Once again the “Music at the Mine” musical series will return to the Kentucky Mine in 2007. As in years past, there is a fairly wide variety of musical styles coming to the mountains this summer. With a strong focus on local artists, we hope to attract more attendees and continue to grow the popularity of this unique venue. If you have had the pleasure of attending one of the “Music at the Mine” shows you know how relaxing and enjoyable they are. If you have not, shame on you. You are missing out on a great way to spend a lovely summer evening while supporting one of the Historical Society’s key fund raising efforts. So break out those favorite toe-tapping or dancing shoes, bring an appetite for good food and music and we’ll see you at “Music at the Mine” this summer.

As with last year, all shows are on Saturday evenings starting at 7:30 PM and usually run until around 10:00 PM. Ticket prices will range from

\$10.00 to \$15.00 with kids 10 and under free. Tickets can be purchased at the door or on the web at www.kentuckymine.org. Yes, that’s right, tickets can be purchased online! There will be some local outlets available which will be listed on the website.

A new facet to this years program will be a pre-show tailgate BBQ, prepared by chef Bob Morales from the Old Sierra City Hotel, for all shows in 2007. The BBQ’s will start at 5:30 PM and are not included in the show ticket prices. Bob guarantees they will be both tasty and reasonably priced. The season opening BBQ menu on June 16th features grilled Chicken & Tri-tip, Coleslaw, Chili Beans, Garlic Bread and Corn on the Cob. Information on the menu for the rest of the 2007 shows can be obtained by calling Bob Morales at the Old Sierra City Hotel at 530-862-1300.

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Music at the Mine - 2007 Schedule

June 16 - Rock Bottom Band - local artists from the Sierra Valley and Portola, featuring classic rock & roll music from the likes of Fleetwood Mac, the Eagles, Lynard Skynyrd and Clearance Clearwater. Ticket Price: \$10.00

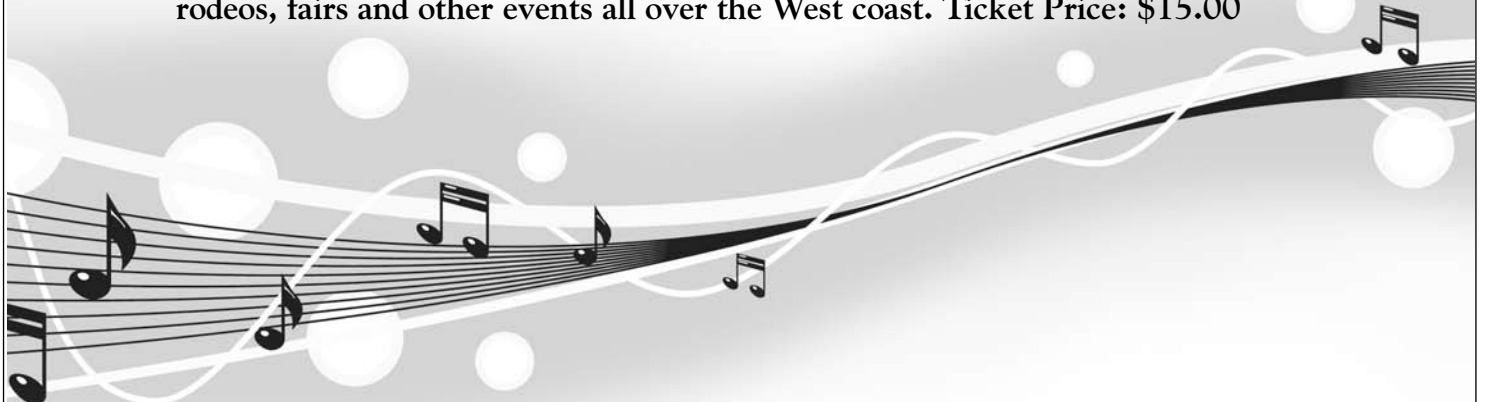
June 30 - No Taboo - local performers from the Auburn area, they classify themselves "Club" performer. Smoky blues, R&B, friends with Robert Cray, they are primed and ready to entertain. Ticket Price: \$10.00

July 7 - Golden Bough - an Oregon based band that features authentic, traditional Celtic music from Scotland & Ireland. Since the early 1980's, they have traveled to many countries bringing their unique talents to thousands. Ticket Price: \$15.00

