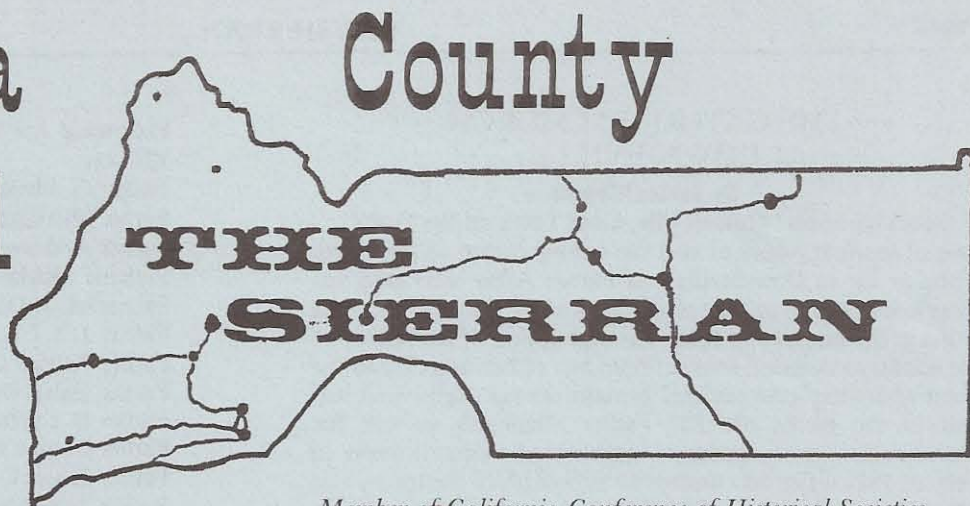


# Sierra Historical Society



*Member of California Conference of Historical Societies*

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Volume XI

Number 1

Fall 1981

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## A HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES OF SIERRA COUNTY

In the last issue of *The Sierran*, the history of churches on the east side of Sierra County were featured. We continue with those on the west side in this issue.

In the early 1850's, Catholic services were conducted in Sierra City, Downieville and the Goodyears Bar area by visiting priests from Nevada City. These areas were considered missionary country and the mining towns were served, when the weather permitted, by Nevada City priests travelling on horseback. In 1855, visits were made by Father Thomas Dalton to the many mining camps of Northern Sierra County including Forest City and Alleghany.

Alleghany and Forest City were served more regularly after 1856 when a priest was assigned to the Downieville parish. The last year that a priest on horseback regularly visited Alleghany and Forest City was in 1916. This was Father John J. McGarry who was assigned the Downieville parish for a short time. It was after this that the first Catholic Church was built in Alleghany.

The Methodist Church was started in both Forest City and Alleghany about the same time. A two story building was erected in 1854 or 55 on the east side of the present Plaza in Alleghany. It was a combined church and public school with the church on the top floor. Methodist Church services were started in Forest City in 1854 by J. R. Tansey. A church was built, and he became the first minister. After a succession of pastors serving on the average of one to two years, a Rev. Todd was the last man permanently assigned to Forest City, probably in the 1860's.

Quoting from James J. Sinnott's book, "*Alleghany and Forest City*", the author describes how these early men of God made their way around the area.

"Visitations by Methodist ministers and Catholic priests, stationed at Downieville, were, of course, by foot or on horseback, and the route was in high probability either via the Galloway Ridge Road or the early trail which ascended the east mountain-side of Slug Canyon from Downieville, to cross Rock Creek and so on to Forest City and Alleghany. It is to be assumed that the visits to these towns of southern Sierra County were from late spring into the fall, possibly no more frequently than once a month and that during the winter no trips were made as a general rule--depending, of course, upon snow conditions.

"Though the Galloway Ridge Road from Downieville, which connected with the Henness Pass Road, was in existence by 1850 or 1851--though being very primitive--and though roads from the Henness Pass Road entered both Forest City and Alleghany by 1853 or 1854--the passage up the Galloway Road was made with great difficulty. It is, therefore, to be considered highly improbable that ministers and priests visited Forest City and Alleghany using a horse and buggy."

