

Member of California Conference of Historical Societies

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#### A HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES OF SIERRA COUNTY General Introduction\*

The spiritual needs of the inhabitants of Sierra County before the turn of the century were met by three organized religious groups--Methodist, Congregational and Roman Catholic. Church membership was always low and each faith, in its own way, attempted to bring more people into the fold.

The Roman Catholic Church was not confronted with the problem of apathy to the extent the Protestant faiths were. When the religious could not get to church, the priest took the church to them. In the 1880's, the Downieville Catholic priest rode a circuit that included Sierra City, Forest City, Alleghany, Howland Flat, Port Wine, Poker Flat, St. Louis and Whiskey Diggings. These long trips could be dangerous. The *Mountain Messenger's* report of one accident seemed to give an indication of the relative importance of man and beast when it noted that "the buggy was wrecked and the Father badly bruised, but the horse escaped without injury."

The Catholics in the eastern part of the county were not fortunate enough to have the services of a resident priest. The Irish had built a Catholic Church in the 1860's in Sierra Valley (about 7 miles south of Beckwourth) and a visiting priest served them on occasion.

In 1872 a Methodist Episcopal Church was built midway between Sierraville and Randolph. That same year work was begun on a Methodist Church building in Loyalton and it was dedicated in July of 1873.

Rev. William G. Pond of San Francisco organized a Congregational Society in Downieville in 1855. He preached his first sermon at the Downieville Amphitheater of Piety Flat. A church was built but before it could be used for services, it burned along with much of the rest of the town. A new structure was started immediately, this time built of brick and stone. (It'later became the Clampers' Hall.) It was built in 1858. By 1865, services were discontinued and the building sold. Rev. Pond also served as County Supt. of Schools in Sierra County from 1862-1865.\*\* In 1888 a Congregational church was built in Sierraville. The old building still stands on the opposite side of the road from the present Community Church. There was a parsonage on the site of the present Floyd May home.

None of these buildings are standing today. The following histories tell of the present churches.

\*Except for \*\*, most of this material is taken from Vol 3, No. 1 of Sierra County Historical Society Bulletin--an article by William G. Copren on "Organized Religion in Sierra County, 1880-1890".

\*\*From HISTORIC SPOTS IN CALIFORNIA by Hoover and Rensch.



## ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH Lovalton

In 1943 Rev. Brad Wilmoth visited Lovalton for the first time. He held a week of revival services in the old Lavery apartment building where the telephone exchange is today. With only one convert, he left discouraged and with no desire to return. However, he worried about all the unsaved in Lovalton and the work which needed to be done. In June 1951 he came back. He prayed, "If you want me to return, give me a job and a place to live". Both were granted that same day. He wanted to start an Assembly of God Church and he needed a building. The Union granted him the use of the largest building in town--"The Union Hall". In Sept. 1951, the first Sunday School was started with 16 present.

Prayer meetings were held in homes; later Wednesday night services were held in the Union Hall. The Church began to grow. In March 1952 the first water baptismal service was held with 10 persons being baptised. The ceremony took place west of Sierraville, off the highway near the Strang Ranch with three feet of snow on the level.

The first revival service was held in homes in May 1952 and 9 members were added to the Church. Cottage prayer meetings continued but a place to worship was much desired. Two lots were purchased from Frank Amodei and in July 1952, ground breaking ceremonies were held. People of the community gave the Church old buildings and lumber and the congregation worked hard salvaging useable lumber. As the foundation was taking form, Wanda Driggers almost became a permanent part of it when a wheel barrow full of cement went wild. Six and a half months after ground breaking, the group moved into their new church. Although it was not yet finished, it was warm and dry.

On Feb. 2, 1953 a fellowship meeting was held at which time the Church was set in order by officials from the district office in Santa Cruz. Another lot was purchased and building of a parsonage was started. In Feb. 1955 the Wilmoths moved into their new home.

In June 1955 the Church had their first Vacation Bible School. Record attendance was 129 with an average attendance of 90. The years average Sunday School attendance was 71.

In 1956 several church families moved away. Brother and Sister Albert Driggers Jr. went to Southern California; the Gerald Monger family moved to Colorado. With the return of the Driggers family in 1958, work began again. The Church Annex was started and finished.

In Feb. 1965 Sister Rosie Wilmoth passed away--a great loss to the church. In Nov. 1970 Pastor Wilmoth resigned and went to Herlong to help finish their new church, then he later moved to Lemon Valley, Nevada.

In Dec. 1970 Rev. Buckey Dikes, who had grown up in Loyalton, came to serve. He and his family were with us 18 months and the church began to grow again.

