

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

“The Kentucky Mine Museum”

By Corri Jimenez, M.S.

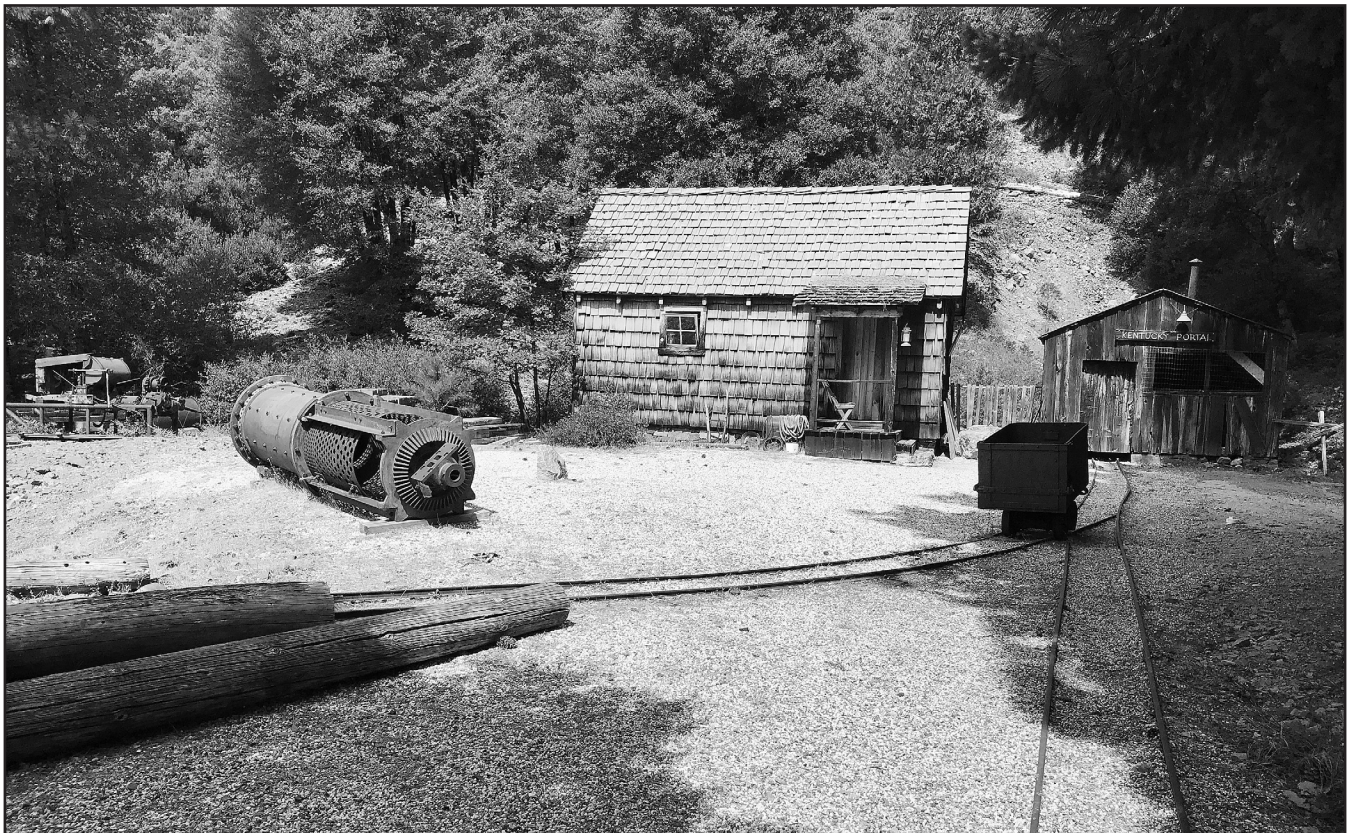
Nestled in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the wooded hamlet of Sierra City, the Kentucky Mine Museum reflects the county’s rich mining, agriculture, and social histories. The museum, the stamp mill, and the surrounding park house a treasure-trove of artifacts.