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.\*

The following histories tell of the present churches in western Sierra County.

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\*From an article by William G. Copren on "Organized Religion in Sierra County, 1880-90", Vol. 3, No. 1, of Sierra County Historical Society Bulletin.



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DOWNIEVILLE

By James Sinnott

From his book "Downieville, Gold Town on the Yuba"

One of the first priests to visit the mining camps of the North Yuba as far as Downieville was Father Aiker who held services in the several mining settlements along this branch of the Yuba in the summer of 1852. His description of the beauty of the country interested Father Shanahan of Nevada City to the point where the latter decided to make the same trip. So it was that in the spring of 1853 Father Shanahan set out for Downieville with the intent of establishing a church there. In Feb. of 1852 a fire had destroyed almost all of the town, and when Father Shanahan arrived he found the people more interested in the rebuilding of their homes than in establishing a house of worship, even though this was more than a year after the fire.

However, he was successful in organizing a group interested in the erection of a Catholic Church. Within a few weeks the committee had secured a piece of property and construction began. This first Catholic Church was built in 1853 on a site north of the present Lower or Bell-tower Plaza.

When Father Shanahan was called back to San Francisco, he was succeeded in the pastorate at Nevada City by Father Peter Deyaert in Dec. 1853. Father Deyaert made regular visits to Downieville until the spring of 1855 when the communities of this region were placed in charge of Father Thomas Dalton. He was followed by Father Charles Delahunty who came in the winter of 1856 from San Andreas.

Father Delahunty had scarcely become settled when the fire of New Year's Day of 1858 destroyed the entire business section of the town and several other buildings including the Catholic Church. A new church was soon built on a lot higher up the hill. This is the church that is existent today.

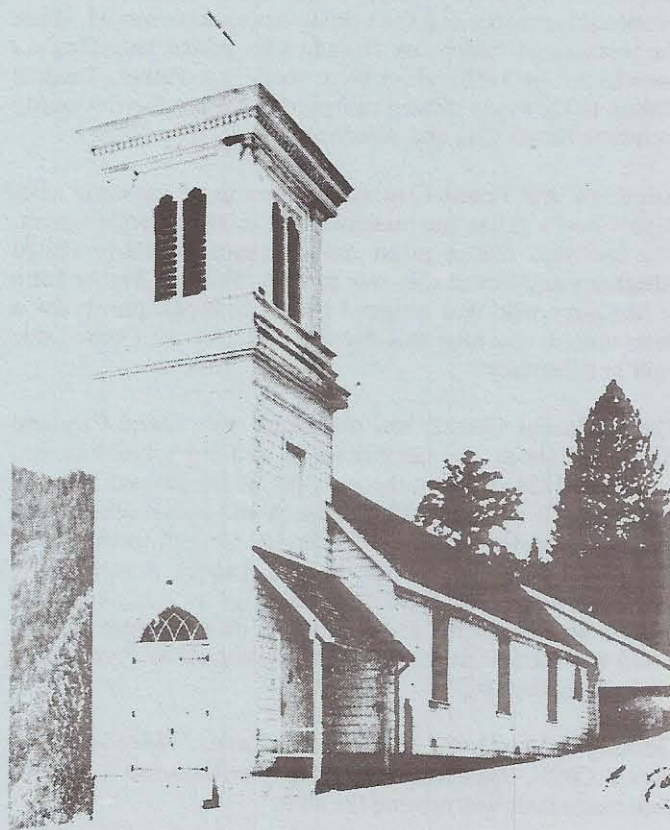
Father Delahunty carried on his work in the mining settlements until the fall of 1861. Bishop O'Connell of Marysville had no priest to send to Downieville at this time so the Sierra County missions were regularly visited by Father Dalton of Grass Valley until in May of 1862, Father Morris went to Downieville. In 1865 Father Morris returned to Ireland. There he induced Father Charles Lynch to return to California. He was assigned first to Marysville. On a trip to the North Yuba region to hold services, he was so overcome by the beauty of the country and so liked the people that he persuaded the Bishop to assign him to the area, as Downieville had been without a pastor for a time. Father Lynch was only 23 years old at the time and he became a great favorite of the miners and their families. He came to suffer greatly from rheumatism,—so much so that by 1869 he found it necessary to call on other priests at times to hold services in the communities. Father Lynch's health deteriorated, so late in 1869 his place was taken by Father William Maloney who remained until Oct. 1870. Father O'Donnell then conducted services until Dec. 1870 at which time Father Lynch, with his health much improved, returned to remain until Jan. of 1877.