July 21 - Plan-B - based in the Grass Valley and Auburn area, they perform a wide blend of blues and southern R&B that is great for listening and dancing. Ticket Price: \$10.00

Aug. 4 - The Johnson's - good ole boys from Downieville, Grass Valley/Auburn, these guys are well known throughout the HWY 49 corridor. Performing rock favorites from the 60's, 70's and 80's bring your dancing shoes. Ticket Price: \$10.00

Aug. 11 - Sourdough Slim - inspired by 1920's and Depression years' traveling minstrels such as Jimmie Rodgers, Slim paints a musical pictures of the era with country blues and western traveling music. Extremely popular throughout Northern California & Nevada, Slim has entertained thousands of listeners at rodeos, fairs and other events all over the West coast. Ticket Price: \$15.00



As in 2006, any Sierra County Historical Member that wishes to provide additional specific sponsorship of the Music at the Mine Series should contact Joleen Torri with any questions or donations.

Contact Information: <http://www.kentuckymine.org/> or 530-862-1310. If you can't get what your looking for at these contact points, you can always call our "Music at the Mine" coordinator Bob Morales at 530-862-1300. Have a magical and musical summer.

Keirn-Lagomarsino Cabin Loganville, CA

The idea to save and restore one of the old cabins in Loganville came about on June 23, 1999 when Bill Copren, then president of the SCHS, along with other members met with the Keirn family and Forest Service representatives. The cabin looked rather spartan. It was the SCHS that has since guided the project to save the cabin from the bulldozer, for use as a research facility. The old cabin had served as a vacationer hide-a-way for many decades.

The USFS agreed to have the SCHS manage the cabin and grounds. It is up to the SCHS to fund the restoration, which at this time is being done with RAC II monies, private donations, and future support of various organizations. In addition to members, we hope to involve local contractors to donate sweat equity for the endless tasks of upgrading and maintaining the facility. Little by little the cabin will rise to what it once was.

SCHS members can be assured our investment will help create a project that keeps on giving to the community of Downieville, Sierra City, Loganville, Bassett Station, Sierra Valley and Sierra County, and to the preservation and enhancement of Sierra County history.

At this time, the renovation and improvement drawings have been completed and structural drawings of the front porch and side entrance are near completion by licensed architect Volker Flashe of Bauwerk Engineering. Mr. Flashe has owned and has restored a house in Forest City. The next step is to have the drawings approved by the USFS. Once approved, and the proper building permits are granted, construction will begin.

Future plans for the cabin are for it to be tied into the Loganville Scenic Highway Visitor Center, USDA Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest.



Keirn-Lagomarsino Cabin, Loganville, CA

The trailhead will provide access to an interpretive trail leading through the historic town site of Loganville.

One of the uses of the Lagomarsino-Keirn Cabin will be interpreting the history of the mining era in Loganville town site area.

A Look Back

The cabin's single wall construction, held together by square nails and resting on a hand-placed stone cellar and foundation, speak of its humble origins and the hardscrabble frontier of our gold mining past. The cabin faces south toward the sun. The immediate planting of several varieties of apple trees around the cabin's perimeter ensured a continual harvest should one variety fail. A well-thought-out water system, using a flume from American Creek, passes behind the cabin and above the buildings of Loganville to provide

Keirn-Lagomarsino Cabin (Continued on Page 8) —

Keirn-Lagomarsino Cabin (Continued from Page 7)

a constant clean, clear water supply only five feet from the back of the cabin's lot. The cabin site was cleared of rock allowing for garden space and the rock was used in a hand placed stone fence surrounding the cabin on three sides.

The fact that this very modest cabin, built sometime before 1872 as the Lagomarsino Cabin set in the very small town of Loganville, has generated 22 deeds of ownership; six delinquent tax sales with two additional deeds; 8 court proceedings; and constant harassing claims by miners on

its sovereignty; shows how embedded it is in the local history and lore of Sierra County. This does not include its last 40 years as the "Keirn Cabin", and the ongoing struggles with the USFS to first keep it as a family cabin, and second to preserve it as a modest historical building. During these more recent years, there have been four honeymoons at the "Keirn Cabin", and countless hours of fishing and fun staying at the cabin and enjoying the surrounding treasures of Sierra County by family and for friends.