Rev. Vance Reynolds served from Aug. 1972 to Aug. 1975. He was followed by Pastor Stan Wagner. At this time there were only about 8 members in the Church so it took a lot of faith to try a venture like this. The church and Sunday School began to grow. Bible studies were in full swing and several revivals were held.

A school bus and the parsonage were used for extra Sunday School rooms. More space was needed. The building across the street once again became available -- "The Largest Building in the City". This was where we first started. Now we have plenty of Sunday School rooms but sometimes the church is full in morning worship with more than one hundred in attendance. 70 have been baptised by Pastor Wagner.

#### As point of record:

Alice Dawson was present at that first meeting in the Union Hall and still attends today. Bert Graves has been a board member since the time the Church was put in order up until just recently. Vi Graves was superintendent or assistant superintendent to our Sunday School until just recently. Bert and Vi Graves were charter members and still attend faithfully.

#### THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS **By Inez Roberts**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (commonly called Mormons) started holding church services in Loyalton in 1938 at the home of Willard Olsen. Joseph Hardy served as First Councilor, Homer Hardy as Second Councilor, Willard Olsen as Sunday School Superintendent and Robert Jamieson was our representative to the Reno Nevada Stake. Sunday School and Sacrament Meetings were held at 10 A.M. and 11A.M. on Sundays with Primary classes on Tuesday after school.

Several years later the Jamiesons and Hardys moved to Reno, Nevada and the Olsens to Provo, Utah. The remaining members then attended services in Portola where they had previously worshipped before formation of their own church in Loyalton.

In 1963, new members moved into Loyalton--the Rollo Larsens and Robert McDonalds. We then started holding our meetings in The Odd Fellows Hall in Loyalton. Rollo Larsen was our Presiding Elder until 1976 when we were organized as a Branch of the Reno Stake. Robert McDonald was Branch President and Rollo Larsen was our representative in the High Council of Reno Nevada Stake.

At the present time, Jim McDonald is our Branch President, Tim Little is First Councilor, Tom Ramelli is Second Councilor, Robert McDonald is Branch Clerk.

## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH Loyalton

## From their 75th Anniversary Bulletin

"The Baptists are holding religious services!" This was the news in Loyalton in the year 1864. A Rev. Doom was presiding in the pulpit. He was a very busy man for he was also the Jusice of the Peace, physician, storekeeper, hotelkeeper, postmaster and Sunday School teacher--all in the town of Loyalton, population 50!

The first church was built in 1870. The lower floor housed the church and the upper floor was used as a Hall.

There seems to be no record of what happened in the intervening years until 1903. Then a meeting of Baptists was held at the home of Mrs. Hiram Lewis (Sarah) of Loyalton for the purpose of organizing a Baptist Church. The name "Loyalton Baptist Church" was adopted at this time. Rev. Robert Whitaker accepted their call for 3 months at the stipulated salary of \$100.00 per month. Services were held in Enscoe's Hall with weekly prayer meetings at the home of Mrs. Sarah Lewis. (This is the house next to the Cookie Jar.) Rev. Whitaker left in September and Rev. T.S. Crandall then occupied the pulpit. Seventeen days after he arrived in Loyalton, he died very suddenly. The laymen of the church carried on the ministry with W.E. Rees the Sunday School superintendent.

In January 1904 Br. Amos P. Boyd filled the pulpit for 6 weeks but due to the illness of his wife, he had to resign. In July of 1904, Henry B. Neville agreed to pastor the church. On October 16th of that year, the church experienced a very busy day. The new church building was dedicated, Bro. Neville was ordained and after his ordination, he and Grace B. Glover were joined in the Bonds of Matrimony. Rev. Neville served for 2 years. He later became City Attorney, then District Attorney and then Judge of the Superior Court of Sierra County.

He was followed by Rev. C.H. Smith--1906-1907; and M.R. Wolfe--1908-1909. A.G. Sawin then began his pastorate which lasted from 1909-1920. He carried on through difficult years--a depression and the beginning of a World War. The Baptist Church was the only active church in Sierra Valley through some of these years. Br. Sawin served without renumeration from any source for eleven years so that the church might not lose its identity in the community.

Rev. Tom Beaston of Houston, Texas arrived in April of 1920 but because his wife refused to accompany him to this little community, he stayed only 6 weeks. Rev. E.E. Stocking served from Oct. 1920 to April 1922. It is of interest that a Mrs. Hostetter was called next but she did not accept the position. A Mr. J.S. Taylor did and he stayed until 1925.

At this time the defunct Methodist Episcopal Church of Loyalton donated all their pews and Bibles to the Baptist Church.