Following are the pastors of the Downieville Parish from 1877 on:

Father G. Meiler	Jan. 1877-Aug. 1877
Father Sheridan	Sept. 1877-Jan. 1878
Father Andrew O'Donnell	Jan. 1879-Aug. 1879
Father P. Kirley	Aug. 1877-Nov. 1882
Father M. J. Dillon	Nov. 1882-May 1884
Father J. J. Claire	May 1884-July 1893
Father Patrick O'Kane	Jan. 1894-Oct. 1897
Father James Dermody	Oct. 1897-Sept. 1903
Father G. Laffan	Oct. 1907-Dec. 1911
Father Patrick O'Reilly	Oct. 1907-Dec. 1911
Father James O'Flanagan	Jan. 1911-Dec. 1915
Father John McGarry	Jan. 1916-Mar. 1926

Father McGarry was the last priest to visit his other parishes on horseback.

Father D. J. O'Donovan	Mar. 1926-July 1930
Father Patrick O'Reilly	July 1930-Oct. 1940
Fathers Edward L. Williams and James Enright	Oct. 1940-April 1942
Father Virgil Gabrielli	May 1942-Aug. 1955
Father Daniel McCarthy	Aug. 1955-April 1957
Father Daniel Minogue	April 1957-Sept. 1961
Father Robert J. Connelly	Sept. 1961-Sept. 1966
Father Patrick O'Rafferty	Sept. 1966-July 1970
Father J. Declan O'Sullivan	July 1970-July 1972
Father Sean Maloney	July 1972-Sept. 1976
Father Colm O'Kelly	Sept. 1976-Feb. 1979
Father Liam MacCarthy	Present



Catholic Church of Downieville, erected 1858



## THE METHODIST CHURCH Downieville

Taken from church notes on their 105th anniversary in 1957  
and from James Sinnott's book  
"Downieville, Gold Town on the Yuba"

Downieville can claim the distinction of harboring the oldest Protestant church building in continuous use in California. In 1851 Rev. Robert Rankin Dunlap had received an appointment as a missionary to Calif. In Nevada City he became associated with the Methodist Episcopal Conference and was sent to Downieville in 1852. He preached in "unfinished buildings Sabbath mornings and in the Virginia Hotel Sabbath nights". He soon succeeded in raising funds and erecting a very neat church at a cost of \$2,387.30. Of this sum \$1,325.00 cash had been raised and \$264.00 in "solvent subscriptions", leaving an indebtedness of but \$798.30. Rev. Dunlap preached twice each Sabbath and once in two weeks at Goodyears and Cox's Bars, with a membership of 33 within the circuit.