Sierra County was carved out of Yuba County in 1852 due to mining exploration and agricultural developments that increased settlements in the area. In the early period of the Gold Rush, the west-end communities of Goodyear’s Bar, Forest City, Alleghany, and Sierra City utilized the latest technologies available for placer, hydraulic, and hard rock mining. These operations and their remnants are still visible

today, and Alleghany’s 16-to-1 Mine (incorporated 1896) endures as the longest continually operating gold mine in the California.

Sierraville, Calpine, and Loyalton are communities on the eastern side in the lush basin of the Sierra Valley, which extends to the Nevada border. Agriculture, including hay, lumber, and livestock,

The Kentucky Mine Museum - (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!

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If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact any board member or email at info@sierracountyhistory.org

Become a Member!

Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$20.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION.....	\$25.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING.....	\$35.00
SUSTAINING.....	\$50.00
LIFE (per 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

Presidents Message

In remembering an older person who passed on, how often do we say to ourselves, "I wish I'd payed closer attention to his stories!?" When I was growing up in the East Bay, our neighbors through the cherry orchard were a sweet, elderly couple who always welcomed my visits. They lived in a farmhouse kept dark against the pounding summer sun to protect the drapes and wallpaper, and it was a haven for me because none of us had air-conditioning in 1950s Danville. I would perch on the heavy mahogany sleigh bed that they used as a sofa while Mrs. Spahr regaled me with stories of her youth. I was impressed that they used to travel to the area before the Caldecott Tunnel was constructed, but one particular event that she related to me became my "I wish I'd payed closer attention" regret. You see, as a young woman, Mrs. Spahr was on board the *Carpathia*, the ship that arrived two hours after the *Titanic* had sunk, and she took on 705 survivors from lifeboats. Through the grace of Google, I was able to add that statistic, but oh, how I...well, you know.

I have a number of historic tidbits from various life encounters. I can tell you that the dad of one of my classmates was the navigator on the *Enola Gay* on that fateful day, and that Annie Moon, an unassuming elderly Scottish lady from Sierra City had been the traveling companion to Mrs. Knight who later built Vikingsholm Castle at Emerald Bay, Lake Tahoe. But these are just one-liners. Wouldn't it be great to be able to flesh out stories like these?

My SCHS New Year's resolution for 2019 is to put new life into our oral history program. My goal for the society is to acquire appropriate recording equipment and to beef up our volunteer crew to interview folks who hold our historic stories. I once read that, "When an old person dies, a whole library disappears". Let's not let that happen in Sierra County. Please contact me if you'd like to be involved in saving our stories. mnourse46@gmail.com

Mary Nourse

The Kentucky Mine Museum - (Cont. from Page 3) —

were the prominent industries in the valley, and commodities were shipped to the Comstock Mining District in present-day Nevada as early as 1859. In 1860, Henness Pass Road, a major freight route across the Sierra Nevada Mountains was constructed. It extended from Marysville, through Sierra County to the mining operations on the Comstock Lode and is one of the earliest routes across the range. Because of these activities, Sierra County had a population of over 11,000 people by 1860 with Downieville crowned as the county seat. Today, Sierra County is much smaller and has approximately 2700 residents.

The Kentucky Mine Museum (100 Kentucky Mine Road, Sierra City, California, 96125) operated by the Sierra County Historical Society has a collection that exemplifies the rich mining history of the area. It is set in a wooded area at the foot of the spectacular Sierra Buttes. The exhibits include the portal to the mine adit and an approximately 35 foot high wood trestle that leads to a 10-stamp hard rock mill. The grounds also include a replica of miners' cabin, lots of engineering equipment, and a museum.



The Kentucky Mine and its adjacent mill are both water-powered by Pelton wheels, designed by Yuba County resident Lester Allan Pelton, and are hands-down the greatest asset in the historical society's collection. The Pelton wheel was uniquely engineered with cups, which allowed water pressure to propel them on a flywheel in powering the



mining equipment. At the entrance to the mine portal, a Pelton wheel propelled by single cups, which powered drills in the quartz mine. It is theorized that the Pelton wheel may have come from an older mill in the area. This wheel is adjacent to other historic artifacts, such as a leather blacksmithing bellows connected to an iron forge.