Loyalton Baptist Church

In 1926 Bro. Vincent Widney became pastor at a salary of \$1800.00 a year and he stayed two years. It was in the year 1927 that the church adopted the name Loyalton Baptist Community Church.

In July 1928, Rev. G.L. Snyder of Sparks, Nevada came out of retirement to accept the call. He remained as pastor for 22 years through some very lean financial times of the big depression.

Rev. C.L. Perkins served for one year after which, in 1952, Bro. Robert Gwinn arrived to begin a pastorate that lasted 17 years. During those years of service to the church, it became self-supporting, many improvements were made to the interior and two additions were built to the building--in 1957 and 1963.

Rev. Myron Reed arrived in 1970 and served 6 years. Dr. Leroy Fraser and Dr. Floyd Reed served as interim pastorsbefore and after Myron Reed's ministry. In July 1977, Mark A. Lambert, the present minister arrived.



### COMMUNITY CHURCH SIERRAVILLE By Erma Strang

Sierraville Community Church was born as an outgrowth of a little Sunday School group which had held meetings in the old closed Congregation Church building for a number of years. In the summer of 1947, a Rural Missionary came in and asked to be allowed to hold services for 10 days. On April 28, 1948 a public meeting was held and a church organized. Since the town was so small, a non-denominational organization was decided upon. The ordinances of this fundamental church were kept to a minimum to accomodate members who were of different denominational faiths. The missionary, Rev. H. Wm. Flemming, agreed to stay on as pastor until a permanent pastor could be called.

A great deal of repair and painting etc. was done on the interior of the church with donated labor. The community was most cooperative. In Dec. 1949 Rev. Wm. Heath accepted the call as pastor. In the summer of 1949, a half dozen members of the defunct Pilgrim Congregational Church challenged our right to use the building. In a trial and an appeal, they won the case. Nothing daunted, the group met in various homes.

Mr. Homer Sanborn came to the rescue and donated a square from the corner of his field across the street and the new building program began. Ground breaking ceremonies were held on Oct. 5, 1952, and the church building was dedicated on Dec. 12, 1954 with Rev. Kalencheck of Davis delivering the dedication address.

Mr. Heath stayed for almost 7 years supplementing his salary by work in different sawmills. In the meantime, he purchased the old Bininger home in Sattley--remodeled and modernized it into a comfortable home. He left in Nov. 1955 for Southern Calif. to further his education.

Rev. Norman Coon pastored from April 1956 to May 1959. During his stay, the annex was added to the building. It included a large social room with kitchenette, 2 rest rooms and 2 Sunday School rooms. James Zeck, a student pastor from San Anselmo Seminary filled the pulpit from June to Sept. in 1959.

The Village Mission Association of Kansas City, Mo. was contacted for help and they sent a field representative who surveyed the area and stayed until a pastor could be placed. Rev. Donald Kunkel arrived in Nov. of 1959. He stayed until Jan. 1963 when the Mission transferred him to Colorado and sent us Paul Faris from Idaho. Miss Zelma Cowan, Village Mission Field Secretary, filled in for seven months until he arrived.

With a housing shortage in Sierraville, a house in Clio was rented for Rev. Faris, his wife and 6 children. Besides pastoring here, he started a work in Graeagle which eventually led to a church being formed over there.

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The Sierraville Church was actively pursuing purchase of a parsonage. Mr. Ed White of Loyalton gave us a lot in Randolph to build on but before we could get started it came to our attention that Louis and Hazel Maddalena were planning to build a new home on their ranch and were offering the old 5 bedroom home for sale for salvage. Upon being contacted, they agreed to leave all kitchen cabinet work, stove, furnace and plumbing fixtures intact and sell it to us for \$2500.00. With a "gift" like that we began plans for moving it. The lot Mr. White had given us was rather small for so large a house so Mr. and Mrs. Gifford Webber offered us a large hillside lot in Randolph.

The house was moved and the pastor and family moved in Thanksgiving Day in 1964. To pay expenses for moving and furnishing it etc., a loan was taken at the Bank of America. This is a very appropriate time to write this history as we burn the mortgage in July!

The lot Mr. White gave us was then traded to Joe Goss for an equal strip along the back of the church, allowing us expansion room and the use of the front area (originally intended for a parsonage area) for a parking lot.

Mr. Faris was transferred to Pahrump, Nevada in Aug. 1968. Our next pastor was Rev. Richard Goold who stayed until June 1970. John Peterson followed him. He was to be sent to Graeagle but he liked Sierraville and agreed to stay here with no mission backing. He left the next year for Auburn, Calif.