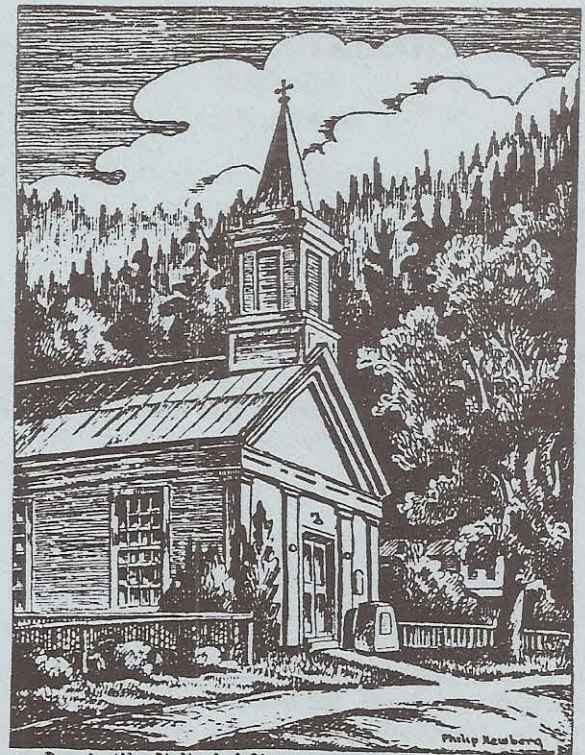
In the October 9, 1852 issue of *The Mountain Echo*, the editor wrote: "We would call the attention of the people of Downieville to the fact that they have erected a very commodious and comfortable Church in the rear of the lower plaza, and have a talented and zealous preacher; in short, that the citizens of Downieville have done everything for the church with the exception of supporting it."

In 1853 Rev. William Wilmot was appointed to the Downieville area. He was followed by Rev. C. Bonner in 1854 and by Rev. Ewart in 1855. Rev. J. B. Hill arrived in 1856. It was during his pastorate that funds were raised to build the church which stands today located on Commercial Street on Jersey Flat. The flyleaf of the pulpit Bible, which is still used, was presented to the church in 1860 by Rev. Henry B. Sheldon. Rev. Sheldon also constructed the pulpit and renewed the flooring during the one year of his pastorate in 1859.

In 1904 the Trustees of the church purchased the Deidesheimer place, a house two buildings east of the church, for use as a parsonage. Prior to this, the living quarters for the pastor was the back section of the church structure. Over the past years much work has been done to maintain and improve both buildings.

In the years from 1852 to 1980, 55 ministers have filled the pulpit serving an average of two years. The longest pastorate was that of Rev. Edward Dabritz from 1960-1968.

Present pastor is Rev. George Clemmons. As of July 1981, the North Gold Circuit was established with Rev. Clemmons serving Methodist Churches in North San Juan, Downieville and Sierra City.



Downieville Methodist Church

Downieville, Calif.

## DOWNIEVILLE ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Downieville Assembly of God was founded November 8, 1978. It is a full-gospel outreach serving Downieville and its neighboring communities. It was started by Reverend and Mrs. Gabriel Abdelaziz, whose appointment has recently ended. Over the past year they have used the Downieville Community Hall facilities. The response and attendance has been good.

Reverend and Mrs. Buck Dikes have accepted the pastorate as of March 1, 1980. They have a tremendous vision that the church becomes a real outreach and vital ministry to the community.

The basic teaching and philosophy of the church is that of a Bible-based lifestyle and of the acceptance of Christ as one's Lord.



## ST. MICHAELS CATHOLIC CHURCH

Alleghany

By Mary Hope

The history of the quaint little St. Michael's Catholic Church began in the 1850's at Moore's Flat. This thriving town was located on a high ridge in Nevada County, across the Yuba River from the village of Minnesota of Sierra County.

The building was dismantled and hauled to Alleghany on a horse-drawn wagon. In 1917, it was reconstructed by the late Mike Shea, a local resident. The church was then dedicated with a mass and other ceremonies conducted by Father Patrick O'Reilly and Father John J. McGarry. The Downieville Catholic Church choir participated in the dedication.