The Kentucky Mine's mill, constructed from 1928 to 1933, is a six-level, heavy-timber framed structure erected by German immigrant, Emil Loeffler and his son Adolph "Dutch," from existing 19th century stamp mills in and around Sierra City. Reusing and repurposing older mining equipment is a typical *modus operandi* in the industry, and the Kentucky Mine's mill is no exception. One known mill that the Loefflers reused was the 1890s Phoenix Mill, a 10-stamp mill that was located east of the Kentucky Mine. Local oral stories recall the Loefflers deconstructing the Phoenix Mill, loading it on a flatbed truck, and reconstructing it at its current location on the Kentucky Mine property.

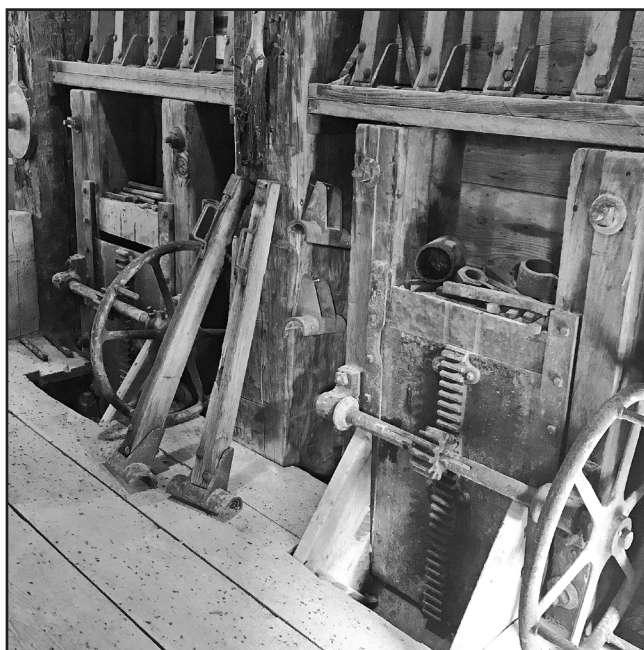
The Kentucky Mine Museum - (Cont. on Page 4) —

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The mill's process is solely gravity fed from the top down. At the top, ore is transferred from mining carts on a trestle from the mine's adit. The product is dropped down into "grizzlies" that were manned at the top in controlling the ore in the grizzly slots. Smaller particles would feed down to the stamp batteries and larger particles would fall into two Blake jaw crushers in a mortar box that is



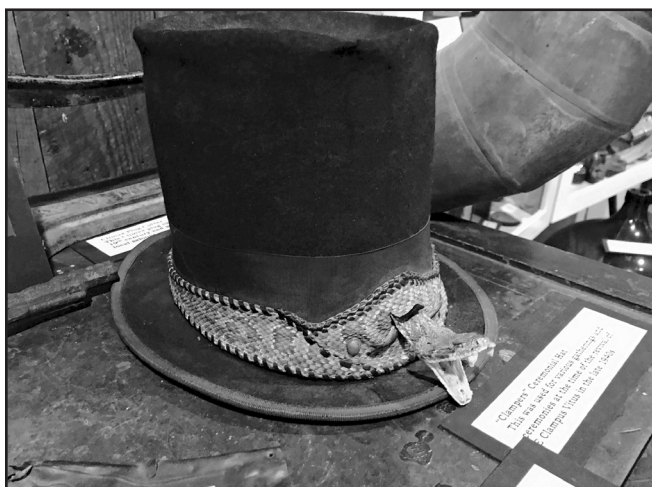
located in the middle, which crushes it into walnut size ore. This ore would then drop into the same, two 5-stamp batteries that would distribute the fine ground ore onto amalgamation tables, which are lined with mercury on zinc sheets. A retort would be used to separate the gold from the mercury. Any overflow from the amalgamation tables was passed onto shaker tables located below to remove gold particles as dust. A 6-foot water-powered Pelton wheel on ground level turns wooden wheels and belts to connect and power the crushers and stamps. Incredibly, the mill was operated solely by the two Loeffler men into the 1940s, with a later



mining company operating it until 1953. They processed about four tons of rock per day. Because of the small size of the operation, many considered it a "moonlighting" operation since both men had full-time jobs as butchers in Sierra City.