We then went back with Village Missions and Rev. Clare Drake arrived in Aug. 1971. He pastored until July 1977.

In Sept. 1977, the Rural Home Missionary Assoc. agreed to accept us into their organization and sent us Rev. Phillip Jackson from Las Vegas, N.M. They are still with us and are especially active in youth work.

Our numbers have fluctuated over the years but the work continues on. We now have plans for additional Sunday School rooms to be added. The church is a member of an FICA group of independent churches in Eastern Calif. and Western Nevada and we share many activities with them.



Holy Rosary Catholic Church of Loyalton. Photo 1916.

### HOLY ROSARY CATHOLIC CHRUCH Loyalton By Georgene Copren

Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Loyalton is celebrating its golden anniversary this year.

From the 1860's on, the Catholics of Sierra Valley were served by the priest from Downieville, who, at rare intervals, visited the mining camps and the valley. Later, the priest from Reno occasionally visited the valley and served mass.

From 1885 until 1912, Sierra Valley was included in the parish of Truckee, which contained all of Modoc, Lassen and Plumas Counties and parts of Sierra, Nevada and Placer Counties. The Truckee priest served mass in Sierra Valley at least once a month.

The Holy Family Parish was established Nov. 10th, 1929 by Right Rev. Robert J. Armstrong, Bishop of Sacramento, comprising Holy Family Church in Portola and Holy Rosary Church in Loyalton. It also included missions in Quincy, Greenville, Graeagle and Walker Mine.

The following are the priests who have served this parish:

- 1. Rev. Patrick McTague: 1929 1935.
- 2. Rev. John McGoldrick: 1935 1947.
- Rev. Michael Myles served as assistant: 1944-1946.
- 3. Rev. Arnold Schaffer: 1947 1954.
- 4. Rev. Thomas O'Brien: 1954 1961.
- 5. Rev. Patrick Corkell: 1961 1967.
- 6. Rev. Bernard Burns: 1967 to ---.

Through the efforts of Father O'Brien, the present church was built in 1955 and the old church building has since been used to hold classes, as a social center, and for wedding receptions. This old structure was built in 1910. The earliest Catholic services had been held in homes of the faithful families. Father Horgan came from Reno to conduct monthly Mass. In 1908, they purchased an old schoolhouse and remodeled it for their church.



Holy Rosary Catholic Church of Loyalton. Photo 1970.

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## **KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS**

Much as been completed at the Museum and Park this year. We now have electrical power (lights) in the mill for increased safety of our visitors. Also, a new fire sprinkler system has been installed in the mill. The ampitheatre is completed and has been used this summer for a CATS benefit. There was live blue grass and folk music which sounded great in the natural setting of the woods.

A replica of the miners cabin has been constructed by Cy Rollions and his able crew and includes hand-hewn beams and hand-split cedar shakes. The cabin will be furnished as authentically as possible. Any donations to help with this project will gladly be accepted.

Our first annual flea market was quite successful. We had many enthusiastic buyers and sellers. We hope to have another flea market next year.

With the resignation of Tommie Jones in May, Cherry Prince was hired as part-time curator. Cathy Otto was also hired as a CETA museum clerk and tour guide. The museum has been managed very efficiently through the effort of Cherry and Cathy. Many thanks to the volunteers who helped in the gift shop during the busy weekends.

With summer gone, Cathy and Cherry will be busy this winter doing inventory, displays and getting organized for the coming season.



## SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS

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For Membership send \$5.00 to Darlene Messner, Membership Chairman, Sierra County Historical Society. P.O. Box 536 Downieville, CA 95936

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#### MEMORIAL DISPLAY DEDICATED

On July 27, 1980, a group of family friends dedicated a display in the memory of Shirley Perryman Palmer, 1923-1980. Mrs. Palmer was a descendant of the Perrymans - a pioneer mining family in Sierra City.

The display includes a beautiful celluloid and velvet family photograph album, a specimen of quartz and gold from the Gold Bluff Mine and several other Perryman family treasures.

This display is a very attractive addition to our museum and we would like to thank the Palmer family and friends for sharing it with us.

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The Historical Society wishes to acknowledge and thank the following businesses for their financial support.

Sierraville--Canyon Ranch Resort Alleghany--Dickey Exploration Sierra City--Yuba River Inn Camptonville--The Water Wheel Indian Valley Outpost Downieville--The Golden Apple Downieville Motor Inn Mountain Messenger St. Charles Place Sierra Hardware Sullivan Realty Snider's Motel and Antique Shop Yoho Downieville Gold Sales

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BRINGING HOME THE CHRISTMAS TREE

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SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY Post Office Box 98 Sierraville, California 96126