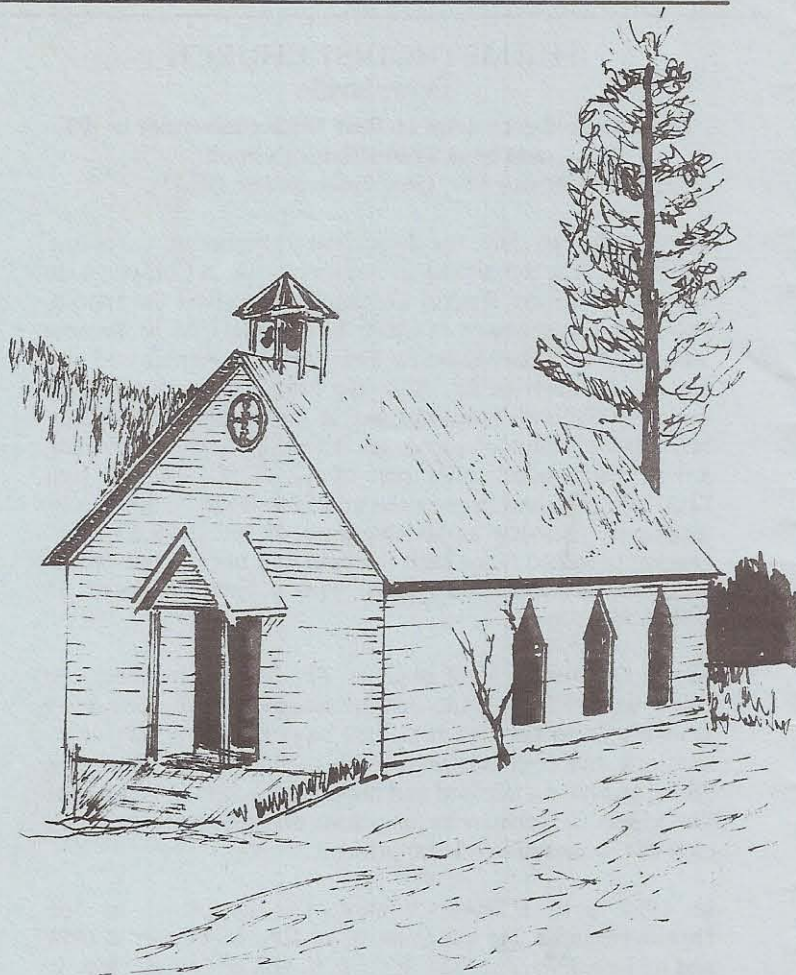
Through the years, St. Michael's was in continuous use served by the many traveling priests who visited this area. Marriages and baptisms were performed.

For a short while, due to the inaccessibility of the church in winters of deep snows, the home that is now owned by the Tony Zito family of Sacramento was used for church services and it was equipped with pews. (This is the former Gaucher and Street family home.)

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, St. Michael's stood silent and unused as apparently too few attended services on the visits of the priests. During the fall of 1979, Father McCarthy of North San Juan reactivated St. Michael's by holding non-denominational services each Sunday.



St. Michael's Church - Alleghany



## THE METHODIST CHURCH

Sierra City

From James Sinnott and Jeanne McMahan

A Methodist Church was built in Sierra City in 1877. It was dedicated by the Rev. R. S. Hardard of San Francisco in November of that year. This structure was destroyed by fire in the early 1880's and the present building was erected in 1883.

This church and the Downieville Methodist Church are considered a two-charge appointment with one pastor serving both churches. Since there is a parsonage in Downieville, the pastor lives there.

The Sierra City Methodist Church is very picturesque and has been the setting for many weddings, not only of residents but also of people who have just visited the area.

The front part with the bell tower was added about 1895. In 1965, new doors were installed and painted by Charlotte and Earl Withycombe.



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Sierra City

By James Sinnott

from his book "Sierra City and Goodyears Bar"

Work on the construction of a Catholic Church was completed in the summer of 1881. It is thought that it was destroyed by fire in May of 1882. In 1887 work was begun on the erection of a new church with A.C. Busch making a gift presentation of a bell. This church, located on Church Street directly across the street from the present Mrs. Mabel Cartwright home, was badly damaged in the Great Avalanche of Jan. 3, 1890.