Today, the only inhabitants in the mine and stamp mill are a colony of Townsend Big-Eared Bats that are monitored and protected in the fall during their mating season. Artifacts from Sierra County's industrial days are displayed all around the Kentucky Mine site. Visitors can see such items as a "trommel" or circular flume, hydraulic monitors, and a steam donkey, or portable boiler that is used in the mining and lumber industry. In addition to historical tours, a 200-seat amphitheater is set in the wooded, industrial landscape and hosts summer concerts ranging from jazz to zydeco. Visitors can freely tour the landscape, and take in the site's rich history. For a small fee, they can tour the mill and mine and witness the Pelton wheel in action as it raises and releases Stamp No. 2 with a loud bang.

The Kentucky Mine Museum is ideally located on the industrial site. Its collection is an extensive array of items rich in Sierra County history. There is an 1860s rocker box from Goodyear's Bar and opium bottles from the Chinese who placer mined along the North Yuba River. There is a replica of the largest gold nugget ever found in Sierra



County. Known as the “Monumental,” the original nugget weighed 106 pounds, found in Sierra Buttes Mine, and is on display in the entrance to the museum. Its replica is an impressive sight near the museum’s entrance.

Another current exhibit showcases the history of E. Clampus Vitus (ECV), the mock-fraternal organization spawned during the Gold Rush for the protection of “widders and orphans.” On display is a ceremonial top hat adorned with rattlesnake skin and a “hewgag,” a makeshift saxophone used to



summon the Clampers to meetings in Sierra City. As a research library, the museum also includes community information, historic photographs, family/genealogical histories, and period books.



The Sierra County Historical Society was founded in 1966 and gained stewardship of the site in 1970, which is located on Tahoe National Forest federal land. The museum was constructed in 1977 to house artifacts significant to gold mining history. For over 40 years, SCHS has been publishing a newsletter, known as *The Sierran*, to educate its membership about county history. The historical society has over 200 members and hosts annual picnics at various historic sites throughout the county. It also participates in the Art + Ag Festival with the Sierra County Arts Council. In addition, the historical society is deeply invested in the county and its historic resources and funded National Register designations of the 1931 Sierraville School and the 1860 Webber Lake Hotel on Henness Pass Road.

For more information or visiting the Sierra County Historical Society, visit www.sierracountyhistory.org to learn more.

Corri Jimenez, M.S. resides in Sierra County and has a graduate degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon. She has authored two National Register nominations in the county that include the 1931 Sierraville School and 1860 Webber Lake Hotel. Currently, she serves as a board member on the Sierra County Historical Society.

“Butte School”

Northern Sierra Valley, Plumas County, North of Buttes

By Virginia (Maddalena) Lutes

B

y January 1896, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors approved the Butte School District upon petition of citizens and taxpayers of Sierra Valley. Boundaries were established for the May term 1896, and the land was purchased for \$10.00 from Emma O'Connor. William Arms, Anton Laffranchini and A.E. Bulson organized this school. These people saw the need for a school that was closer to their homes; Mr. Arms' children had been attending the Beckwith School, and Mr. Laffranchini's children the Summit School.

There are indicators that the schoolhouse had at least two locations. Records show there were two purchases of land for the school, the first in 1896, and another in 1922, both for \$10.00.

Ron Bonta remembered hearing from Henry Maddalena that the building was first a house that sat to the north. Possibly the first Butte School pupils attended school at that location. In November 1905, there is record that the school district lapsed and merged into Beckwith and Summit Districts.

Flora Otis appears to have been the first teacher at the Butte School. The earliest records located for a teacher show that G.E. Anderson was the teacher from June 1897 to July 1898, for 5 months. A document of “Plumas County Public Schools, List of School Districts, Clerks, Teachers, Salaries, Etc. for the School Year ending June 30, 1899, shows the Butte school district, salary \$50.00, grade: grammar, 14 students, teacher: G.E. Anderson, clerk Wm. Arms, P.O. address, Beckwith”

Other teachers were Hattie Hinds, Holmes Goodwin, Frances Kirby, Sadie McCutcheon, Miss Carter, and Miss McGillivray. Carrie Dedmon was the teacher from 1904 - 1905 when the District lapsed.