In Jan. of 1903 plans for building a new church were under way. By August \$800.00 had been collected and work was begun on a contract to Anton DeMartini on a lot donated by John G. Rose. The church was built north of Main Street and is the building existent today.

At present, Mass is held every Sunday during summer. The priest from North San Juan comes to both Downieville and Sierra City each week.



Catholic church of Sierra City, 1970

## LOYALTON MUSEUM

The City of Loyalton received an \$80,000 grant from the State under Proposition I to construct a museum and social center. The museum will be built by November, 1981, if all goes according to present plans. The City of Loyalton will work closely with the Sierra County Historical Society in implementing the Society's plan of a museum chain in Sierra County.

While the Loyalton Museum will concentrate on the history of the lumbering industry and agriculture in Sierra Valley, it will, of course, display all historical artifacts from all periods of Sierra Valley history.

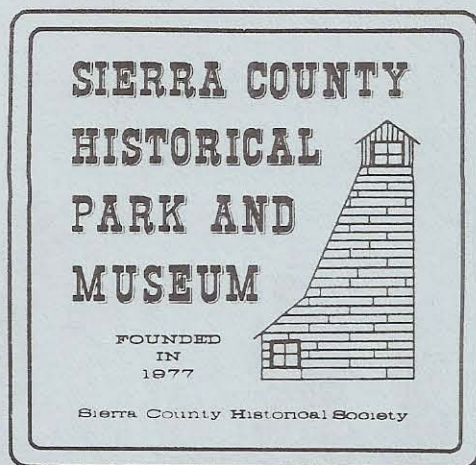
Anyone wishing to donate or loan material to the Society for the Loyalton Museum or anyone wishing to make gifts or loans of material directly to Loyalton may do so now as we hope to open the museum to the public in April or May of 1982.

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

Sierraville — Canyon Ranch Resort  
 Alleghany — Dickey Exploration  
 Camptonville — Indian Valley Outpost  
                     The Waterwheel  
 Goodyear's Bar — Mountain House Press  
 Downieville — Downieville Motor Inn  
                     The Golden Apple  
                     The Mountain Messenger  
                     Sierra Hardware  
                     Snider's Antique Shop  
                     Downieville Motors  
 Dobbins — Doc Willy's







### KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS

Our new curator is Cathy Otto. She and her husband, David, moved into the apartment above the museum when Cherry and Pete Prince bought their own home in Sierra City and Cherry resigned as curator. Cathy had on-the-job training last summer as a CETA employee and assistant to Cherry, so the transition was an easy one. The Sierra County Historical Society felt very fortunate that Cathy was available to step into the position of curator. Cathy is attending Chico State College this fall and will have her teaching credential in December.

There has been an average of 800 adults going through the museum each month this summer. Although this is a smaller number than last year, the monetary income is about the same. Not quite as many take the mine tour, but those who do are very enthusiastic about what they see and learn of stamp mill mining.

There is a new school room display in the Museum centered around four old-fashioned school seats. These have been loaned to the Museum by Ray and Lucy Prince of Sierra City.

The beautiful quilt made and donated by the Sierra City Fire Department Auxiliary is a great addition. It hangs on the north wall. Read more about this in the Dedication article.

The miner's cabin is now complete, furnished with authentic artifacts of mines from around the county. Also, the amphitheater is finished and has been used. We hope to have many and varied programs in its next summer.

### SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS

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President	Lincoln Madsen
Vice President	Jeanne Yegge
Secretary	Maren Scholberg
Treasurer	Georgene Copren
Corresponding Secretary	Darlene Messner



### NEW MEMBERS

Mimi Atkinson  
 Joanne Busch  
 E. T. Logan  
 Helen Maddalena  
 Mountain House Press  
 David McKinney  
 Gladys Poor  
 Leon Rovetta  
 Jean Tulle  
 The Waterwheel  
 Karol M. Yegge  
 Catherine H. Otto  
 David H. Otto

*For membership send \$5.00 to Darlene Messner, Membership Chairman, Sierra County Historical Society.*

*P.O. Box 986  
 Alleghany, CA 95910*





## DEDICATION

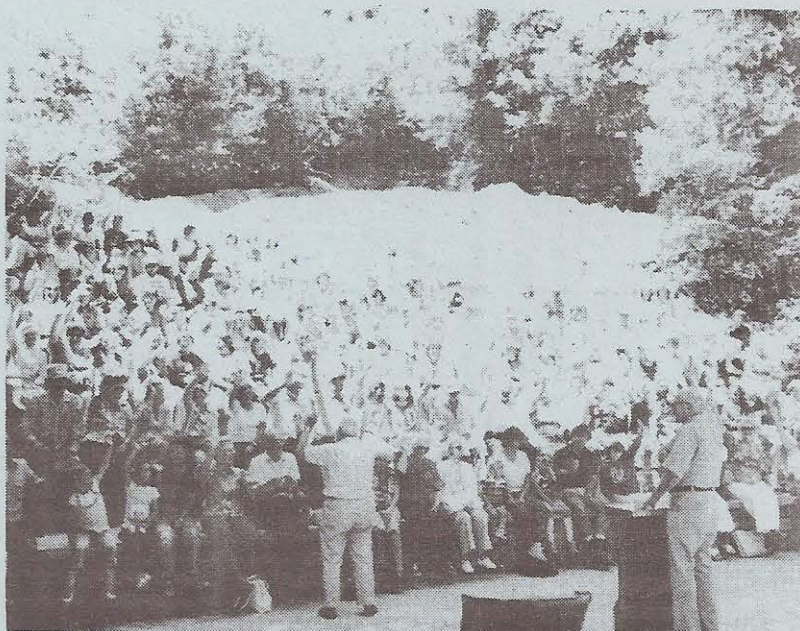
On July 11, 1981, a large crowd of Historical Society members and friends from near and far gathered to celebrate the completion of restoration of the Kentucky Mine, and completion of the miner's shack and amphitheater. A picnic was held, followed by a dedication ceremony in the amphitheater.

The crowd was welcomed by Lincoln Madsen, Historical Society President. He then introduced Milt Gottardi, past president, who in turn introduced the speakers. Pat Grieb, Regional Vice President of the California Conference of Historical Societies, spoke on the importance of small historical parks and museums in preserving our state's heritage. Jeanne Yegge gave a history of the "Old Kentucky" from mining days to the present. Earl Withycombe, representing the Sierra County Board of Supervisors, spoke on the contributions the historic park and museum have made to Sierra County.

A highlight of the dedication ceremony was the presentation by the Sierra City Fire Department Auxiliary of a handmade quilt portraying scenes from historic Sierra City. The idea for the quilt was conceived in 1977 by Billie Madsen and Cherry Prince. Members of the Auxiliary contributed one or more quilt squares, and they were assembled on a blue background. Already it is a treasure of the Museum.

The entertainment of the afternoon consisted of a skit in which David Otto, using a life sized puppet of an old miner, portrayed life as it really was back in the days of the 49'ers. The ceremony concluded with a song composed by Cathy Otto. The audience joined in the chorus while Cathy sang about the history of the Kentucky Mine.

The program was followed by a demonstration of the stamp mill in operation, with Cy Rollins once again in charge.



**Top:** Lincoln Madsen addresses crowd at newly completed park amphitheater.

**Above:** Historical Society officers Linc Madsen, Maren Scholberg and Georgene Copren thank guest speaker Pat Grieb (second from right).

**Left:** Admiring the quilt made by Sierra City Fire Department Auxiliary are (left to right) Charity Clover, Paula Lau, Billie Madsen and Jeannette Olsen.





Keep Sierra County history alive!  
Join the Historical Society.

**SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
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Sierraville, California 96126