The school remained closed for about 10 years, then the citizens of Sierra Valley petitioned for new district boundaries and the Board of Supervisors again established a Butte School District in January 1916. It is assumed that when the need for a schoolhouse reappeared, the schoolhouse was



Butte School students, circa 1918. Pictured top left: Louie Maddalena, Julius Bonta, Sam Bonta, Charlie Maddalena, Mary Bonta Cheise, Jennie Maddalena Mitchell, Amelia Bonta Ramelli, Henry Maddalena, Elsie Bonta Yukaren, Delia Maddalena Nichols, Bruno Maddalena, Joe Maddalena, and Guido Maddalena. Photo courtesy Ron Bonta.

moved to the location where it is still remembered by local residents, this being on the north side of the Buttes with the tracks of the Nevada California and Oregon Railroad behind.

BUTTE SCHOOL - (Cont. on Page 7) —

BUTTE SCHOOL - (Cont. from Page 6) —

The teachers at the Butte School were challenged at the beginning of each term with students who spoke mostly Italian or Swiss and very little English.

Guido Maddalena remembered "The teacher didn't speak Italian, we kids didn't speak English too good. I don't know how we learned anything."

Eva Maddalena (Lompa) related her memories as the schoolhouse having a wood stove. The children would carry wood in and empty the ashes. "We went to school with a horse and buggy 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. In the mornings they would get up and ready for school, the girls wore dresses, boys wore Levis. We made our lunch. Momma made all the bread, everything wrapped in paper. There was a well at school for water. After school, we came home again about 4 p.m., milk cows, feed chickens, and gather eggs. Sometimes we had homework."

At one point in time, the schoolhouse needed a roof. The women in the area decided to hold a

"basket social". They made up food baskets for auction to the highest bidder. There were logging camps with many hungry loggers. A train brought a number of the loggers in for the event. Over \$60.00 was raised, and this was sufficient to put on a new roof. When a man bought the basket, he also sat down to eat the food with the family that had made the basket. If there were a large family, the woman would have made a lot of food. Mostly the food items were what came from the ranch, usually fried Chicken, maybe potato salad, homemade bread and a pie.

The district lapsed somewhere between 1927 and 1930. The schoolhouse was moved to the old Sam Bonta ranch where it was used for a grainery. When it was moved, there was still a desk inside; the grain was dumped in right on top of the desk. On one wall, Louie Maddalena had carved his initials. The Bonta family offered it for historical preservation but no interest was taken, so just a few years ago, the old schoolhouse had finally leaned so far over that it had to be taken down.

Katie Laffranchini left for school in the buggy by 7:10 in the morning. "Three miles in a buggy wasn't very speedy because the old horse wasn't too happy about leaving. We were going home one night-twice it happened - went through the gate, I opened the gate and the teacher drove the horse through, the horse got through the gate, kind of put its head down like he wanted to drop, run out there about 50 feet and dropped dead. It was about the half way point. The teacher looks at me. My Dad was plowing in a field there, he seen me walking so he came to see what happened. I told him old Jack died. I guess the horse was old enough. I do not remember, but I think we all walked home. Then we got another one, and about two weeks before school was out, why he died at the hitching post. They never gave us the best horse for the buggy."

Kate also related that one day she and Julie and Sam Bonta decided to go fishing up the Clover. She told her parents she was sick and couldn't go to school. "There was never a day in the country that my Dad had to go to Clover the same day as me. Well, I was fishing along and came around a turn and there was our dog. Well, Dad caught me, said, 'Pretty sick, huh?' I replied, "Yeah, damn sick, fresh air is best." When they got home much later that day, Dad told Mother what had happened. She replied she "knew that was coming." When Dad asked how she knew, she said "she gave it away on the calendar says she has the measles." Yes, I caught a bunch of fish, probably why I didn't get into more trouble."

The Sierran

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

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Webber Lake Hotel Granted National Register Status



On December 31, 2018 while the U.S. federal government was shutdown, the National Park Service's Keeper of the National Register approved the Webber Lake Hotel National Register nomination (No. SG100003281). The listing automatically places the hotel on the California Register of Historical Resources and potentially opens it up to grants and possible tax incentives for the hotel's rehabilitation. The hotel is now the ninth National Register properties in Sierra County that includes the Sierraville School, listed last year, as well as Forest City Historic District, Downieville's Sierra County Sheriff's Gallows, and numerous archaeological sites.

